



Leo Tanguma's highly symbolic and optimistic "Torch of Quetzalcoatl," exhibited at the Denver Art Museum, portrays "what our community has overcome" in the lower depths; in the center are contemporary Coloradan Latinos, enlightened and guided by the torch's glow, and figures from Aztec mythology and legend, including la llorona, who finds her children here. Photo by Bea Roeder, 1991.

How many Aztec and Chicano symbols can your class identify? The bird at center top is a quetzal. There is a strong tradition of social activist muralism in Mexican and Chicano arts. Mr. Tanguma has worked on murals with students and communities around the state, as has another fine muralist, Emanuel Martínez.

Front Range Cultures

This essay explores many of the groups whose diverse traditions enliven not only the Denver metropolitan area and the front range, but also the entire state. European, Latino, Russian-German, African American, American Indian, Asian and Pacific Islanders—each culture has interesting traditions that have been maintained or adapted to life in the United States. One art form, quilting, is explored as a way to study and appreciate the heritage of many of the groups. Classroom activities are included to help bring the stories to life.

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Look for these icons for resources accessible on this website



Audio



Video



Lesson Plan

Standards: Information in this essay can be presented to help meet these Colorado Model Content Standards according to various age groups, abilities, and grade levels, depending on the class.

History 1.1, 2, 2.3 6

Geography 1, 1.3, 2, 4, 4.2

Resources: A wide variety of resources are directly accessible on this website.

- **Audio and Video** segments related specifically to this essay showcase Irish, Slovenian, German Russian, Latino, American Indian, Asian and African American cultures (also available in cassette and vhs form from CCA.)
- **Lesson Plans** related specifically to this essay include the following: Latino Cultures, Hmong Culture, Take a Trip to a Special Place, Quilts Across Cultures, St. Patrick's Day and the Irish.

Please see **Lesson Plan** and Resource Sections to access these resources and notations throughout the essay for ideas!

About the Author

This section was prepared by the late Dr. Bea Roeder of Colorado Springs and Denver. Her M.A. in Spanish was from the University of California-Berkeley, and Ph.D. in Folklore, Mythology and Hispanic Studies from UCLA. While serving the Colorado Council on the Arts as State Folklorist, she successively was Folklorist-in-Residence at the Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities for five years, taught folklore and Spanish at Pikes Peak Community College for five years, and, then, based at Four Mile Historic Park, served as State Folklorist for Metro Denver and coordinated the Colorado Folk Arts Festival. She was also a Folklorist-in-Residence in schools in Colorado Springs, Denver and Wray; attended Young Audience's Aesthetic Institute; worked with the Nebraska State Historical Center to train Latino community scholars in traditional Hispanic arts and fieldwork methods; and taught Folk Arts of the Americas at the University of Denver. She was a member of the Folk Arts in Education section of the American Folklore Society and conducted related site visits for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Dr. Roeder passed away in June, 2003. Bea was an incredible supporter of Colorado folk arts. The entire folklore community mourns her passing; she will be greatly missed by family and friends.

Colorado's Front Range Cultures

By Bea Roeder

Overview of Population

Eighty-two percent of Colorado's population lives along the Front Range! Students learning to analyze the dynamic spatial organization of people, places, and environments (Geography 1.3) can observe that much of this population is urban and suburban, and that every year farm and ranch lands give way to developers and sub-dividers. Before

the recent massive influx of newcomers, mainly from California, the 1990 census counted 2,686,341 people along the front range, but only 132,633 residents of the eastern plains, 103,276 in the eastern Rocky Mountains, 332,297 on the western slope, and 40,207 in the San Luis Valley. By the year 2000 census, Colorado's population increased to 4,301,261, of whom over half (2,400,570) live in the six-county metro Denver area (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson Counties). Another 516,929 live in El Paso County, which includes Colorado Springs.

Diverse Cultures Among White Majority

Who are these people? The majority of Coloradoans (82.8% in 2000) are White, but there are more cultures represented in larger numbers along the Front Range than elsewhere in Colorado. In the first place, “Whites” or Caucasians trace their roots to many different European nations and ethnic groups, each with its own traditions. Large numbers of Irish, Scots, Italians, Scandinavians, and Eastern Europeans came here and keep their respective heritages alive through social clubs, holiday festivities, folk dance, family traditions, and distinctive foodways. Colorado Springs, once known as “Little London,” registers twenty-two ethnic and nation-of-origin organizations in the public library, including African American, American Indian, Australian, Austrian, British, Czechoslovakian, East Indian, German, Germans from Russia, Hawaiian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Latino, Norwegian, Scottish and Welsh groups. These are only the tip of the iceberg: Italians in Denver, for example, tended to form fraternities according to the town in Italy from which they came. Many immigrant groups were drawn to Colorado’s mines (such as the Welsh and Cornish), steel mills (Slovenians and Slavs, for example; Pueblo has had 29 foreign language newspapers), and farmlands (Scandinavians and Germans, among others). Many Irish fled famine, poverty or political upheavals at home; Jews fled Hitler’s pogroms; Lithuanians, Ukrainians and others fled Communism. Greek and Russian orthodox churches, Jewish synagogues and Moslem mosques speak of cultural groups not listed separately in census reports.

Hispanics or Latinos?

‘Hispanic’ used to be a widely-used respectful term, but many now prefer to be called ‘Latinos’, since their forefathers fought for independence from Spain and most ‘Hispanics’ now in the United States trace their origins to Latin America rather than to Spain. Whichever term you prefer, they are Colorado’s second-largest cultural group. Latinos were 19% of the Front Range population in 1990, increasing to 17% of the entire state and nearly 32% of the City and County of Denver by the 2000 census. Note that “Latino” is not a racial category! Latinos may be of White, American Indian, Black, and/or Asian ancestry, yet all share to some degree in the Hispanic heritage of the American Southwest, Latin America, and Spain. It is important to remember that the Arkansas River, which flows through Pueblo, was the boundary between Mexico and the United States until 1848, and that Mexico itself was part of the Spanish Empire until 1821 (History Standard 1.1; Geography 2; Geography 4).



For examples of Latino music, dance, storytelling and other art forms watch “**Just Plain Art**” video segments 4 and 7;



Listen to “**Do Not Pass Me By**” Volume I Side B # 1, Volume II Side A #1, #2, #3; Listen to “**A Calling Card for Friendship**” Volume

1 Side A # 2, #8, Volume I Side B #1, 5, 9, 10, Volume II Side A 4, 10, 11, Side B #1. See Resource Section



for complete information. For classroom activities see Latino Cultures **Lesson Plan**.

Germans from Russia

The third largest cultural group in Colorado does not appear in the census. They are German-Americans, particularly Germans from Russia. One descendant of this group, folklorist Timothy Kloberdanz of the University of North Dakota, was raised in Sterling, Colorado. He estimated their numbers at 200,000 in Colorado alone in 1979 (they are also numerous in Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Canada). The American Community Survey done in conjunction with the 2000 census calculates their number in Colorado in the range of 930,127 to 1,052,797, with a middle estimate of 991,662 (compare to 561,000 Coloradans with English ancestry and 534,000 of Irish ancestry).

Colorado's Germans were homesteaders, wheat farmers and beet field laborers with an interesting history. In 1763, Catherine of Russia had invited foreigners to settle in Russia, offering them full religious freedom, free transportation, perpetual exemption from military service, and 80 acres of free land. Drought and hard times in Hesse and Rhinelands led 23,000 Germans from those areas to accept her offer and settle along the Volga River. By 1767 there were 104 German colonies in Russia. However, in 1871 Czar Alexander II, a great grandson of Catherine, revoked the military exemption. Many Germans, especially Mennonites and Hutterites (whose religion forbade military duty) fled for Canada and the United States, bringing "Turkey Red," a hard winter wheat, with them. Arriving by rail as the transcontinental railroad progressed across the plains, they began to reach eastern Colorado in the 1880s and 1890s; more came in the 1900s.

Charles Boettcher introduced the sugar beet to Colorado from Germany and founded the Great Western Sugar Company, which recruited German Russian laborers. By 1905 Great Western ran



Colorado Springs CETA mural at a community celebration of Mexico's Independence Day (16th of September) portrays Chicanos' mestizaje, mixed racial heritage. Photo by Bea Roeder, 1980.



Fraktur. Many Germans emigrated directly from Germany. Those who settled in Pennsylvania became known as the "Pennsylvania Dutch" (from the German word, Deutsch, for German Language). Anita Landis-Eigsti of Lakewood painted this fraktur: Pa. Dutch calligraphy with decorative border painting, to celebrate her son's birth. Photo by Bea Roeder, 1997.]

six sugar plants in Eaton, Greeley, Fort Collins, Longmont, Loveland and Windsor. By 1910 nearly 75% of all sugar beet farms in the South Platte Valley, from Denver to Sterling, were owned or operated by Germans from Russia. Whole families worked in the fields, eventually drawing criticism for their use of child labor. Two world wars also generated hostilities against Germans living in Colorado, including Ku Klux Klan attacks, so the German Russians tended to isolate themselves from their neighbors and depend largely on each other, as has often been the case with recent immigrants whose native language is not English. Another well-known Coloradoan German was Adolph Coors, who founded Coors Brewery in Golden.

Learning the history and religious motivations for the German Russian migration will enable students to meet both Geography 2 and History 6 Standards. Exploring specific cultural traditions, such as marriage ceremonies, naming practices, and foodways, allows students to recognize that people develop distinctive traditions that transmit their beliefs and ideas to the next generation.



For examples of German Russian music and culture listen to ***“Do Not Pass Me By”*** Volume 1 Side A #3, Side B #3, Volume II Side B #7. See Resources Section for complete information.

African Americans

African Americans are the fourth-largest Coloradoan population. In 1990, ninety percent of Colorado’s 133,146 African Americans lived in the Denver and Colorado Springs metropolitan areas. The 2000 census shows Black or African American persons form 3.8% of Colorado’s population, but higher percentages of Denver (11%), Arapahoe (7.7%), and El Paso (6.5%) Counties. The Black American West Museum & Heritage Center in Denver is an excellent source of information about African American pioneers and culture. Denver’s James P. Beckwourth Mountain Club commemorates a well-known Black Mountain Man. The Bill Pickett Rodeo commemorates the Black cowboy who introduced bull wrestling to the rodeo world (it used to be an annual event in Colorado, but has been moved to California). As African Americans escaped from slavery and won emancipation, many came west. The town of Dearfield in Weld County was an all-Black town; there is now a video documentary available about it. The history of towns like Dearfield, San Luis, and Ignacio, and of the immigrant groups who successively occupied Five Points in Denver, help students learn “how culture and experience influence people’s perceptions of places and regions” (History 2.3).



For an example of African American art watch ***“Just Plain Art”*** segment 6. See Resources Section for complete information.

American Indians

American Indians in Colorado numbered 27,776 in the 1990 census, only 8,873 of whom live on Colorado's two Ute reservations in the southwestern part of the state. Denver-area Indian organizations variously claim there are 12,000-20,000 Indians just in the Metro area, but many stay for only a few months, discouraged by high living costs and difficulties getting viable jobs. Indians are often an invisible minority; they aren't noticed much except when outfitted for powwow dancing, as for Denver's March Powwow, which draws thousands of participants from across the United States and Canada. It may surprise students to know that there are more Native Americans in Denver than on Colorado's reservations. A survey of where powwows are held throughout Colorado can reveal much about "the nature and spatial distribution of cultural patterns." (Geography 4.2)

Perhaps because of their much-diminished numbers, there is a tendency to lump American Indians together, as Asians may be lumped together by people who do not know them. In both cases, the differences among them are vast. Tribes that inhabited Colorado before Europeans came varied over time, as the westward push of European settlement pushed eastern tribes westward, causing friction among longer-established and newly-arriving tribes. Some Coloradoan tribes were the Utes, a long-time mountain people; Arapaho, Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Lakota (Sioux), who hunted in the plains and cut lodgepole pines for their tipis in the mountains; and Comanches, Apaches, and Navajos, who were more southern. Mount Blanca in the San Luis Valley is one of the Navajos' four sacred mountains. An old Lakota bison-hide map that correlates with a star map ("as above, so below") extends to the Colorado Springs area. Today, Colorado is home to Indians from many more tribes and to Eskimos and Aleuts as well, yet

Native Americans are only 1% of Colorado's total population.



For examples of Native American art and culture watch "**Just Plain Art**" segments 1 and 5; Listen to **Do Not Pass Me By** Volume II Side A #7; "**A Calling Card for Friendship**" Volume II Side A # 12, 13.

Asian and Pacific Islanders

Taken together, Asians and Pacific Islanders in Colorado numbered 59,862 in 1990, and 94,628 by the year 2000, just 2.3% of the population. However, as with American Indians, this number represents very distinct cultures. Japan (11,402) and Korea (11,339) are the Asian nations with the largest Coloradoan populations, followed by China (8,695), Vietnam (7,210) and the Philippines (5,426). There are also thousands of people from India, over a thousand each Laotians, Hawaiians, Cambodians, Hmong and Thai, and hundreds from the Islands of Guam and Samoa. There are now more Samoans in California than there are on the Samoan Islands!



For examples of Hmong culture watch "*Just Plain Art*" segment 2.



For background information and classroom activities, see Hmong Culture **Lesson Plan**.

Folk Arts in Colorado: Quilts

How can students begin to appreciate the many heritages of Colorado? As folklorists, we suggest studying a few folk arts in the historical and cultural contexts in which they were created. Take quilts, for example. Quilts are the quintessential American folk art. Typically made from recycled materials, three layers were stitched together by pioneer women needing to protect their families from cold winter nights. Outgrown or worn out clothing was cut up and then sewn together in patterns to create "blocks" or squares of colorful designs for the top of a bedcover. There are a number of much-used traditional patterns: log cabin, tumbling blocks, whirling logs, Sunbonnet Sue, double wedding ring, for example. A typical quilt may consist of a top of nine or more blocks sewn together; a backing of sheet, blanket, flour sacking, or new material; and a filling of cotton, wool, or any fiber or cloth available; the three layers are then tied or stitched together to produce the finished quilt. "Quilting bees" allow women to come together to socialize while they stitch. A "friendship quilt" can be made by having each quilter make and sign one block; after the blocks are assembled and quilted, the finished quilt then may be given as a wedding or going-away present or, in times past, to assist a burned-out neighbor. Women's guilds from churches often quilted together to raise money for missions or local causes. The Rocky Ford Mennonite Quilt Auction is still a major annual fund-raiser for Mennonites from a multi-state region. Contemporary quilters usually buy new materials in carefully selected colors and patterns to create often-startling effects, but many still use variations of the old patterns. Unique Coloradoan quilts have been made from county and state fair ribbons and from neckties!

Quilting is by no means limited to any one ethnic group, but it does often reflect the values and aesthetics of a group. Among Anglo-American quilters, symmetry is important and the smaller the stitch, the more highly-prized the quilter's work. African-American quilts tend to introduce a note of spontaneity and improvisation, as in jazz music; they are often of asymmetrical design. The vocabulary is different too: a woman may "build" a quilt or "play" the fabric. Eli Leon, the foremost collector of African-American quilts, points out that what some interpret as mistakes are actually manifestations of the "unexpected, the unique, and the personal" in African-American quilt design: "rhythimized oscillations of blocks and frames and strips in the building of the covers" and "attack coloration" (bright, clashing hues that echo the off-beat phrasing of jazz).



For an example of African American quilting watch "*Just Plain Art*" segment 6.



Rose Shipp includes African-American colors and symbols in this quilt, one of a series on African-American heritage. Photo by Bea Roeder, 1991.

American Indian women learned to quilt during the early reservation period, when missionaries and government officials tried to substitute "useful skills" for nomadic hunting ways. With the deliberate slaughter of the bison that the Plains tribes had lived on, not only were whole tribes made dependent for food on cattle driven north from Mexico and Texas (the Goodnight-Loving Trail passed through Colorado), but the women lacked hides for clothing, tipi covers, and proper burial of the dead, of which there were many, from starvation, warfare, and European diseases like chicken pox and small pox. The Lone Star pattern was very much like the Morning Star design that Lakota women had sewn on hide with porcupine quills, to represent the coming dawn and the starry road that the dead must travel through the Milky Way to reach the end of their journey. So the star pattern was quickly adopted, usually portrayed in bright and often primary colors representing the four directions, sometimes with a chief's bonnet, eagle or a circle of tipis superimposed on the star, sometimes with these and other symbols quilted on. The star quilts were made for ceremonial use, giveaways, and burials, and have spread from tribe to tribe to become almost as inter-tribal as the powwow.

Giveaways are similar to Northwestern tribes' potlatches. A person who has been honored, or who wishes to give a memorial dinner for a loved one on the anniversary of that person's death, will display his or her generosity by giving away large numbers of gifts. In olden days, this was the way wealth was redistributed; a chief was expected to give away most of his possessions, especially to the poor. Nowadays, gifts like star quilts are usually given to people whom the giver wishes to honor or thank for past support. Smaller gifts are distributed to all present, particularly elders. It is not unusual for five to twenty star quilts to be given away at

Respecting Cultural Differences



Neva Standing Bear and family's Memorial dinner, quilt giveaway, and powwow on the anniversary of her son Jerry's death. Neva and her daughter Marie made over 20 quilts; others prepared food and arranged the powwow at the Denver Indian Center. Photo by Bea Roeder, 1996.

one time. Needless to say, a woman making many quilts for a giveaway is not inclined to take painstakingly tiny stitches; she is more concerned with pleasing colors and getting the tips of the star to form proper points. The Indian aesthetic, then, has more to do with color and design than size of stitch. Other cultural groups have adopted quilts also; Hawaiian quilts have their own lush aesthetic, and Japanese quilts reflect Asian aesthetics. Not all quilts are patchwork. Many are embroidered; others use appliqué techniques, drawings of important family events or occasionally even photo transfers. A class quilting project, with students each contributing a square to represent their own family, can be a way to initiate discussions of family values, symbols, and heritages. Quilting or tying the students' blocks together provides time for thoughtful conversation. The final product can hang in the classroom or hall, be given to a cause the students consider worthy, or be auctioned off as a fund-raiser for some class project.

Folklore provides a means of understanding some of the differences that often divide people of different heritages. Let's take two common customs as examples. What is a teacher to think of a student who refuses to look her in the eye? European-Americans are apt to assume that the student feels guilty about something or has told a lie. American Indian children, however, and many Latinos, are trained to show respect for a person in authority by looking down, submissively. Indeed, many adult American Indians consider it brazen for a woman to look a man in the eye and confrontational for a man to do so. Then there is the matter of handshakes. An East Asian may prefer to bow, with no physical contact between individuals. An American Indian will proffer a hand and touch lightly, but only an acculturated Indian will engage in the typical businessman's hearty handshake. As a result, will a prospective employer misjudge an Indian applicant to be an indecisive wimp?

These are but two of myriad differences that cause unnecessary but sometimes costly misunderstandings. A sensitive and respectful approach to multicultural education can help to clarify and prevent such misunderstandings. This is, after all, part of educating our children to thrive in the global village that our planet, including our state, is fast becoming.



See Quilts Across Cultures **Lesson Plan**.

Classroom Activities

Note: William Bascom suggested “Four Functions of Folklore” in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 67 (1954), 333-49:

1. Amusement; escape in fantasy from society's restrictions and repressions. Examples: fairy tales, jokes
2. Folklore validates culture, justifying its rituals and institutions. Examples: myths and legends
3. Education, especially in nonliterate societies. Example: proverbs
4. Maintains conformity to accepted patterns of behavior, in part through release of aggressions (jokes, stories).

Colorado Cultural Map (Geography 1)

Have the class make a cultural map of Colorado, or of your own region, each student showing where a different ethnic group has settled. Encourage them to indicate each group's density or percentage of the population in a few different areas. Can students explain why there may be a higher or lower density of one group in a certain area? Choose an icon (symbol) to represent each group on the map (Denver museums recently used a teepee for Indians and an adobe church for Hispanics; what would you use for Anglo-American settlers?). Look for local sources of information about early immigrants to your area. When and why did they come here? How? What did they do here to earn a living? What traditions did they bring with them?

Family History Research (History 2)

Students can research their own family history through oral histories, student-conducted interviews, newspapers, maps, county records, deeds, tombstones, genealogies (as may be found in a family Bible, for example) and, if granted permission, photographs, diaries, letters, and other family mementos. Where did their ancestors come from? What traditions have they kept? Are there many other people from the same place here now? Do they get together to celebrate certain dates or events? How do they celebrate ethnic festivities?

Have each of your students create an imaginary ancestor from any time period of Colorado history they wish to research. Their historical research should enable them to find an appropriate name, dwelling, occupation, clothing, social relationships (family, neighbor, church), and perspective on life. They can then use their creativity to describe their imaginary ancestor and his or her daily or seasonal

activities in a story, poem, diary, newspaper article, drawing, song or skit. For math, give students Colorado population figures from the 2000 census. If Whites are 82.8% of Colorado's population of 4,301,261, how many White people are here? Continue for each race. You may want to discuss why some people may report two or more races (mixed ancestry) or "some other race." What do you suppose Middle Easterners reported?

Folklore Bingo

The "Folklore Bingo" game is a good exercise to introduce folklore into the classroom. It gives students an opportunity to recognize some of their own folk speech and customs, to learn about some of their classmates' customs that may be different, to notice that there may be variations among different students' versions of the "same" traditions, and to achieve a working understanding of some basic folklore terminology.

Bingo sheets (in English or in Spanish) can be copied as needed. Encourage students to describe the context in which they learned one or two examples of folklore. "Context" refers to the social group and the situation in which folklore occurs. Maybe students learned a proverb from Mom when they didn't behave properly, or a riddle from a second-grade friend, a remedy from Grandma when they were ill, or a joke or game from a classmate on the playground or school bus. Encourage your students to think about why people tell proverbs or riddles. What good are they?



See Folklore Bingo **Lesson Plan**.