

G.U.A.T.E.M.A.L.A

Bird Puppets



The bird population of Guatemala is spectacular—over 900 species have been classified. Only 190 are migratory visitors from the North.

Birds and feathers have been of great ceremonial and artistic importance in Guatemala since the times of the Mayan civilization when feathers were often worked into gala and everyday dress. Bird puppets reflect a reverence for the winged creatures and are an appropriate and enjoyable way to pass along information about birds to children. They are made from sticks, wax, and feathers.

You may want to familiarize yourself with some of the different Guatemalan birds and their characteristics, then share the information with your students.

Perhaps the best-known Guatemalan bird is the quetzal, the national bird. It lives in the high altitudes of Verapaz and is known for its brilliant green and blue plumage. The quetzal's tail is an iridescent red and hangs in a question mark 2 to 3 feet long. To protect its magnificent plumage, the quetzal makes its nest with openings on two sides. Because it dies in captivity, the quetzal has become a symbol of the Guatemalans' love of liberty. It is forbidden to capture or kill the quetzal.

Other birds include the *cuchucito*, which has a call that sounds like a small dog's bark. Guatemalans believe that the bird's call forecasts earthquakes, war, death, and other major disasters. Of the many types of owls found in Guatemala, one is called *guía de león* or the lion's guide, because it flits from tree to tree emitting short, sharp notes when it sees a lion or puma on the prowl. The *cenxontle*, or "bird of 400 voices" (mockingbird), is sought after as a pet. It lives happily in captivity and is an inspiration for music. The *oropéndola*, the golden oriole, inhabits hot climates. It builds a long, hanging nest from the branches of dead trees. Some trees may have as many as 50 to 100 nests built closely together. *Oropéndolas* fly into the tree top and out the bottom in a steady stream. The *azacuán* is a type of falcon that migrates north in large numbers in April and May. It returns in late October, after the rains. Flying as far north as Canada and as far south as Argentina, the *azacuanes* are charged with opening and closing the springs for rain.

HOW TO MAKE A Bird Puppet

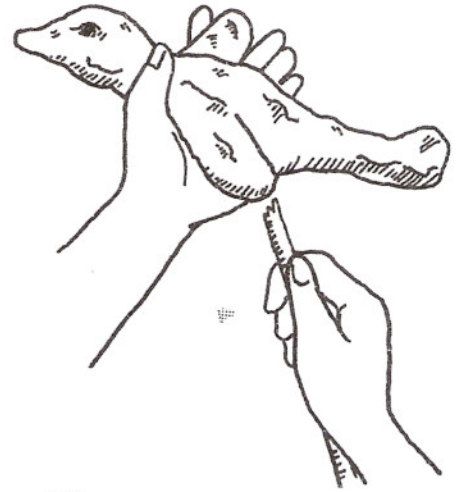
Materials

- clay piece, 3–4 inches in diameter, for each student
- stick or dowel
- feathers (Collect them from outdoors, buy them at a craft store, or have your students make them out of paper.)

Directions

1. Form the clay into a real or imaginary bird shape by pressing, pinching, and molding it with your hands and fingers. Try to keep it all in one strong piece.

2. Insert the stick into the bird's body.



3. Insert feathers into the bird. Let dry.



Follow-up

- Have students make nests for the birds out of twigs and clay.
- Let your class take the bird puppets outside for a puppet parade.
- Have your students create a bird puppet play.
- Have students research real birds that are indigenous to Guatemala. Invite them to write short reports to share with their classmates.