



# THE Q'EQCHI'

A Companion Guide  
for  
Elementary and Middle School Teachers  
(Grades 4-8)

By  
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# ACTIVITY SHEETS AND HANDOUT CREDITS

1. “The Creation of Earth and the Man of Corn” handout and “The Importance of Corn for the Q’eqchi’” handout. Taken from an essay provided by the Q’eqchi’ community for the National Museum of the American Indian Indigenous Geography Project.
2. “The Gifts of Corn” handout. Taken from © Drawing: Marco Buenrostro, based on Francisco Hernández. Originally published in Mexican Archaeology (Arqueología Mexicana), vol. V, num. 25, May-June 1997.



# EDUCATOR INFORMATION

## Overview

This curriculum/study guide has been prepared as an educational tool to accompany the Q'eqchi' Community component of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of the American Indian's Internet-based **Indigenous Geography Project**. *The Q'eqchi': A Companion Guide for Elementary and Middle School Teachers* has been designed to help educators in grades 4-8 teach about one Central American Indian community today: the Q'eqchi'. The Q'eqchi' community has experienced important transformations throughout history. Today, the Q'eqchi' continue to celebrate their histories, traditions, and ceremonies while becoming an integral part of contemporary Guatemalan society.

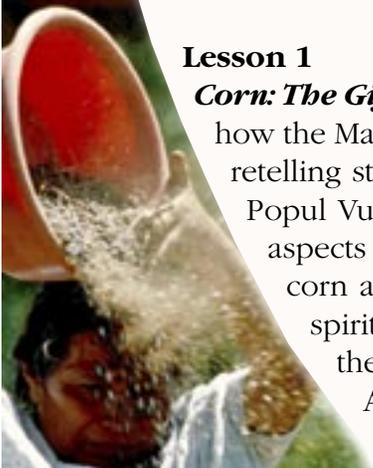
A total of two lessons that explore in more depth selected topics addressed by the Q'eqchi' community in the Indigenous Geography Project have been developed. These topics include the importance of oral history and storytelling, the role of crops, especially corn agriculture in the economy and spiritual life of the Q'eqchi', and activities designed to provide children with the opportunity to articulate their opinions and ideas. When preparing these lessons, we worked closely with members of the Q'eqchi' community to ensure relevance and accuracy of topics explored in the lessons. Also, efforts were made to reveal the interdependency of these topics and to target particular National Geography Standards and National Social Sciences Standards. These standards provide direction for helping students become geographically and historically informed and further understanding and appreciation of the complex web of relationships between people, places, and the environment through time.

## What You Will Find

This Guide contains two lesson plans.

### Lesson 1

**Corn: The Gift of Life** introduces students to the importance of stories and storytelling and how the Mayan Q'eqchi' of Guatemala continue to maintain their ancient history alive by retelling stories such as "The Creation of Earth and the Man of Corn", recorded in the Popul Vuh. This story together with another reading highlighting the most important aspects of corn for the Q'eqchi' help students further understand the essential role corn agriculture continues to play among the Q'eqchi', both as an economic and spiritual crop. After this, students investigate what the main economic activities of their own community are and analyze the social and economic impact of them. At the end of the lesson, students are asked to write a shape poem taking into account what they have learnt about Q'eqchi's corn. As an extension,



students can celebrate Earth Day on April 22 by inviting environmental specialists and local farmers to learn about how to grow crops in their own school garden.

## Lesson 2

**Express Yourself** encourages students to articulate their views on issues that matter to them and to think of ways to improve them. Students explore Q'eqchi' children's concerns, hopes for the future, and actions for change and then reflect on theirs. They work in groups to identify concerns, do research, and discuss ideas to improve or solve a particular problem. Then students prepare a visual presentation (e.g. poster) to share their findings with and obtain feedback from adults and teachers.

## How to Utilize This Material

Each lesson consists of thirteen sections. **Objectives** highlights what the lesson is designed to achieve. **Connections to the Curriculum** lists what curriculum areas the lesson touches on, for example, social sciences, geography, history, language arts, and/or language. **Connections to the National Geography Standards** lists what standards the lesson explores. **Connections to Students' Geographic Skills** describes what kinds of abilities students will acquire or develop further as a result of doing the lesson. **Connections to the National Social Sciences Standards** points out what strands this lesson examines. **Estimated Time** provides an average estimate of lesson length. **Materials Required** lists the materials that will be needed to carry out the lesson. **Vocabulary** words are underlined in the background information and defined in the vocabulary portion of each lesson section. Words from Q'eqchi' language are in *italics*. **Background** provides information that enhances understanding of the lesson topic and may be reproduced for classroom use, if needed. **Setting the Stage** serves as an icebreaker to introduce students to different themes. **Procedure** describes the different steps teachers need to follow to carry out the lesson successfully. **The Student Assessment** activities allow students to integrate what they have learned and communicate it to others. They also provide educators with ways to evaluate students' understandings of the topic. **Extension** suggests ways students can explore a similar topic in their own community. Finally, **Sources Consulted For Content** points out what bibliographical references were used to develop the lesson contact.

## How You Can Help

Let us hear from you. Email your comments to [NMAI-IndGeog@si.edu](mailto:NMAI-IndGeog@si.edu)

## Indigenous Geography Website

[www.IndigenousGeography.si.edu](http://www.IndigenousGeography.si.edu)

# LESSON 1

## CORN: THE GIFT OF LIFE

GRADE LEVEL: 4-8

### Lesson Objectives

At the completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Introduce students to the importance of stories and storytelling as a venue to keep history alive.
- Examine the role and impact of agriculture, especially corn agriculture, in the lives of the Q'eqchi'.
- Identify the location of economic activities in the students' own communities and analyze the economic and social impacts of these activities on surrounding areas.

### Estimated Time

Two to three sessions of 45 minutes

### Materials Required

- "The Creation of Earth and the Man of Corn," Handout A
- Materials for collage (paper, scissors, glue)
- "The Importance of Corn for the Q'eqchi'," Handout B
- "The Gifts of Corn," Handout C

### Connections to Curriculum Areas

- Geography
- Social Sciences
- Language Arts
- Arts

### Connections to the National Geography Standards

**Standard #11:** The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface

## Connections to Student's Geographic Skills

- Identify the location of one economic activity in the Q'eqchi' community and how it affects their livelihood.
- Identify the location of economic activities in the students' own community and analyze their economic and social impacts outside the community.

## Connections to the National Social Sciences Standards

**Strand I: Culture.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

**Strand II: Time, Continuity, and Change.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

**Strand III: People, Places, and Environments.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and the environments.

## Setting the Stage

- For homework have each student make a storytelling bag about him/her life as a child. Students should select objects, photographs, drawings, toys or any other items that describe his/her life. They should put all these things in a paper lunch bag and decorate it with crayons or markers.
- Before coming to class, each student should practice telling his/her childhood story to go with each item.
- In the classroom, divide the class into groups of four-five students and have each student share their childhood story.
- Then have students reflect on the importance of stories and storytelling to keep one's history and that of others alive.

## Procedure

### Stage I

- Tell students that throughout time, people have sought explanations about the creation of life and its livings. Religions have provided different answers about the origin of the world, some of which have been recorded in sacred books.
- Elicit from students the names of the sacred books of different religions, for example, Christianity: Christian Bible, Islam: Koran, and Judaism: Torah.
- Tell students that for the Mayan Q'eqchi' of Guatemala, the Popul Vuh is their sacred book of creation. It was originally written in Mayan hieroglyphs and then translated into the Roman alphabet in the sixteenth century. The book describes the deeds of the Mayan gods from the beginning of time and ends with the Mayan lords who founded the Q'eqchi' kingdom in the Guatemala highlands.
- Have students sit in a circle and tell them "The Creation of Earth and the Man of Corn" Q'eqchi' story, Handout A, fragments of which were taken from the Popul Vuh.
- Read the story a second time and ask students to identify the different

moments of creation and then list them on paper.

- Elicit students' answers (Answers: 1. water is drained, the earth appears, and animals are created and told were to live. Then they were ordered to speak but the animals couldn't speak, they screamed so they were condemned to be food; 2. Creators made first a man out of mud, and then out of wood and ask him to be kind and respectful, but men did not remember and animals turned against them and ate them, 3. The creators consulted the animals about how to make a man and the animals told the creators to use white and yellow corn. When men were asked to talk, they responded with a lot of wisdom. The gods were worried and blew in their eyes to impede their vision. Then they gave them women to be their companions. This is how the first four men and four women were created.)
- Divide the class into three groups and have each group represent in a collage one moment of the Q'eqchi' creation story.
- Then have each group select a spoke person to retell the story from the group's artwork. Display the students' artwork in the classroom.

### **Stage II**

- Write the word "corn" on the board and ask students where and when corn first originated (Answer: The earliest evidence of corn was found in a cave in the Tehuacan Valley in Mexico, and it is 9,000 years old).
- Ask students to list different food items containing corn (i.e. tortillas, tacos, pop corn, corn on the cob, tamales, cereals, cornmeal, corn syrup, corn oil, and corn flour)
- Tell students that corn also known as "maize" has evolved over time into dozens of different corn species and varieties serving as a staple food for many indigenous peoples over thousands of years, long before Columbus set foot in the Americas. Corn supported the development and spread of civilizations like the Incas, Mayas, and Aztecs. Today corn continues to be an important food crop in the diets of people worldwide. For the Mayan Q'eqchi' of Guatemala corn is a sacred food crop and the ingredient of many important foods such as tortillas, tamales as well as beverages.
- Have students read "The Importance of Corn for the Q'eqchi'," Handout B, and examine "The Gifts of Corn," Handout C, to answer the following study questions:
  - What are the main crops that the Q'eqchi' grow?
  - When do the Q'eqchi' plant their crops and why?
  - What beliefs, if any, hold the Q'eqchi' about the land, crops, and farming?
    - Who does the planting and why?
    - What parts of the corn plant do the Q'eqchi' use for food, beverages, crafts, and medicine.
- Elicit answers.

### **Stage III**

- In the previous activity, students learnt about the importance of corn and other crops for the Q'eqchi'. Now, students will examine their

own community to identify the location of economic activities (i.e. agricultural, industrial, etc) and the economic and social impact of these activities in their community.

- For homework, have students explore their community with the aid of family members or neighbors, do research at the library and on the internet to obtain information about the main economic activities in their area and how these activities impact their community.
- In the classroom, divide the class into groups of four and have each group develop a map illustrating the location of the main economic activities and how they are linked to other activities outside the community.
- Ask each group to report the information presented on the map to the class and encourage a lively discussion.
- Display their maps on the walls
- As a follow-up take your students to visit some of the places described on their maps.

### **Evaluation: Shape Poems\* for Corn**

- Have students write a shape poem for corn based on all the information gathered from the discussion and activities on Q'eqchi's use of corn. To learn more about the importance and uses of corn by the Q'eqchi', tell students to do research on the Indigenous Geography link of the National Museum of the American Indian web page at [www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu)
- Compile students' poems and make them available at the school library.

\* *Shape poems are poems whose form on the page looks like the object the poem describes.*

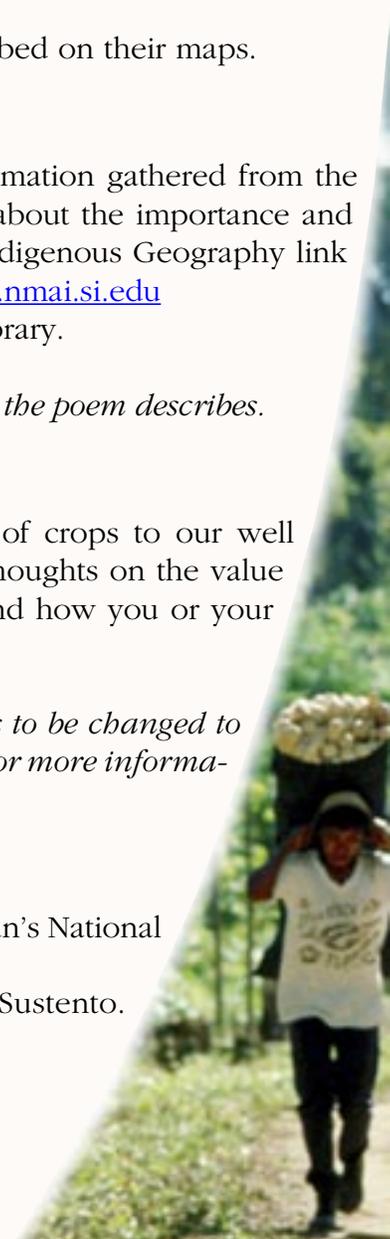
### **Extension: Celebrate Earth Day\***

Organize Earth Day events at your school to celebrate the importance of crops to our well being. Invite local farmers or local environmental experts to share their thoughts on the value of growing healthy crops (i.e. pesticide free, non-genetically modified) and how you or your class can start a small crop garden.

\* *Earth Day is a special day to look at the planet and see what needs to be changed to make it a better place to live. It is celebrated worldwide on April 22. For more information, visit Earth Day Kid's page at [www.kidsdomain.com](http://www.kidsdomain.com)*

### **Sources Consulted for Content**

- Essays provided by the Q'eqchi' from Alta Verapaz for the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian Indigenous Geography Project.
- Barros Cristina and Marco Buenrostro. 1997. El Maíz, Nuestro Sustento. *Arqueología Mexicana*. Vol.V, No.25, pp.6-15.



# LESSON 2

## EXPRESS YOURSELF

GRADE LEVEL: 4-8

### Lesson Objectives

At the completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Examine issues affecting Q'eqchi' children and your students.
- Provide students the opportunity to articulate their views on issues that matter to them and to find ways to take action to change them.

### Connections to Curriculum Areas

- Social Sciences
- Language Arts

### Connections to the National Social Sciences Standards

**Strand I: Culture.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

**Strand II: Time, Continuity, and Change.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

**Strand III: People, Places, and Environments.** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and the environments.

### Estimated Time

Two sessions of 45 minutes.

### Materials Required

- “Express Yourself,” Handout A

### Background

Whether it is in the Mayan highlands of Guatemala, in the city of Washington DC or in the southern tip of South America, children throughout

the world have opinions and ideas about their lives and the world they live in and need opportunities to express them. Their opinions and ideas are important and often provide adults with a different, valuable perspective on a range of issues.

Expressing yourself means getting involved, participating, and doing things. There are millions of ways to express yourself like creating, talking, sharing, making friends, and many more. By expressing ourselves, we share things we like and dislike, and how we think and feel. This lesson offers students an opportunity to learn about Q'eqchi' children and themselves.

Guatemala is a multicultural and multilingual country. The Q'eqchi' language is spoken by more than eight hundred thousand people and used extensively in the family as well as in the village and community throughout vast networks of trade and kinship relationships. However, Q'eqchi' children attending the official schools in Guatemala do not have enough opportunities to learn about the depth and richness of the Q'eqchi' culture and their native tongue. Classes are primarily taught in Spanish and there is a lack of ready-available materials, such as curriculum guides and school textbooks, with content on the Maya Q'eqchi' culture. This constitutes an important concern for Q'eqchi' children and their parents who feel that the schools should provide a venue for Q'eqchi' children to learn about Q'eqchi' history, traditions, worldview, and language in order to keep their culture alive.

## Setting the Stage

- Ask students how many ways they can think of to express themselves.
- Elicit answers and list them on the board.
- Have students think of ways they can use to help solve a problem that affects their school, community, town, or country and list their ideas on the board.

## Procedure

### *Stage I: Identifying Your Concerns and Others*

- Tell students that the Q'eqchi' children in Guatemala also have concerns and hopes for the future. Share some of the challenges Q'eqchi' children face today (See background section above and have students check the National Museum of the American Indian Indigenous Geography link to learn more about other issues affecting Q'eqchi' children)
- Give out “Express Yourself,” Handout A, to each student and have them list Q'eqchi's children concerns, hopes for the future, and actions for change and theirs.
- Elicit answers.
- Ask students to compare and contrast Q'eqchi's views and theirs and reflect on the similarities and differences.
- Elicit answers.
- Divide the class into groups of four students and have each group select one concern they would like to see it changed in the future.
- Have them think about how each student can help solve that problem/ concern.
- Have them find out all they can about that particular problem. En-



courage them to do research and make contact with groups that are already working to fix it.

- Have them choose one way to help. It could be a small thing such as not throwing litter on the streets or something bigger, such as starting their own organization.
- Have students prepare a visual presentation (e.g. poster format) highlighting the problem, facts about the problem, and actions of change.

### ***Stage II: Sharing your Concerns and Taking Action***

- Use this exercise as a venue to get other adults to listen to the students concerns.
- Have students agree on a time with parents and teachers when they can share their concerns. Ask them to bring along their visual presentation and any other supporting material to back up their opinions.
- Encourage students to allow parents and teachers to respond to what they say and consider their views.
- Ask students to keep calm and treat people with respect while they carry out this exercise.
- Encourage students to pursue their project.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluate students on their active participation and commitment throughout the completion of the project.

## **Extension**

- PLAN, a non-profit international child-centered development organization dedicated to improving the lives and well-being of children in impoverished countries, has a wonderful Child Media program that offers children in Guatemala and other countries the opportunity to express their views and opinions by producing radio programs and other materials. For more information and to learn about how children in Guatemala can participate, check [www.atodavoz.org](http://www.atodavoz.org)
- Also, teachers and students can download “Los Duendes de la Cajita Mágica: Programas Radiofónicos” printed manual in pdf format from [www.atodavoz.org/materiales\\_plan/manuales/cajita\\_magica.php](http://www.atodavoz.org/materiales_plan/manuales/cajita_magica.php) to learn about how to develop your own radio program.
- Tell students that children had their say at the United Nations Special Session on Children, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2002. This was an opportunity for children from around the world to talk to world leaders about issues affecting them. To learn more about how your students can participate in this event, visit the United Nations web page at [www.unicef.org/specialsession/highlights](http://www.unicef.org/specialsession/highlights)

## **Sources Consulted for Content**

DK in association with UNICEF. 2002. *A Life Like Mine. How Children Live Around the World*. DK Publishing, N.Y.

Essays provided by the Q’eqchi’ from Alta Verapaz for the National Museum of the American Indian Indigenous Geography Project.

## THE CREATION OF EARTH AND THE MAN OF CORN

Before the creation, all was calm. There was a lot of water but there was nothing else, not a single animal, not birds, not fish, crabs, trees or rocks. Only the creators existed who were in the water covered with green quetzal feathers. They consulted one another and discussed how to make the creatures that would populate the earth. Then they ordered that the water be drained and the earth appear to farm its surface, they said. Later the hills and plains appeared, and the waters, the rivers; the mountains emerged covered with pine and cypress trees. Then the gods created the animals, the deer, the bird, the puma, the jaguar, also the snakes, and they said that each species would have its place to live and they told the deer, "You will live and sleep on the cliffs, you will multiply in the hills and walk on four feet." To the birds: "You will live in the trees, you will make your nests on branches and there you will have your children."

The animals took their places and the creators ordered them to speak, to shout out their names according to their species, to identify their origin and their creators, to speak and give greetings. But the animals only began to scream, to howl loudly, and the creators did not like this and the animals were condemned to have their flesh used as food.

The gods tried to make other creatures and they made a mud man, but he did not move; he was very soft and dissolved in the water. The creators unmade him and decided to consult the fortunetellers and told them to please read their fortune with the red beans and the corn kernels, and to ask them, "How can we make a man?" They asked the red beans and the corn the question and they answered by saying, "Yes, make the man from wood and he will speak." The gods made wooden men who multiplied and their descendants were numerous. They spoke, but they did not remember to give thanks to their creators. The gods punished the wooden men for not remembering them. They unleashed a furious deluge; it rained day and night upon the land. All of the animals turned against them and massacred them. The wooden men ran desperately under the rain of resin and tar. A strong movement shook the earth and the wooden men cried out in pain and fear inside the houses. They were terrified. They shouted, "We're drowning!" and that is how they came to an end. They were destroyed. And only the monkeys remained as a memory of those creatures. That is why the monkey looks like a man.

All the previous attempts to create man had failed. But the gods did not give up and again they spoke. They consulted one another and discussed how to make man and what substance they would utilize to make his flesh. The animals appeared, the mountain lion, the deer, the coyote, birds, and to them they gave places of abundance. There is much yellow corn and much white corn there. There are sapodillas, custard apples, hog plums, and many other things, orchards in that place; it is full of honey and cocoa. They cut ears of yellow corn and of white corn and they gave them to them to prepare the dough from which four men would be made. They said to them, "Men of corn, what do you see? Speak." And they

answered, “We see all that there is in the world up to the four corners of the earth.” Upon hearing this, the creators became concerned because they thought it was not good for their creatures to know as much as they did. And they blew in their eyes to impede their vision. After that, they gave them women so that when they awoke their hearts would be glad...companions they would have with which to populate the earth. These four men and four women were the first fathers and mothers of the Maya people. This is what the sacred book *Popol Vuh* tells us.

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*Source:* From an essay provided by the Q’eqchi’ community of Alta Verapaz for the National Museum of the American Indian Indigenous Geography Project

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CORN FOR THE Q'EQCHI'

The highlands of Guatemala have been the home of the Q'eqchi' for many centuries. Today they live in different townships surrounded by mountains, hills, and forests, which are crossed by numerous rivers. For the Q'eqchi' people, the land is alive, and needs to be respected and cared for. When people begin their farming labors, permission is asked of the hills and valleys. If one fails to do this or loses respect for the land, there are serious consequences such as insects, pests, and poor crop yields.

Agriculture is one of the most important economic activities for the Q'eqchi'. Summer and winter seasons mark the rhythm of crops.

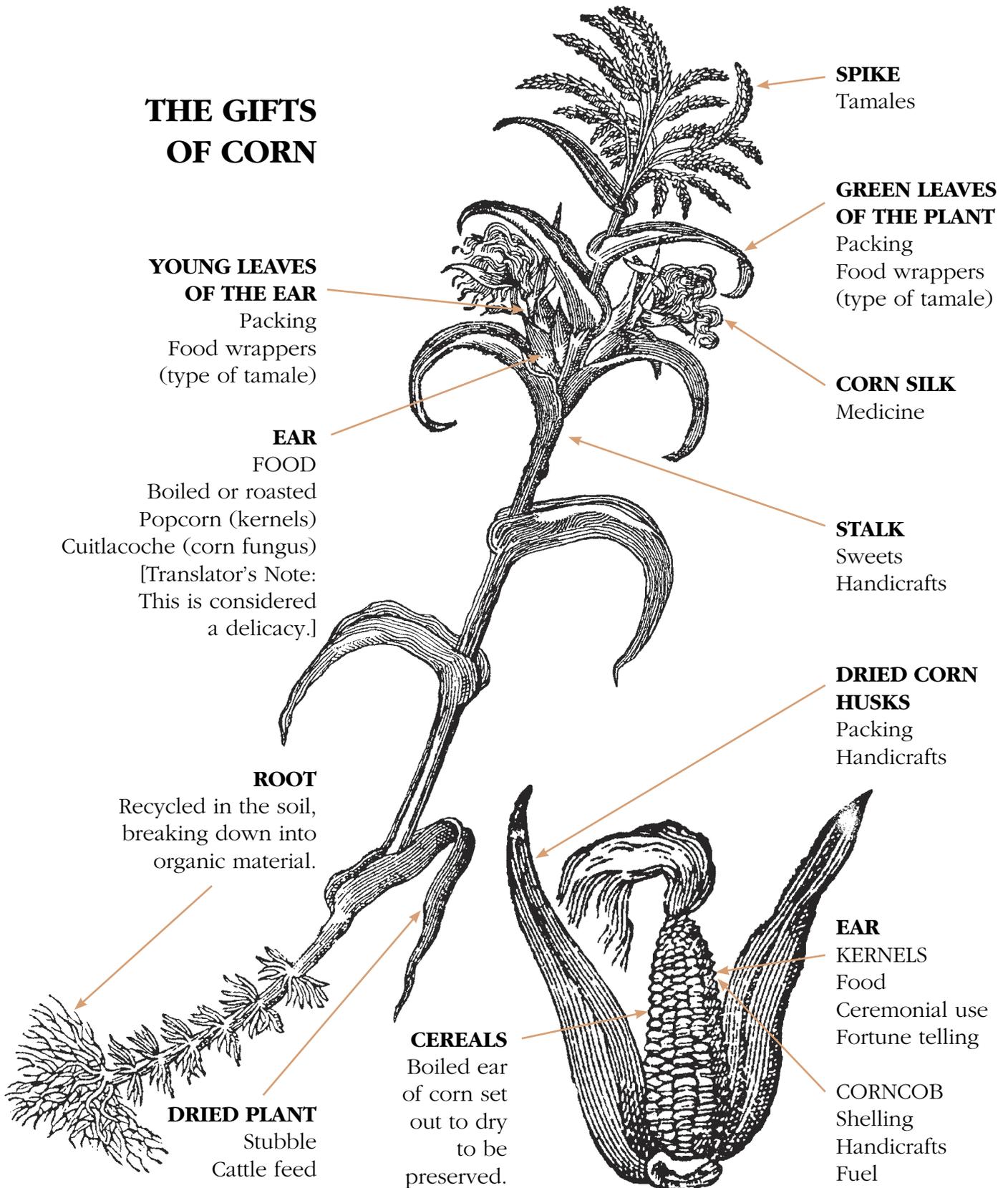
Visitors to Alta Verapaz experience the unusual weather, and when they go home, they say—with a smile on their lips—that in the Q'eqchi' region it rains thirteen months out of the year! In other words, most of the time it rains. However, there are two distinguishable seasons. The summer (*sak'il*) is rather short and begins at the end of February. In March and April, even as the heat intensifies, there is still a fine drizzle called *chipi chipi*, (in Q'eqchi', *musmus hab*). The Q'eqchi' people begin to prepare the land in the fields, especially for planting corn. The corn is not actually planted until May. This is because the rain begins to fall more heavily (*balk'e*) and can water the corn. People plant following the rhythm of the rain and the weather. During these first rains, small butterflies begin to come out of the ground or out of old tree trunks. They look like moths; in Q'eqchi' they're called *chochocuem* or *kams*. They say that when too many come out, there is not much corn on the corncobs.\*

Many prayers for rain are said when planting corn (*ixim*). At the beginning of May, the preparations begin. Rain is much appreciated during this month. In the warm highlands, planting is done once a year and in the lowlands, twice a year. Many times beans and pumpkins are planted in the cornfields. When the corn is ready for planting, the Q'eqchi' conduct ceremonies asking permission of the *kawatzul*, the spirit of the mountain and Mother Earth, for the date when the soil will be pierced to deposit the corn seed. At dawn, the head of the family conducts the ceremony beforehand and invites neighbors to participate in the planting. The amount of land the person plans to plant more or less determines how many people he invites to the field to help. This is how it is done; each family supports one another in the planting. Women never participate in the planting of the corn, because they are the soil, the earth, where the seed will be deposited. Together with the girls, they do the preparations in the kitchen, make the beverages and dish out the food.\*\*

Today, the Q'eqchi' are facing serious problems arising from the increased use of pesticides, which pollutes their soil, wildlife, and water; the introduction of genetically-modified corn; and the need to grow a variety of crops rather than one single crop in order to ensure a good supply of nutritious food for the family and trade.

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- \* Excerpted from the "Seasons" essay provided by the Q'eqchi' Community for the National Museum of the American Indian's Indigenous Geography Project.
  - \*\* Excerpted from the "Living World" essay provided by the Q'eqchi' Community for the National Museum of the American Indian's Indigenous Geography Project.

## THE GIFTS OF CORN



## **EXPRESS YOURSELF**

**Q'EQCHI' CHILDREN**

**NAME OF STUDENT** \_\_\_\_\_

Concerns

Concerns

Hopes for the Future

Hopes for the Future

Actions of Change

Actions of Change