

DAUGHTERS OF THE SUN

OVERVIEW

The students will investigate the significance of the butterfly for the early inhabitants of México and what beliefs about the butterfly persist today.

BACKGROUND

Archaeological discoveries and ancient manuscripts have familiarized us with the significance of the butterfly for the principal pre-hispanic cultures as demonstrated by their prominence in symbolic ritual and on objects of daily use.

The ancient Mexicans so highly valued butterflies that they were used as a form of tribute, if they were alive, as well as ornaments or jewelry. Butterflies came to represent heroes and important people that had died.

The Teotihuacana culture (200-900 A.D.) reproduced the butterfly on flat stamps, nose rings, headdresses, frescos on temple and palace walls, and on ceramic pieces like ceremonial pottery. Its representational form varied from the most natural to the completely stylized.

In the Toltec culture (900-1168 A.D.), it appears on the breastplates of colossal Tula warrior figures, known as Atlanteans, and was carved on the temples of Chichen-Itzá, the great ceremonial center of the Mayan culture.

The Mexíca people, later to become the Aztecs, reproduced butterflies on flat stamps, feather artisanry, small blankets, some manuscripts and stone engravings, and as a part of the warrior headdresses and shields. One of their many deities, "Xochiquetzal", goddess of happiness, flowers and

LEVELS

Grades 3-8

SUBJECTS

Language Arts, History, and Art.

CONCEPTS

- Cultural and social perspectives influence the attitudes, beliefs, and biases of people toward the use of resources and environmental protection.
- Most cultures have beliefs, values, and traditions that affect their interaction with the environment and its resources.

SKILLS

Research, Oral and Written Expression, Communication, Manual Skills, Visualization, Description, Interpretation.

OBJECTIVES

The students will learn about the significance of butterflies as mythical and ritual symbols for the principal pre-hispanic cultures.

MATERIALS

Notebook, pencil, books for research, materials for drawing.

TIME REQUIRED

Research time and two hours classtime.

housework, was represented with a human face and arms, and the body and wings of a butterfly.

The early Mexicans were very knowledgeable about butterflies' life cycles and the different species. They were even familiar with their different stages of metamorphosis.

In order to distinguish the different types of butterflies, they gave them different names. In some cases, they grouped several species by their similar habits or colors; others were grouped together in relation to their myths and legends.

The caterpillars, in general, were named "ocuilpapalotl de ocuilin" which means worm-butterfly. The chrysalis or cocoons were given the name of "cochipilotl" which means to sleep hanging. The butterfly itself was called "papalotl" which was part of another word which indicated its color or habit. For example:

<i>Itzapapalotl</i>	Obsidian butterfly
<i>Ixtapaplotl</i>	White butterfly
<i>Ichcapapalotl</i>	Cotton butterfly
<i>Matlalpapalotl</i>	Blue butterfly
<i>Cospapalotl</i>	Yellow butterfly
<i>Xiquipilchiupapalotl</i>	Butterfly that makes bags
<i>Zoquipaplotl</i>	Mud butterfly
<i>Tzonincanpapalotl</i>	Butterfly that stands on its head
<i>Tzahuanpapalotl</i>	Bird butterfly
<i>Quetzalpapalotl</i>	Monarch Butterfly

NOTE: The name given to the Monarch Butterfly by the Masahuas people meant daughter of the sun.

The butterfly was of such significance to the early Mexicans that they even named some places after them. For example, Papaloapan (River of the Butterflies), Papalotepec, a local region in the state of México, which means "Butterfly Hill" and Papalotipac and Papalotlan which means "Place Abounding in Butterflies."

Butterfly Legends and Myths.

Many of the butterfly myths and legends are related to the topic of death. The Aztecs believed that butterflies were in charge of taking warriors' souls, who died in battle or were sacrificed, and the souls of women, who died giving birth, to their resting place.

Another surviving myth is of a dark brown butterfly which is abundant during the months of July through September, and is often seen resting on house walls. Many people believe that when these butterflies appear at a sick person's home, it means that person will die. They also think that they can cause illnesses like ringworm. It is known, however, that butterflies are harmless to one's health.

There are also several indigenous legends associated with the Monarch Butterfly. One of them claims that the Monarchs are the souls of children who have died and come back. Interestingly enough, the butterflies start arriving at their sanctuary on the 2nd of November, celebrated as the "Day of the Dead" in Mexico.

Still, another legend tells of a group of indigenous people that migrated from the Rocky Mountains to the center of México. Due to the intense cold, the children and the elderly could not continue the trip, and were left behind. To protect themselves from the cold, they covered themselves with tree resin and pollen. At that moment, their god appeared, and feeling sorry for them, turned them into butterflies so that they could more easily find their families. And that was how they got to México. The fir forests of the state of México and Michoacán came to represent the parents who waited for them with open arms.

Source:

Las Mariposas entre los Antiguos Mexicanos by Carlos R. Beutelspacher.

Mariposas Mexicanas by Roberto de la Maza.

Magazine *Muy Interesante* (Special edition of Ecology)



Teotihuacan figure made of baked clay with helmet like a butterfly.

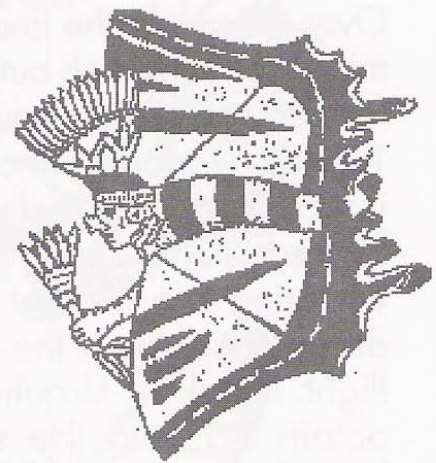
ACTIVITIES

1. Ask your students to research in the public library how butterflies were used in pre-hispanic cultures or use the background information for this activity. Make a list on the board of all the ways butterflies were used in pre-hispanic culture, for example: on ceremonial altars to burn aromatic plants and incense, as ornaments on nose rings, headdresses, etc., and, in architecture on murals, columns, etc., and any other uses such as religious, as myths or legends.

2. Discuss why the butterfly's figure was used. Because of its beauty and coloring? Because of a particular meaning? Let the students give their opinions freely.

3. Subsequently, the students should research how the butterfly's figure is used today and particularly, that of the Monarch Butterfly. Have the students bring objects from home in which the butterfly's figure is represented. Classify the objects by usage. Discuss if the uses have changed and how.

4. Use the attached sheet which has the designs of the pre-hispanic butterfly to make crafts. For example, use them to create a fabric stamped with its design, an embroidery, a wood engraving, other wooden articles, cards, etc. Set up an exhibit with the objects created.



Xochiquetzal

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Ask the students if they know any myths or legends about butterflies. Ask them to tell the story to their classmates and discuss the possible origin of that myth or legend. If the subject of "the butterfly of death or bad luck" is discussed, make it clear that these are superstitions and that no butterfly can be a carrier of sickness or a messenger of death.

2. Write a story or legend about the migration of the Monarch Butterfly. Select the best and send them to PROFAUNA A.C. for publication in the next report.