



# Material Review: A Century of Color

By Bridget Yaden, PNCFL President

**K**athleen Mossman Vitale, co-founder of Endangered Threads Documentaries, recently sent PNCFL a copy of the documentary *A Century of Color: Maya Weaving & Textiles*. I found the documentary to be beautiful and professional. It provides insight into the history of the Mayans of Guatemala as told through their weaving and textile art forms. The audio and video are of excellent quality, and the narration both in Spanish and English is clear and informative. A scholar and a journalist co-authored the script.


The video is fifty-three minutes long, and you can choose to hear the narration in English or in Spanish. All of the direct interviews with Mayans are in Spanish with English subtitles, and interviews with English speakers have Spanish subtitles. From the menu screen, you can choose to watch only a particular category, such as looms, blouses, skirts, belts, or men's wear, or you can watch the documentary all the way through. The documentary highlights the large collection of Mayan textiles at the University of California-Berkeley Museum of Anthropology, numerous interviews, and different locations in Guatemala.

The introductory clip on the history and diversity of Guatemala is an excellent resource in and of itself. This clip could be part of a unit on Guatemala specifically or Central America in general and could be shown in English or in Spanish, depending on students' abilities. I would definitely use this video with language students and ask them to answer comprehension questions. The introductory clip also includes audio examples of several different indigenous languages, so students can hear the linguistic diversity of this country. Hearing and seeing the cultural and linguistic diversity of Guatemala is important for students at all levels to better understand the multiple facets of

"Spanish-speaking" countries. For history or cultural studies, this documentary is an exceptional resource on Guatemala.

After the introductory historical segment, the remaining chapters of the video deal with specific articles of clothing. Although I would not expect my students to become experts on Guatemalan belts or hair ribbons, the individual clips on the history of each article of clothing could be used as learning tools in other ways. For learning or reviewing color vocabulary, for example, the video clips could be watched with the sound off, and students could describe in Spanish what they see. The bright colors and varied articles of clothing are a culturally diverse way to teach color and clothing vocabulary.

Viewing this video brought back memories of my own visit to Guatemala in 2003. I had purchased a *huipil* (blouse) that hangs in my office, which often becomes a conversation starter for students. With interest, I watched the video section on the history of the *huipil* in several communities in Guatemala. This documentary will be a great addition to my cultural lessons on Guatemala and complement a PowerPoint presentation I developed using photos and realia I gathered during my own travels.

For more information about this documentary, visit <http://www.endangeredthreads.com/>. You can purchase your own copy for \$20, and the organization also accepts donations. Endangered Threads Documentaries is a small California-based nonprofit founded in 2004 with the goal of producing "educational documentaries recording endangered indigenous art forms, especially those in imminent threat of disappearing due to global economic expansion." 



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