

# THE POT THAT JUAN BUILT

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by Nancy Andrews-Goebel, ill. by David Diaz

Grade Level: 2-5

Themes: Biography, Mexican culture, Pottery-making/art

Running Time: 17 minutes

### SUMMARY

In the style of the children's rhyme "The House That Jack Built," *The Pot That Juan Built* poetically tells the story of Mexico's most famous potter, Juan Quezada. Quezada has spent his life experimenting with different local materials to recreate the pottery-making process used by the Casas Grandes people, who inhabited the area around Quezada's hometown of Mata Ortiz over six hundred years ago. Through patience, talent and luck, Quezada learned this process and now produces some of the most beautiful and unique pottery in Mexico. Moreover, he has taught this method to many of the people of Mata Ortiz, transforming the small town of impoverished laborers into a thriving artists' community. The glowing animation and rich language of this video will draw students into the pottery-making culture of the people of Mata Ortiz and will illuminate the unique process and its results.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the life and work of Juan Quezada.
- Students will learn how Quezada and other artists from Mata Ortiz make pottery.
- Students will compare and contrast the pottery and pottery-making process of the people from Mata Ortiz with the pottery of other people.

### BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Show students pictures, slides or actual pottery from different parts of the world. Talk with students about the similarities and differences between the pottery.

Guiding questions:

- How is the pottery painted? Do any of the designs look similar? What are the differences between them? What colors are used?
- What are the shapes of the pottery?
- What do you think the pottery is used for? Carrying water? Cooking? Serving food? Decoration?
- Show students a piece of pottery without identifying its origin. Challenge students to examine its features and guess its location of origin.

Talk with students about Juan Quezada and where he is from in Mexico. Locate Mata Ortiz on the map. Discuss the landscape and natural resources found there. Have students hypothesize about what types of materials he uses to make and paint his pottery. Students can write down these hypotheses to check after viewing the video.

### AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Talk to students about archaeology. Guiding questions:

- What inspired Juan Quezada to begin making pottery? (He found potsherds in the hills around his home.)
- What did the potsherds tell Juan about making pottery?
- How do archaeologists, or people who study ancient cultures through their material remains, find out about a culture from their pottery? What clues do they look for? (For example: evidence of the pot being put in a fire, paints made from natural resources, evidence of food being carried in the pots, pots found in graves.)
- How does archeology help us learn about cultures that no longer exist, like the Casas Grandes people? Why is this important?

Provide students with potsherds from different cultures (sometimes a university museum or a museum of natural history has these to lend to classrooms). Challenge students to hypothesize about where the

potsherds came from and what they were used for. Alternatively, you can create your own potsherds by purchasing cheap pottery from a second-hand store and breaking it into pieces. Try to choose pottery that had different purposes, such as cooking and decoration. Warn children that the pieces may be sharp.

Create pottery with the students using the general process described in the video. If you have access to a kiln, use clay that can be fired and painted. Otherwise, use self-hardening clay. Discuss the difficulties and successes that the students experienced making this kind of pottery.

View the documentary, *Mata Ortiz Pottery: An Inside Look*, created and produced by the author of *The Pot That Juan Built*, Nancy Andrews-Goebel, and her husband, Ron Goebel.

Discuss how Juan Quezada helped his community to become more prosperous. Have students brainstorm changes in their own community(ies) that have brought more business or recognition. If there have been none in recent history, explore the community's past through pictures, books, and town hall records to see how the community has changed. Students can create a timeline showing major developments in the community in terms of art, business, and industry.

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