

Colombian library goes beyond books to keep stories alive

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. What do you know about South America? Choose the best answer in each case.

1. The capital city of Colombia is **Bogotá** / Caracas.
2. The official language of Brazil is **Portuguese** / Spanish.
3. There are **ten** / twelve countries in South America.
4. The currency of Colombia is the **bolívar** / peso.
5. The southernmost point of South America is in **Argentina** / Chile.

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

ancestors

carve

indigenous

recipe

site

1. A _____ is a place where something happened, especially something interesting or important.
2. If you _____ stone or wood, you use a knife to cut it to make a shape or pattern.
3. An _____ people lived in a place for a very long time before other people came to live there.
4. Your _____ are people who are related to you but lived a long time ago.
5. A _____ is a set of instructions that tell you how to cook.

award

community

displace

threat

wrapping

6. A _____ is the plastic or paper that covers something that you buy.
7. A _____ building is one which all the people of a town or village can use.
8. An _____ is a prize you get for something you have done.
9. A _____ is a situation or activity that could cause harm or danger.
10. If you _____ people, you make them leave their homes and live somewhere else.

'Legends are to be told': Colombian library goes beyond books to keep stories alive

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

Genevieve Glatsky

21 March, 2022

- 1 Each month, a group of children walk to an ancient site in Colombia carrying cameras and sketch pads. At the site, there are hundreds of smooth stones with patterns carved on them. The children come to create their own images of the art of their ancestors. The public library in Atánquez, a quiet mountain town of 10,000 people, runs the project.
- 2 The library is the centre of the indigenous people's attempts to preserve their history and strengthen their culture. There are community meetings here. Youth activities include the trips to the stones, photography workshops and meetings with elders. "The rock carvings are memories of the ancestors," says one young girl. "They're beautiful."
- 3 Another girl says "They show us as another part of who we are. They tell us about the past and explain how indigenous people saw things."
- 4 The children learn about traditional music, recipes and how people have changed over the years. In one project of the library, the children collected stories from their grandparents and used them to make videos.
- 5 In February, 2013, Atánquez had just one box of unopened books, which the National Network of Public Libraries sent to the town. When a group of young people found out that a government official was coming to remove them because no-one was using them, they decided to take action. They took off the plastic wrappings and arranged the books in an old community building. The official didn't think much of this "library" but they told her: "If we can put this together in one night, you cannot imagine what we can do in a year."
- 6 The official gave them a year, as well as tables and chairs, and new books arrived. In 2017, Atánquez won Colombia's National Library Award.
- 7 There are about 35,000 Kankuamo. Modernization and conflict are a threat to their culture. In the 1980s and 1990s, paramilitary groups killed and displaced hundreds, separated families, and targeted leaders and religious authorities.
- 8 For years, being Kankuamo was seen as shameful and many people tried to distance themselves from their culture, but the early 1990s saw a change. "Little by little, our people are beginning to value what they are as indigenous peoples," said one Kankuamo elder.
- 9 "For us, memory represents survival," says the librarian. "If we do not have that memory, if we do not have those stories, we cannot continue to be Kankuamos."

© Guardian News and Media 2022

First published in *The Guardian* 21/03/2022

Colombian library goes beyond books to keep stories alive

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How often do the children visit the site?
2. What do they take with them?
3. How many people live in Atánquez?
4. What do the rock carvings tell the children?
5. What did the children do with the stories they collected from their grandparents?
6. How many books were in the town in February, 2013?
7. What happened in 2017?
8. How many Kankuamo people are there?
9. What did paramilitary groups do in the 1980s and 1990s?
10. When did the Kankuamo start to value their culture again?

4 Key language

a. Complete the phrases from the text using these prepositions.

by with about of at to

1. _____ the site
2. learn _____ traditional music
3. a threat _____ their culture
4. little _____ little
5. she didn't think much _____ the library
6. stones _____ patterns on them

5 Discussion

a. Discuss this statement.

- "We must preserve ancient cultures."

Colombian library goes beyond books to keep stories alive

Level 1: Elementary / Pre-Intermediate

6 In your own words

a. Use the internet to find more information about Colombia.

- Where is it? Is it on the coast?
- What countries does it share borders with?
- What is the population?
- How many languages are there?
- Apart from the capital, what are the other major cities?
- What are the main industries?

b. Report your findings to the class.