

## Colombian library goes beyond books to keep stories alive

### Level 2: 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. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a noun meaning *a rock carving* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 1)
2. a verb meaning *make a picture on a hard surface by cutting it* \_\_\_\_\_  
(paragraph 1)
3. a noun meaning *someone who is related to you but lived a long time ago*  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 1)
4. a noun meaning *an important action that is intended to solve a problem*  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 2)
5. a noun meaning *a short journey that you take for enjoyment* \_\_\_\_\_  
(paragraph 2)
6. a noun meaning *an older and more experienced member of a group or organization who gives advice and makes decisions* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 2)
7. an adjective meaning *left empty or no longer used* \_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 6)
8. an adjective meaning *having doubts about something that other people think is true or right*  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 6)
9. a verb meaning *force someone to leave their own country or area and live somewhere else*  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 8)
10. a noun meaning *the art, traditions, and beliefs that are important to a society's culture*  
\_\_\_\_\_ (paragraph 10)

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

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- 1 At dawn in northern Colombia, a small group of children walk downhill carrying cameras and sketch pads. Each month, they come to an ancient site that has hundreds of petroglyphs – smooth stones etched with patterns – to create their own images of the art of their ancestors. The project is run by the public library in Atánquez, a quiet mountainside town of 10,000 people in the Kankuamo Indigenous Reserve.
- 2 Atánquez's Kankuaka Library is the centre of the indigenous people's initiatives to preserve their history and strengthen their identity. There are community gatherings here. Youth activities include the petroglyph outings, photography workshops and meetings with tribal elders. "The rock carvings are memories of the ancestors," says seven-year-old Mariham Martinez Daza. "They're beautiful."
- 3 Sahian Maestre, 13, adds: "They show us as another part of who we are. They tell us about the past and explain how indigenous people saw things. It is also another way of seeing each other and how our ancestors believed each one of us is connected."
- 4 But her favourite trips are those to meet Kankuamo elders, to learn about traditional music, recipes and how people have changed over the years. For one early project of the library, children collected stories from their grandparents and used them to make videos.
- 5 "For us, it is essential that certain memories are transmitted by mouth," says Souldes Maestre, the librarian. Legends are meant to be told, not just read in books, he says. "We want the children to begin to create an interest in knowing, in asking questions."
- 6 In February, 2013, Atánquez had just one box of unopened books sent by the National Network of Public Libraries. When a group of young people found out that a government official was coming to remove them because they weren't being used, they decided to take action. They took off the plastic wrappings and arranged the books in an abandoned community building. The official was sceptical of this "library". But, Maestre says, they told her: "If we can put this together in one night, you cannot imagine what we can do in a year."
- 7 The official gave them a year, as well as tables and chairs, and new books arrived. In 2015, Atánquez was a finalist for Colombia's National Library Award, winning it in 2017.
- 8 There are about 35,000 Kankuamo. Like many other indigenous people, their culture is threatened by modernization and conflict. Violence from paramilitary groups in the 1980s and 1990s killed and displaced hundreds, separated families, and targeted leaders and religious authorities.
- 9 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," says Ener Crispin Cáceres, a Kankuamo elder.
- 10 John Robert Torres Maestre helped start the library. He says that, 40 years ago, a generation went off to university and never returned, which is why it is so important to cultivate a love of learning alongside a love of heritage, so that those who leave for higher education come back.
- 11 This identity is increasingly important as nearby coal, mineral, and oil mining projects would damage land and poison rivers. For Maestre, there is a clear link between the library's work and the community's ability to defend itself.
- 12 "For us, the concept of memory is not like a museum, something that can be seen, but rather represents survival," says Maestre "If we do not have that memory, if we do not have those stories, we cannot continue to be Kankuamos."

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The children go to the ancient site to etch patterns into the smooth stones.
2. They visit the site every morning.
3. The library is the centre of the Kankuamo's attempts to preserve their culture.
4. Sahian Maestre's favourite trips are the visits to the petroglyphs.
5. In February, 2013, there was only one box of books in Atánquez.
6. The government official really loved the library.
7. The library won a national award in 2017.
8. There are fewer than 40,000 Kankuamo people.
9. In the 1980s, a lot of young people left to go to university and never came back.
10. For John Robert Torres Maestre, a museum is much more important than the concept of memory.

#### 4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. sketch       | a. official |
| 2. rock         | b. wrapping |
| 3. government   | c. people   |
| 4. plastic      | d. carving  |
| 5. indigenous   | e. group    |
| 6. paramilitary | f. pad      |

#### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "It is important to preserve our cultural heritage."
- "Now we have the internet, we don't need libraries."

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#### 6 In your own words

- a. Use the internet to find more information about the Kankuamo people of Colombia. Find out, for example, about:
- their culture and traditions
  - what economic activities they engage in
  - what language or languages they speak
- b. Make notes and report your findings to the class.