

# URBANGATEWAYS

## DANZAS CEREMONIALES DE MEXICO

### NAHUI OLLIN



#### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Experience the living traditions of Mesoamerica with Nahui Ollin as they present the pre-Hispanic Aztec traditions of central Mexico. Vibrant and active, the dancers' movements represent and honor the elements in nature, totem animals, deities and sacred actions. Both ritualistic and spiritual, the program is highlighted with authentic costumes and instruments.

#### MEET THE ARTISTS

The group Nahui Ollin was founded to embrace and perform the indigenous, ancient ceremonial dances of Mexico. Nahui Ollin focuses primarily on Aztec dances, also known as the Dance of the Concheros.

#### TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Access to electricity
- Sound system with two microphones
- Private dressing room near performance space (preferably not a student bathroom)

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

The choreography of La Danza (the dance) is derived from the movement of the sun and the planets and guided by the sun. For the dancer, La Danza starts at the soles of the feet through which he or she connects mind and thoughts to heaven.

La Danza represents, through the body and its movements, all the elements in nature. The dance originated during the Aztec Empire (1428-1521) as an expression of gratitude for natural elements like fire and wind, shown to their gods and ancestors. The dance begins with a ceremony, offering fire to the four winds of the world. The burning of incense acts as a cleansing element for the ceremonial space, instruments, and dancers.

This Aztec Dance is a real and tangible manifestation of the living tradition of Mesoamerica. La Danza represents the “Guerra Florida” or the floral war, which is the spiritual battle between good and evil, active and passive, ignorance and wisdom, light and darkness, and life and death.

The rhythm is marked by a large drum that sits in the center of the circle called the huehuetl. It symbolizes the heart of the dance. Accompanying the huehuetl is the concha guitar. Made from an armadillo shell, it serves as the symbol of the union between the Spanish and the indigenous people. Additionally, each dancer wears ankle belts filled with large seeds called ayoyotes. It is their sound which serves as the distinguishing sound of La Danza. The dancers perform several dances, each paying tribute to natural elements like fire; totem animals like the white eagle; spiritual deities like Quetzalcoatl; or sacred actions like the sowing of plant seeds.

## RESOURCES

Aztec History (activity):  
<https://goo.gl/s5epKc>

History Channel: Brief  
Video on Aztec (additional  
resources included):  
<https://goo.gl/X17CZo>

Scholastic “Let’s Discover  
Mexico” Lesson Plan &  
Activities:  
<https://goo.gl/7av7Ez>

## Chicago Guide for Teaching and Learning in Arts: Scope and Sequence

### Interpretation & Evaluation:

**Listen and Describe (IL 25A,  
26A, 27A; Nat’l 6)**

- Identify and exhibit appropriate audience behavior for listening to music.
- Analyze the uses of elements of music in musical selections representing diverse genres and cultures.

### Making Connections

**Cultural (IL 26B, 27A; Nat’l  
9)**

- Listen to musical excerpts and identify how music contributes to celebrations.
- Distinguish styles of music in various cultures and periods and identify unique features.
- Describe how the elements of music are used in various genres and styles of music.



1 Cipáctli (Alligator)



2 Océlotl (Jaguar)



3 Mázatl (Deer)



4 Xóchitl (Flower)



5 Ácatl (Cane)



6 Miquiztli (Death)



7 Quiáhuitl (Rain)



8 Malinalli (Grass)



9 Cóatl (Snake)



10 Técpatl (Flint)



11 Ozomatli (Monkey)



12 Cuetzpalin (Lizard)



13 Ollin (Movement)



14 Itzcuintli (Dog)



15 Calli (House)



16 Cozcaquauhtli (Vulture)



17 Átl (Water)



18 Ehécatl (Wind)



19 Cuauhtli (Eagle)



20 Tóchtli (Rabbit)

## Nahua (Aztec) Calendar Day Signs

## VOCABULARY

### AZTECS

a Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican people of central Mexico in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries; they were noted for their advanced civilization particularly before Cortez invaded Mexico in 1519

### CEREMONIAL DANCE

specific dances invented and performed by a group of people as a ritual to honor, give thanks and show joy to higher spiritual beings and each other

### CHOREOGRAPHY

literally “dance-writing,” is the art of making the steps and patterns in which movement occurs and forms a dance

### INDIGENOUS

occurring or living naturally in a particular area or environment; native

### MESTIZO

a man of mixed European and American Indian ancestry

### PERCUSSION

the striking of one thing against another to produce a sound or rhythm

### RHYTHM

time divided up into parts; the result of energy acting on movement; a pattern of beats with accents

### TENOCHTITLAN

the capital of the Aztec empire, it was built on raised islets in Lake Texcoco; the capital of Mexico, Mexico City is built of the ruins of Tenochtitlan

## SHOW INTRODUCTION

On the day of the performance, please have someone from the school read the following introduction when welcoming the performers onstage.

“Today we have a show from Urban Gateways. Nahui Ollin (na-who-een o-leen) presents Danzas Ceremoniales de Mexico, an exploration of pre-Hispanic Mexican music and dance. Please give the performers your full attention, and welcome them to the stage.”

## PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Show photos of different Aztec calendar signs and ask students what they think the images represent. Have them make their own calendar using Aztec symbols or creating their own signs to represent different aspects of their lives (like school, sports practices, etc.)
2. Talk with students about what pre-Hispanic means. What happened historically to go from pre-Hispanic to what is now called Mexican culture?

## POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Free-write: What is one thing you learned from today’s show? Have students share their answers with a partner.
2. Make an instrument! Using found/recycled items (paper towel tubes, dried beans, paper plates, etc.) have students create an instrument that is inspired by nature and/or their surroundings. Ask students to decorate their instruments with symbols representing their lives just like the Aztecs did.