



# Viajamos a Colombia

“Reading is a *passport* to  
countless *adventures*.”

Mary Pope Osborne

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This resource incorporates activities aligned to the following [Common Core Standards](#):

### Common Core Standards for Reading

- **Key Ideas and Details:** (1) Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; (2) Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- **Craft and Structure:** (4) Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone; (5) Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g. a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:** (8) Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:** (10) Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Preserving Colombia's Native Customs and Languages

By *Los Angeles Times*, adapted by Newsela staff

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Lexile: 1130; Recommended for: Grade 7

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A group of people posing for the camera: Nelson Iguaran, director of the El Arroyo bilingual school near Riohacha, Colombia, where first-through eighth-graders are taught in Spanish and Wayuu alike.

*Chris Kraul/Los Angeles Times/TNS*

RIOHACHA, Colombia — It was just another day at the office for Elion Uriana, a palabrero, or tribal judge, in Colombia's native Wayuu community. As the leader of his goat-herding clan, he was trying to decide what to do about an arranged marriage that had fallen apart.

The groom's parents had given the bride's family a wedding gift of 60 goats, but the bride left him for another man just a month after they were married. The bride's parents blamed the groom and said he had mistreated their daughter. The families could not settle the dispute in the end, so the bride's family had to pay back the goats.

Uriana had helped arrange the marriage as part of his role as palabrero, a title that literally means "the word." When it comes to marriage, Uriana said that freedom of choice is not an option for the Wayuu: "All our marriages are arranged by the families and the couple has to live by that."

For the Wayuu, Uriana's role of mediator is essential. His other tasks include resolving land disputes, monitoring debt payments and dividing lumber and other shared goods. "My duty is to mediate the peaceful resolution of conflicts. The traditional legal system is one thing; we Wayuus have our own."



**What is the main idea of this section?**

**What are 2 key details that support the main idea of this section?**

## Language Law Was A Turning Point

With 300,000 members, the Wayuu community is the largest of Colombia's 65 native groups. The Wayuu make up more than 40 percent of the population of Colombia's northeastern province of La Guajira, and inhabit parts of neighboring Venezuela.

Not long ago, most Colombians looked down upon palabrereros and other Wayuu customs. Now, experts on the region's native cultures say that people's attitudes are finally starting to shift and Colombians are gaining a newfound respect for the Wayuu and other native groups.

Part of the reason for this change is a new Language Law that was passed in 2010. The law was a response to warnings that up to half of the country's native sayings faced extinction unless steps were taken to preserve them. The Language Law served as a critical turning point in Colombia's relationship with its native peoples. It made a clear statement that preserving Colombia's native customs and languages was important to the entire nation.

That same year, the United Nations' cultural arm, UNESCO, recognized the tribal judges as key elements of the world's cultural history. The move highlighted the importance of tribal rights and gave the Wayuu a significant boost.



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## Embracing Diversity

As a result of the Language Law, the Ministry of Culture created an organized record of all the country's native sayings and customs. The ministry also included the languages used by Afro-Colombians and criollos (people of Spanish descent).

Moises Medrano, the ministry's director of communities, said the 2013 project was the first time local languages had been organized since the 1950s. This time, the ministry used the information to produce a computer program. It teaches users basic greetings in Colombia's 65 native languages.

Medrano says the ministry hopes to spark more conversation between people from different backgrounds and give them an appreciation for Colombia's incredible diversity of native languages. They also want to help members of the native communities feel more pride in their history.



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## Schools Support The Community

To support those goals, the Ministry is making sure the Wayuu language is taught alongside Spanish in native communities. There are now a dozen primary schools teaching both languages.

At one of these schools, first- through eighth-graders from the Wayuu community are taught by instructors who speak both languages. School director Nelson Iguaran says these bilingual schools are essential to preserving the Wayuu way of life. He says they also protect Wayuu students from outside pressures.

“The attitude of people in general in our community is to undervalue themselves because they are (Wayuu),” Iguaran said. “But these kids can now go home and teach their parents words they didn’t know.”

Students at these special schools are taught Wayuu cultural traditions that emphasize the good of the community above all else. They also learn about sonadoras, the female leaders whose dreams can determine a community’s path. They even hear about a mythical spider passing its weaving talents on to the Wayuu women.



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## More Teachers Are Needed

Consuelo Vengoechea, a professor at National University of Colombia, said the Culture Ministry’s efforts are positive but still inadequate. She wants the Education Ministry to train more teachers who can teach in both languages. She says schools also need to adjust the way they teach, not just the language they use.

Maidoll Arredondo is the director of FDHC Guajira, a native rights advocacy group. Arredondo said the bilingual programs provide a rare ray of hope in a province that struggles with poverty, organized crime and drought.



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**What are 2 key details that support the main idea of this section?**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Guiding Questions for Newsela's  
"Preserving Colombia's Native Customs and Languages"**

The following questions and the questions in the preceding text have been created by the LAII's Outreach staff. These questions correspond to the text and align to Common Core Standards.

**Key Terms:** After reading the text, locate these terms in the text and use your own words to define them based on the information in the article.

1. Palabrero: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Criollos: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Sonadoras: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Native: \_\_\_\_\_

**True/ False Statements:** Read the following statements below and use evidence from the text to determine if they are true or false. **If a statement is false**, change it to make it true.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Palabrereros play an important role in keeping the peace in their communities.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ The Language Law of 2010 only protects the Wayuu Community; it does not apply to other native groups in Colombia.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Ministry of Culture works exclusively with Indigenous communities in helping them preserve their cultures and languages.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Schools are now teaching the Wayuu language and its history, culture and traditions, which helps students engage in their culture.

**Main idea:** Using your notes from the reading, summarize the main idea or argument of the text as it develops through the text. Think about why the author wrote this text and for whom they wrote the text. Also, evaluate how successfully the evidence provided supports the main idea or argument.

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