

Explore PUEBLO POTS

Introduction

The Pueblo Pot

When Spanish explorers first came to the hot, dry area that is now the state of New Mexico, they found a land that was already home to many tribes of Indians. They called the Indians who lived in towns “Pueblo Indians” to distinguish them from nomadic Indians who moved often from place to place. Native Americans of the Pueblos primarily supported themselves by farming and hunting and making pottery to trade. When the Spanish arrived, the Santa Clara and Zuni Indians had already been making pots for hundreds of years.



Santa Clara Ruins. Smithsonian photo by Dane Penland

Look at the Santa Clara Pot



This pot was made in 1991 by Clara Stone, who lives at Santa Clara Pueblo in northern New Mexico. Can you find her name on the bottom of it?

Look at the design on the pot. What do you think it represents?

The design on this pot is the Avanyu, which means “Water Serpent” in Tewa, the language spoken by the Santa Clara Indians.



Clara Stone learned this story about the Avanyu from her grandfather.

“The sacred Avanyu lives in streams and is feathered with a turquoise horn growing from the middle of its forehead. The horn moves, sending rain for crops. When the Avanyu creeps on the ground and snaps its tail, it causes thunder, and when its tongue strikes out of its mouth, it causes lightening. If you see the Avanyu, it will bring luck and good health.”

When you see the Avanyu, it means there is water nearby or that it will rain soon. Water is essential for survival. In New Mexico’s hot, arid climate, water is scarce.

Can you find the Avanyu’s horn? Do you see the lightening coming from its tongue?

The movement of the rain and lightening caused by the Avanyu brings the sky and the earth together. When the sky and earth are joined, there is harmony in the Santa Clara world.

Look at the Zuni Pot

The Zuni Indians are also skilled potters. Why do you think the potter chose to paint these images on her pot?

Quanita Kallestewa chose these animals because they are water creatures.

At the Zuni Pueblo, a story is told about the water creatures. Milford Nahohai, a member of Zuni Pueblo, tells this version:

“After the Zuni emerged into this world with the help of the two Twins, they traveled in search of the middle of the universe, which would be the perfect place to live. The Zuni came upon a river. The parents were instructed by the Two Twins to carry their children on their backs. They were warned that changes would occur and were told not to let go of their children. As the parents stepped into the water, their human forms changed to water animals. Some of the young became sacred, struggled to be free, and slipped from their parents’ arms. The children were washed down the stream. So these are our ancestors who were washed away.”



The small pot is like the ones used to store water or to dip water from a larger storage jar. In the past, people living at Zuni used water jars to carry water from springs and wells everyday. The water would then be stored in a clay jar at home. The pots were much larger than the one you are looking at.

Today most people living at Zuni get their water from a faucet. But potters continue to make water jars to use in ceremonies or at home to store water. The storage jars are also made to sell as art objects to tourists and collectors.

The importance of water to the Pueblo people has been reflected for centuries through the designs decorating their pottery.



