

Reading #1: The Taíno people of Boriken

America (which is North, Central and South America) has had people living in it for more than 10,000 years. In fact, millions of people lived in the Americas. They had farms with many different kinds of plants, fruit, and vegetables. They spoke many different languages. They had interesting and diverse cultures.

There were different groups of indigenous people who lived in the islands of the Caribbean. The largest group of people living in these islands were the *Taínos*. They lived in the islands that are now Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, and the Bahama Islands.



The Taíno name for Puerto Rico was Boriken. This is why Puerto Rico is now also called Borinquen by Puerto Rican people, and why many Puerto Ricans call themselves Boricua. Many Puerto Rican towns still have the original Taíno name (Caguas, Cayey, Humacao, Guayama and others).

Mapa Cacical de Puerto Rico (Boriquén)



Taínos in Boriken did not like to fight. They had a very organized society. Taíno villages had leaders who were called *caciques*. Taíno houses were made of straw and were called *bohíos*. The bohios were clustered together in groups in small villages called “yucayeques”.



The Taínos liked to carve wood and make hammocks from cotton. The hammocks were used for sleeping at night.



The Taínos played a ball game that is similar to baseball in a small area like this, called a *batey*:



Taínos painted their bodies with bright colors. Both girls and boys wore gold jewelry. They sang and danced at ceremonies called “areytos”.

Taínos farmed and hunted small animals. They also ate a lot of fish, especially the people who lived near the ocean. One of the most important foods they grew was yuca (cassava or manioc). They cooked yuca and also made bread out of it. They also grew corn, squash, beans and sweet potato.



The Taíno carved symbols on rocks. These are called "petroglyphs." Here are some examples of Taíno petroglyphs:

TAÍNO SYMBOLS



frog - coquí



snail - caracol



sun - sol



baby - niño

There are many words from the Taíno language that we still use today in Spanish and even in English! Here are some examples:

Taíno word	English word
barbacoa	Barbecue
hamaca	Hammock
huracan	Hurricane
tabaco	Tobacco
canoa	Canoe

This activity is from, “Teaching about the Taínos, Columbus, and Indigenous Peoples’ Day in a Middle School English Language Learners Classroom,” a lesson By Alicia Lopez, M.Ed. It will be in the upcoming new edition of *Caribbean Connections: Puerto Rico*, published by Teaching for Change (<https://www.teachingforchange.org>).

Adapted from:

- http://www.elboricua.com/BKTainos_LessonPlan.html
- Chapter 1 of *A Young People’s History* by Howard Zinn