



## Roads Scholar Educational Adventures in Our Own Backyard

By Kathleen Williams  
CRIZMAC Art and Cultural Marketplace

# *Hiaki* Easter: A Festival of Flowers, Dances, and Masks

Three times the groups of costumed dancers march toward the church, advancing toward the line of ash that marks off the holy ground. Three times they are turned back, overcome by a barrage of flowers, the ringing of bells, the waving of flags, and the songs and dances of the opposing groups. After the third attempt, they give up and throw their masks into a huge bonfire. Once again, they have been defeated by the flowers and faith of the church people.

This colorful, elaborate ritual is all part of the annual *Hiaki* (in Spanish, Yaqui) Easter celebration, which began on Ash Wednesday and will conclude on Easter morning with more dances, followed by a final procession. The Easter ceremonies of the *Hiaki* people of Arizona and northern Mexico represent a tradition that dates back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. When the early Jesuit priests came into what is now Sonora, Mexico, they introduced Catholic ceremonies, which blended with *Hiaki* tradition to include element of both worlds. Flowers are very important in *Hiaki* culture. They represent beauty, but even more, in the desert, an abundance of flowers means that the right rains have come; the desert and the harvest will be fruitful and the people will prosper. Both in the ceremonies and the daily lives of the *Hiaki* people, flowers are used as powerful weapons against evil and are an important symbol, found in the elaborate floral designs on traditional *Hiaki* clothing.

Dances are another important part of the *Hiaki* culture and help them to maintain a strong sense of identity. Two of the main dances are the Deer Dance and the *Pascola* Dance. The Deer dancer is best known to most non-*Hiakis* as he also serves as the tribal symbol. The dancer wears a headdress depicting a deer's head and his steps imitate the movements of a deer. The deer dancer wears a breechcloth, a belt of deer hooves, and cocoon rattles around his ankles. Deer dancers perform at many *Hiaki* events, but not as often as the *Pascola*.

The *Pahko'ola* or *Pascola* dancer is the "Old Man of the Ceremony." The term comes from the words *pahko*, which means ceremony or fiesta, and *o'ola*, which is an affectionate term for an old man. The *Pascola* dancer has many roles. First, he is the historian of the *Hiaki* people who keeps the history alive through legends, myths, sermons, and jokes. He is the host of the ceremony and entertains the people with his jokes and antics. The *Pascola* dancer usually wears a mask, often representing a goat.

The symbols on the *Pascola* mask represent the people's closeness to nature. Smaller, triangular designs around the edge of the mask represent the rays of the sun. The sun itself is represented by what is seen by some as a cross shape. Its four parts represent the four directions: north, south, east, and west. Small animal designs—often snakes or lizards—represent nature, while longer, downward-pointing triangles under the eyes represent rain or tears.

Other dancers at the Easter celebration include: the *Caballeros* or horseman who carry blue flags that symbolize all that is good; the *Chapayekas* (“long-nose” in *Hiaki*) who represent the Spanish; the *Fariseos*, dressed in black, who represent the forces of evil; and the *Matachines*, representing the forces for good, who wear brightly colored shirts and headdresses decorated with red flowers.

While the festivities are on-going over the course of several weeks, it is the drama of the final confrontation of *Sabado de Gloria* or Holy Saturday that usually draws the biggest crowd. Visitors are welcome at *Hiaki* Easter celebrations at various sites around Tucson, but it is important to understand that this is a religious ceremony, not a play or a performance for tourists. The *Hiaki* people participating in the ceremony do so as a part of a *manda* or promise they made to God. No photography or recording is allowed, and visitors should watch respectfully, being careful not to intrude on the ceremonial areas or enter the church during the ceremony.

## Details

**What:** *Hiaki* Easter Celebration

**Where:** Celebrations will take place at a number of sites around Tucson including:

Yoem Barrio Libre	16th & 44th St.	Capilla Senor de los Milagros
Barrio Libre	39th St.	Capilla de San Martin
Old Pascua	W. Grant Rd. and N. Fairview	Capilla San Ignacio
New Pascua	Pascua Yaqui Reservation (Camino de Oeste, South of Valencia)	Capilla de Cristo Rey

**When:** The *Sabado de Gloria* or Holy Saturday festivities on April 15<sup>th</sup> are the most dramatic to witness. The timing is not precise, but events usually get underway around noon.

**Admission:** Free

**Information:** 883-5000

## Discovery Detours

Flowers, both real and tissue paper, and confetti (a symbol of flowers) are the weapons that are used to overturn evil when the wicked *Fariseos* and *Chapayekas* attack the church during the ceremony. The power of the flowers ultimately triumphs and enables the defenders of the church to prevail. A popular tradition at the *Hiaki* ceremony and elsewhere in both Mexican and Indian communities is the *cascarón*, a decorated, hollowed-out egg, filled with confetti, on the end of a long cone. You will find booths selling *cascarones* at the *Hiaki* Easter celebration, but you can also make your own.

Good, simple instructions for making *cascarones* are available on: <http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/do/cascarones.html>

**If you go...**

As you watch the drama unfold, can you identify the different dancers? This website has a good explanation of the various dancers. Print out a copy and take it with you as a reference: <http://www.brownielocks.com/yaquieaster.html>



## Fuel for Thought

### Did you know...

Frank Martinez is a well-known carver of *Pascola* masks. He uses driftwood from cottonwood trees that he finds on the banks of the Santa Cruz River. Taught by his uncle, Frank has been carving since he was 12 years old. He carves his masks with simple hand tools and paints them with acrylic paints. Frank Martinez uses the traditional mask form, but he carves naturalistic lips, teeth and tongues, making his style unique. He has made masks depicting humans, animals, and birds. Twenty years ago, there were about a dozen *Pascola* mask carvers. Today there is only Frank Martinez and one other man. Despite problems with chronic illness, Frank Martinez continues to carve whenever his health permits. It is important to him to keep the tradition and his culture alive.

## Think Tank

### Discussion questions for the whole family to consider:

For hundreds of years, the *Hiaki* have been an agricultural people. They knew how to follow the movements of the sun, moon, and stars to do their planting and harvesting. The symbols on the traditional *Hiaki Pascola* masks have a direct connection to nature. How do you think this might be related to their tradition of farming? Think of some of the symbols in your own culture. In what ways do they represent the things that are important in your culture?

## For the Mouse-bound

[www.pascuayaqui-nsn.gov](http://www.pascuayaqui-nsn.gov)

<http://www.heard.org/rain/cultura5/raincu11.html>

## Wheels Are Turning

Parents and Caregivers: These activities can help your child meet Arizona's educational standards. The standards addressed here include:

1AD-R7. Show respect for personal work and the work of others. (K)

1AD-F3. Discuss own impressions of a dance. (Grades 1-3)

1AD-E4. Identify basic dance steps, positions and patterns for dances from at least two different styles or traditions. (Grades 4-8)

2AV-E4. Describe the role art plays in culture and how it reflects, records, and shapes history in various times, places, and traditions. (Grades 4-8)