

## Jamestown, Québec and Santa Fe: Three North American Beginnings

### Topic/Content: Thinking About Conversion

It may be misleading to speak about Native peoples as simply accepting or rejecting European religions. Everywhere, indigenous people interpreted Christian teachings and combined them with their own. They gave new meanings to ceremonies such as baptism and communion and to figures such as Jesus and the Virgin Mary. For many, traditional beliefs and practices remained an important source of resistance and identity.

### Is that a Christian cross at the center of the Pueblo bowl?



*This ceramic bowl decorated with a cross illustrates the Pueblo peoples' gift for incorporating the alien into their own world, as they made distinctly Pueblo objects for Catholic churches. The bowl was excavated from the archaeological site of Kuaua, New Mexico.*

*Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, Laboratory of Anthropology, Museum of New Mexico, Department of Cultural Resources*

**Maybe.** When Native people integrated Christian ideas with their own, they often produced objects that combined traditional symbols such as kiva steps (shown on the front of the bowl) with Christian symbols such as the Latin cross.

**Maybe Not.** Native peoples everywhere in North America used cross designs, and the crossed line symbol in the center of the bowl pre-dates the Latin cross. Such crosses often represented the four cardinal directions—east, west, south and north, which have a spiritual meaning to many Native peoples. The kiva steps around the outside of this bowl may represent steps to the center of the Pueblo universe. The use of both these symbols as well as the material of the bowl (clay) indicate that this bowl had a spiritual meaning to the Pueblo children of Mother Clay.

## **Main Messages:**

- Native peoples had religious belief systems of their own before the Europeans came.
- Native peoples often combined the new beliefs of Christianity with their own traditional beliefs.

## **Applicable Standards of Learning:**

Based on information compiled from:

Virginia Public Schools

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml>

New Mexico Public Schools

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/standards/index.html>

Ontario Ministry of Education

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/>

## **Students will:**

- Develop a general understanding of early settlements in North America;
- Describe cultural interactions that led to cooperation and conflict;
- Recognize that North Americans are a people of diverse ethnic origins, customs, and traditions;
- Interpret ideas from different historical perspectives; and
- Explain how places change due to human activity and interaction.