



Discussion Cues: Radial Balance in the Giant Kites of Guatemala

Note: what appear to be irregular elements of the design may instead be shadows from the kite spars, as the light shines through the kite sail.



Image #1: The center is a natural point from which to build a design for these roughly circular kites. Often a narrative image will fill the central circle, surrounded by concentric bands of abstract design. Here the central circle is balanced by four smaller circles, highlighting single figures. Notice that the decorative patterning within which the circles are embedded is a series of concentric bands, of different widths, colors, and orientation (horizontal / vertical) of the motifs. The message runs in a thin circle around the central image: Mensaje de los Abuelos Kaqchikeles / Message from our Ancestral Kaqchikels.



Image #2: Here the circle at the center, with figurative images, is larger, rimmed by patterned sections. The central circle is divided into quarters, and this division is reinforced by the four patterned bands (identical in width but not in pattern) at 12, 3, 6, and 9 o'clock on the "clock face" and by the four black bands with repeated motifs at 1:30, 4:30, 7:30, and 10:30. Look at the repetition of motifs within each quarter section and at balance within each half section. Notice as well the three narrow bands around the outer edge of the kite, with geometric shapes in alternating rhythm.



Image #3: Discuss how radial balance works in this kite, with a tripartite design and repeated geometric motifs around the outer edge of the kite.



Image #4: Look at the balancing of circles, diamonds, rectangles, and lozenges radiating from the central oval, with clasped hands, in the middle. Again, the design is anchored by a band of geometric motifs in a contrasting color around the outer rim.



Image #5: This kite sail offers another example of radial balance. Look at how the central circle, which celebrates the ancestors ("We will always blossom where our ancestors have cultivated their seeds") is embedded within a fluted circle, in turn embedded within an intricate abstract pattern. Notice, again, how a narrow circle with a simple geometric motif defines the outer edge.



Image #6: Ask students to describe the overall radial balance of the design of this kite.