

# Weaving Bolivian Chuspas



**Jane Dalton**

**M**y love of textiles has inspired travels throughout South America where I have enjoyed learning about the rich history of weaving in this region. Bolivian textiles captivate me with their imaginative patterns such as birds, llamas, geometric stylization, and stripes. Rich in color and symbolism, Bolivian textiles illustrate the diversity of the native peoples and provide a timeline of colonization and historical changes.

## **Chuspas**

Some of my favorite collections of weavings are the small *chuspas*, or coca-leaf pouches that are an important and beautiful accessory to the indigenous people of Bolivia. Throughout Bolivia, Indian use of

coca is widely spread as a medicinal plant to alleviate fatigue, suppress the appetite, promote physical endurance, and alleviate pain.

It is chiefly men who carry the chuspa which have tiny pockets used to store the lime catalyst that increases saliva production. These bags are intricately woven of very finely spun and vividly colored wool.

## **Beginning with Examples**

When I teach weaving, I always begin by showing students samples of the textiles I have collected during my travels. Often students comment on the unusual color combinations found on the textiles—lime green, pink, and red adjacent to black stripes or boldly

colored symbols. I encourage students to explore new color combinations in their weavings and to select hues they have not worked with in the past.

**I encourage students to explore new color combinations in their weavings and to select hues they have not worked with in the past.**

## **Discovering Weaving**

I teach simple weaving techniques and begin by having students wind a warp (lengthwise cotton yarn) onto a small, prepared cardboard weaving loom. I then demonstrate how to weave simple stripes using different colors by threading a plastic weaving needle with yarn.

I show students how to create a plain weave fabric by going over one of the warp threads and under the adjacent warp thread and to continue doing so until they reach the edge of



the fabric. They continue this over and under process until the fabric is woven.

I find that all students enjoy the tactile qualities inherent in weaving. They are amazed at their results and learn quickly how labor-intensive weaving can be. Students come away from this project with a new appreciation for fabric, as well as the process of weaving. 🌀

*Jane Dalton is an artist, educator, and author of The Compassionate Classroom (Zephyr Press, 2004). daltonje@aol.com*

#### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art.*

#### WEB LINK

[www.janedalton.com](http://www.janedalton.com)

#### Materials

- multiple colors of strong cotton crochet thread or other cotton yarn
- assortment of yarns and ribbons
- masking tape
- plastic tapestry needles with large eyes
- beads and charms for embellishment
- sturdy cardboard or mat board, cut into 6 x 8" (15 x 20 cm) pieces and notched with slots ¼" (0.63 cm) apart at top and bottom (ready-made cardboard looms are available through art supply catalogs)

#### Weaving Procedures

1. Using strong cotton thread, wind the thread (warp) around the cardboard loom, being sure to place the thread securely in each notch.

2. Secure the warp thread by taping the ends to the back of the board, or by tying them together on the back of the loom.
3. Thread a long piece of yarn or ribbon into the eye of the tapestry needle.
4. Begin on one side of the warp thread on the loom and begin to go over one thread, then under the next, repeating until the opposite side of the loom is reached.
5. Repeat this on the return passage and continue until end of the loom is reached and the warp is full.
6. Turn the loom over and cut the warp threads on the back of the loom across the middle.
7. Take two-to-four threads and detach them carefully from the loom notches. Tie them in a simple overhand knot at the edge of the fabric. Repeat on both ends until all the threads are secured.