

# PIASA BIRD

Just Decoration?! | Symbols | Colors

## JUST DECORATION?

Don't take things at face value. Designs that stranger might see as just decoration on American Indian artwork actually might be significantly important symbols to the Native artists. Below are some of the symbols you could find along with colors often used by the artists.

## SYMBOLS

- **Sun** - happiness
- **Mountains** - destination
- **Gecko** - sign of desert
- **Arrow** - protection
- **Snake** - defiance
- **Bear (and paws)** - strength
- **Thunderbird** - caller of rain
- **Feathers** - honor

## COLORS

- **Dark red**
- **Yellow**
- **Turquoise**
- **Reddish Brown**
- **Black**
- **Blue**



## PIASA BIRD (THUNDERBIRD)

In 1673, explorers discovered an American Indian painting of a mythical bird, the Piasa (pronounced pie-a-saw) located by the Mississippi River not far from Alton, Illinois. It was believed that this bird devoured the people of an Indian village. Some Indian warriors eventually killed it with poisoned arrows. The painting was to commemorate their bravery. Although the original painting eroded away, a reproduction of the original has been painted in the same place.

Drawings of mythical birds called thunderbirds have been found in numerous places. It was believed that it brought rain and good vegetation. It was also believed that lightning came out of its mouth thunder was caused from flapping its wings.

American Indians artists used animal symbols when decorating their pots so show their connection with nature. They also created pictographs (drawings) as well as petroglyphs (etchings on rock).

Since no one has seen a Piasa Bird or Thunderbird, you can use your imagination on how they should look.