

# Kachinas or katsinas or dolls

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There is a lot of confusion about kachinas, what they are, what they mean, where to get authentic ones, and even how to spell the name. While kachina is the spelling most widely accepted and used, many professors and writers of expensive coffee table books prefer the spelling katsina, insisting this is the only correct term. The Pueblo tribes that have kachinas as a part of their culture don't call them by either name but by words in their own languages to refer to these religious beings.

Kachinas are the religious figures that carry prayers to the Creator and assume a variety of forms. In the Hopi and Zuni tribes there are over 300 different kachinas each with a specific role and purpose. Some of these kachinas are shared or present in both tribes, while others are distinctly different and not shared. Human faces are never shown during kachina dances and the people chosen to participate believe they assume the role of a particular kachina when the mask, clothing and items identifying that kachina are put on.

Items are kept concealed when not in use and are never displayed. When the masks and clothing are being used all dressing and undressing is done within the kiva, an underground religious chamber that is entered from above by way of a ladder. People who are participating remain in the kivas for several days before and after ceremonies practicing dances and learning the prayers. All knowledge is passed down orally and must be perfectly memorized so that meanings don't get changed. At this time participants will carve representations of the kachinas who will be appearing.

These dolls are given away to children for them to take home. The kachinas are hung on the walls within the dwelling so that the children will learn the different kachinas and their meanings. These carvings are educational in nature and are not worshipped, which has been a common misconception among non-Native American people.

Kachina dolls have been very collectible since the early 1900s and increase in value when carved by a member of a Pueblo tribe. As with all collectibles, look for hallmarks and signatures, buy from the maker or a reliable source that is willing to authenticate the information in writing.

