This past spring, the SBHS Ethnic Studies Club was approached about painting a mural on the outside cafeteria wall, and honestly we were a bit daunted by the challenge. This was a 60 foot wall after all. But with the help of the members of the Raíces SB Club and the In Lak’ech Club, a series of brainstorming sessions led to the concept of a pair of hands holding Lotería cards. From there the students worked with local mural artist and SBHS alum, Manuel Unzueta, over the summer and early fall to come up with the basic concepts for the panels that resulted in a kaleidoscope mural that tells six different messages while staying true to the main theme. Painting began in late September 2021 and two months later we arrived at a mural that has had many hands working on it under the direction of the Mr. Unzueta.

Section 1: Mother Earth
“I really wanted to include nuestra Madre Tierra in this mural because she is our protector. She is our home. She nurtures, provides, and loves us. Madre Tierra is sacred. She is what gives us life. A lot of people don’t see or understand all that she does for us or just don’t care enough to return the care back to her. Day by day, we are killing her and while we do that, we are killing ourselves too as a result. It’s important that we tend to and care for nuestra Madre Tierra because without her the beauty that is life wouldn’t exist. We must acknowledge and recognize her importance rather than be consumed by the idea of capitalism.” Genesis Zarate, SBHS Class of 2020

Section 2: Tools for Knowledge
This panel deals with the concept that knowledge is something we should strive for. Not just academic knowledge, but also an appreciation and respect for the natural world which is equally important. We have much to learn from our past in order that we may help preserve the future.

Section 3: Yearning for Home...No Borders
Part of the original sketch that became the primary theme of the mural, the feminine hand holds a series of Lotería cards that includes the elements of Santa Barbara High including various academic subjects and a Donnette dancer, as well as traditional cards. The cards fade up to become scrolls and eventually hibiscus flowers being followed by hummingbirds. Hummingbirds are important in many cultures but in Mexican symbolism it represents strength in life’s struggle to elevate consciousness. In other words, follow your dreams. The pyramid represents a students’ evolution from a child to a graduate while the silhouette of Lady Liberty looms in the background to remind us of the promise of America even if it is still a struggle.

Section 4: Struggle and Resistance
The other half of the equation is the masculine hand that is layered in its meaning. On one hand, you have the arm being pulled down by a chain representing the plight of the oppressed either through slavery and other forms of exploitation while at the same time in the upper right of the mural the tools of war have claimed a victim in the form of a dove. The Lotería cards include our mascot, El Don, as well as an oak tree, and an activist. But even on this side, we still have a sense of hope as the Monarch butterflies that are sweeping up to the sky. In Mexican culture these butterflies represent the souls of the dead returning to earth. For us here in Santa Barbara they also represent a link back to Mexico where they migrate back and forth from each year.

Section 5: A Vision of the Future
As we move from our past, we look toward a future where we want our students to see themselves. The set of wings have a purposefully blank center where individual students can pose and take a picture while envisioning their own wings taking them where they want to go. Above the student is a conduit to a higher plane because we want our students to dream big while helping to make the world a better place. On the right side are the logos of the three student clubs that helped bring this mural to fruition, The Ethnic Studies Club, Raíces Santa Barbara, and the In Lak’ech Club.

Section 6: Spirits of the Sea
The final section honors the Chumash history and legacy in Santa Barbara as well as paying homage to the sea and its power. A beautiful inspired sun looks down on a tomol of paddlers who are being swept up in a wave as they come home. All around are creatures/spirits of the sea, the same sea that gives us life and sustains us. This panel is also a counterpart to the first panel of Mother Earth as the protection of the ocean is paramount to our survival as a species.