

In Search of the Maya: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description

Is a hieroglyph worth a thousand words? They are to archaeologists sifting through the ruins of the Mayan city Calakmul. See how these valuable epigraphs are beginning to tell the story of a violent, religious, and politically charged culture that disappeared without explanation.

Onscreen Questions and Activities

- Pre-viewing questions:
 - What do you know about the ancient Maya civilization and its ruins in the Yucatán peninsula?
 - As you watch the program, note how epigraphers gained a better understanding of Maya hieroglyphs. How did their discoveries change archaeological theories of Maya culture?
 - Post-viewing question:
 - Many Maya artifacts depict warfare and sacrificial violence. Discuss how the peaceful nature of contemporary Maya people influenced archaeological interpretations.
 - How did these interpretations change once scientists deciphered Maya hieroglyphs?
 - Activity: Invent your own system of hieroglyphs and write a factual story about a leader or ruler in the 20th century. Be sure to include a glossary so that others can decipher your hieroglyph history.
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- Understand that the classical period of the Maya (A.D. 300 to A.D. 900) was marked by the growth of city-states and by imperial wars between them.
- Prepare a news reports about a major event of this period, focusing on one particular city-state.

Materials

- *In Search of the Maya* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Pens, pencils, markers
- Scissors
- Paper
- Paints, glue, and tape
- Books, magazine articles, and other resources about the Maya classical period and Maya city-states
- Atlas
- Encyclopedias
- Computer with Internet access
- Video equipment (optional)
- Publishing software (optional)

Procedures

1. Explain to students that they will explore the ancient civilization of the Maya during the classical period, from A.D. 300 to A.D. 900. This time in Maya civilization was marked by the growth of city-states and by imperial wars between them. (You may want to review the definition of city-state: a self-governing state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory.) Tell students that they will be preparing a news reports about a major event of this period. For example, an event might be a great war planned for a special astronomical date or the capture of a rival king and his city-state.
2. Explain to students that their news reports may be in the form of a magazine article, with sidebars providing background information; a major newspaper story; or an editorial. Students may also wish to videotape a presentation in the style of a prime-time television news show. Although students are reporting on historical events, they should write or present their news stories as if they are there at the time of the events.
3. Have students work in small groups. Provide each group with a list of the classical period city-states, including Tikal, Calakmul, Piedras Negras, and Uaxactun. If students are interested in other classical period city-states, allow them to explore these as well. Ensure that each group has chosen a different city-state so that no two groups report on the same event.
4. Encourage students to analyze the media format in which they choose to present their reports. Challenge them to include as many features of the media as they can, such as headlines, illustrations, news anchors, graphic titles, sidebars, and editorials. Students may even wish to stage interviews with kings of the city-states.
5. Provide or have students collect encyclopedias and a variety of books and magazine articles about the Maya classical period.



6. Provide time for groups to research their city-state and develop a news report about a significant event.
7. Allow class time for each group to present its news report. Include a class discussion period so that students can ask any questions they still have about the Maya.
8. Display the news reports for other classes to view.

Discussion Questions

1. What can artifacts tell us about a civilization like that of the ancient Maya?
2. Discuss why deciphering Maya hieroglyphs was important to the understanding of their history and culture.
3. What do you think archaeologists will find from our society 2,000 years from now, and what will their findings say about us?
4. What objects might lead to the misinterpretation of our culture by future archaeologists?
5. How has our understanding of the ancient Maya culture changed over the last 60 years?
6. What role did astronomy play in ancient Maya civilization?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students present a complete news report about an event from the Maya classical period; news report utilizes many features of its medium (e.g., sidebars, interviews, and op-ed pieces); there is full group participation.
- 2 points: Students present the basic facts of the event; news report only contains a few of the features of its medium; there is full group participation.
- 1 point: Students present a brief report of the event with little background material; news report contains few of the features of its medium; there is not full group participation.

Vocabulary

allies

Definition: States associated with each other by treaty, which usually help each other.

Context: Maya city-states would become allies with each other to go to war against a third city-state.

archaeologist

Definition: A scientist who studies the material remains, such as fossils and artifacts, of past human life and activities.

Context: An archaeologist who wants to study ancient Maya civilization needs to explore the ruins of its temples and cities.



artifact

Definition: An object remaining from a particular period.

Context: Maya artifacts that offer clues to the ancient civilization were found buried in the deep jungles of the Yucatán.

city-state

Definition: A self-governing state consisting of a city and its surrounding territory.

Context: Tikal was one of the most powerful and wealthy city-states of the Maya civilization.

decipher

Definition: To make out the meaning of, despite indistinctness or obscurity.

Context: Once archaeologists could decipher Maya hieroglyphs, they gained an understanding of the ancient civilization's culture and history.

hieroglyphic

Definition: Written in, or belonging to, a system of writing mainly in pictorial characters.

Context: It took many years of study before people could understand the ancient hieroglyphic writing of the Maya.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Historical Understanding: Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns.
- Historical Understanding: Understands the historical perspective.
- World History – Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires: Understands how early agrarian civilizations arose in Mesoamerica.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Culture



Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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