

Mystic Lands: Maya: Messages in Stone: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two to three class periods

Program Description

Explore the mysterious cities of the ancient Maya – Tikal, Chichén Itzá, and Palenque – and examine the legends, history, and facts culled from “rock records.” See how Lord Pacal led the Maya into a golden age of science, music, and art.

Discussion Questions

Before watching the video

- Who were the ancient Maya?
- How have scholars been able to learn so much about the ancient Maya?
- What happened to their civilization?

After watching the video

- When and where did the ancient Maya civilization thrive? (The Maya empire encompassed the present-day countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras, and part of Mexico, including the entire Yucatán Peninsula. It lasted from around 2600 B.C. to the 10th century A.D. and was characterized by advances in architecture, agriculture, mathematics, science, art, and literature.)
- What is Día de los Muertos, and how is it celebrated? (This celebration of the Day of the Dead recalls the ancient practice of ancestor worship. On this day, it is believed that the dead will return to their villages to celebrate with their families. Celebrants place altars and shrines on graves and in homes and churches to honor the dead.)
- What is the Popol Vuh? (This holy book of the Maya, with a name that means the Book of Counsel, contains the Maya creation story and other stories that offer insight into the spiritual origins and foundations of Maya life.)
- Who was Lord Pacal, and what were his contributions? (Pacal was one of the most important Maya rulers. During his reign of nearly 70 years over the city of Palenque, Pacal led the Maya into a golden age of science, music, and art. The Temple of Inscriptions, one of the Maya's greatest mortuary shrines, was his tomb.)
- What purpose did human sacrifice serve for the ancient Maya? (They believed that sacrifices were essential in order for them to survive. It was seen as a way of feeding the gods, and as a way to show gratitude for the benefits of the sun and rain given by the gods.)

- What game was played on ancient Maya ball courts, and what were the stakes? (Players used a large rubber ball and attempted to score points by driving the ball through rings placed high along the side of the court. When the game was over, the captain of the losing team would be beheaded. It was believed that the blood of the victim, as it fell to the ground, would fertilize the earth.)

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Become familiar with the Maya and their culture.
- Explore contributions of ancient Maya civilization in the areas of architecture, mathematics, literature, and science.
- Learn about the ancient Maya ball game and its cultural and spiritual significance, and compare it with other spectator sports past and present.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Library materials and other print resources
- Art and craft materials to make paper uniforms, clay sculptures, and drawings
- Volleyball and Hula Hoops to play game, if desired

Procedures

1. The first team sport, the ancient Maya ball game, had it all: fast-paced action, colorful uniforms, bands, a high-tech playing ball, impressive ball courts, and a real incentive to win. More than a game, the contest was an important part of Maya spiritual beliefs, with the losers sometimes sacrificing themselves – literally – for the good of the community. By sifting through archeological evidence and studying artwork, students will learn how the ball game was ancient Maya civilization in microcosm.
2. The basis for this lesson plan is *The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame* (<http://www.ballgame.org>), an interactive Web site designed to accompany a traveling museum exhibit of the same name. Students can navigate the various sections of the site to learn about the Maya as part of the Mesoamerican world; understand the ball game, its players and spiritual connections; and view artwork depicting the game and spectators. Interactive animations and video clips allow students to listen to Maya music, watch a reenacted game, dress a player, and take a virtual walk around an ancient ball court. The site is rich in examples of original Maya art and artifacts that depict the game.



3. There are several activities students can do in connection with this study of the ball game. Here are a few:
- Draw a mural in the artistic style of the Maya depicting a ball game. You can see examples of such artworks throughout the Ballgame site.
 - Compare the Maya ball game with other spectator sports such as basketball or football. What are similarities and differences between the ancient sport and the modern ones? The "How We Play the Game" section (http://www.ballgame.org/sub_section.asp?section=2&sub_section=4) is a good starter for a discussion or report on this topic.
 - Find out more about the substance that made the ball game possible: rubber. How were the Maya able to make hardened rubber balls 3,000 years before Charles Goodyear invented Vulcanized rubber in 1839? Students can do research and report on the chemistry involved in manipulating latex.
 - Pick two teams of three and play the game. Use a volleyball and Hula Hoops for goals. An example of how the game might have been played is at http://www.ballgame.org/sub_section.asp?section=2&sub_section=4. Essentially, the idea was to get the ball through a hoop to score, using only the hips and legs to move the ball. Establish the rules of play, create uniforms, choose team names, bring in the spectators and drummers, and let the action begin.
 - Keep score using the Maya mathematical system, which is based on 20 rather than 10. Go to Maya Mathematics to learn about the system, see how digits were written, and do some simple calculations.

Assessment

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

- **3 points:** Students conducted thorough research and participated enthusiastically in the Maya ball game activities.
- **2 points:** Students conducted adequate research and took part in the activities.
- **1 point:** Students conducted minimal research and participated minimally in the ball game activities.

Vocabulary

Diá de los Muertos (Day of the Dead)

Definition: November 2nd, a day of festivals throughout Mexico and Guatemala that recall ancestor worship; churches, homes, and graveyards are adorned with altars and shrines to honor the dead.

Context: It is believed that on the Diá de los Muertos the dead will return to the villages to celebrate with their families.



Chichén Itzá

Definition: One of the most important cities of the ancient Maya people and a center of Maya culture; it is now an important archaeological site in the northern Yucatán Peninsula.

Context: El Castillo, the Ball Court, Sacred Well, Temple of the Warriors, and the Caracol, or Round Tower, are among Chichén Itzá's notable ruins.

Popol Vuh

Definition: Mid-16th century book containing the creation myth and national saga of the Maya

Context: The Popol Vuh is filled with stories that offer insight into the spiritual origins and foundations of Maya life.

Quetzalcoatl

Definition: Legendary leader of Chichén Itzá, symbolized by the feathered serpent

Context: It is believed that Quetzalcoatl presided over the darker side of the Maya, represented by human sacrifice.

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/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics,
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
 - People, Places, and Environment
 - Global Connections
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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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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into eight parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Secrets of the Maya (1 min.)

To Maya descendants, their ancestors' spirits still live among the ruins of their once-great civilization.

II. The Day of the Dead (3 min.)

The Maya built fine cities and made advances in art, language, and architecture. Their empire stretched across Central America.



III. Science, Spirituality, and Sacrifice (4 min.)

The Maya universe was divided into three parts connected by the World Tree. To feed the gods and give thanks, the Maya sacrificed humans, which they believed was required to bring rain or good fortune.

IV. Symbols and Spirits (2 min.)

Spanish explorers were unsuccessful in their attempt to convert the Maya World Tree into a Christian cross.

V. Maya Architecture (2 min.)

Pacal ruled the city of Palenque for nearly 70 years and inspired a golden age of Maya achievement in architecture and art.

VI. Links to the World of the Dead (2 min.)

At Chichén Itzá, girls were sacrificed at the Cenote of Sacrifice to appease the god of water. But if they did not drown, their lives were spared.

VII. Chichén Itzá (4 min.)

Among the ruins at Chichén Itzá are the observatory at Caracol, the temple calendar of El Castillo, and the ball court where a game of life and death was played.

VIII. The Maya Today (4 min.)

Carvings amid ruins at Tikal tell the story of the Maya. The civilization is gone, but its spirit lives on in Maya descendants who honor their ancestors during Day of the Dead celebrations.

Curriculum Units

1. The Maya Empire

Pre-viewing question

Q: Where was the Maya empire?

A: In Central America encompassing all of Guatemala, Belize, and El Salvador, much of Honduras, and parts of Mexico

Post-viewing question

Q: When did the empire reach its height and when did it end? What was it known for?

A: The Maya empire reached its peak between A.D. 250 and 900; it ended by the 10th century. It was characterized by impressive cities, ornately carved buildings and temples, and the development of a written language.

2. The Maya Universe

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is a myth?

A: The dictionary definition of myth follows: A traditional, typically ancient story dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes that serves as a fundamental type in the worldview of a



people, as by explaining aspects of the natural world or delineating the psychology, customs, or ideals of society.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did the Maya view the universe?

A: The Maya universe had three parts: the middleworld where humans lived; the upperworld of the gods, ancestors, and the Celestial Monster; and the underworld, or Xibalba, a parallel of the middleworld but cursed by demons and darkness. Connecting the three worlds was the World Tree.

3. Chichén Itzá

Pre-viewing question

Q: Who was a legendary leader of Chichén Itzá?

A: Quetzalcoatl was the city's most famous ruler.

Post-viewing question

Q: What scientific purpose did El Castillo serve?

A: El Castillo was a stone representation of the Maya calendar that was aligned with the rising and setting sun during the solstices. It was used as an almanac to determine good planting and harvest times.

4. War Games

Pre-viewing question

Q: What was the first team sport?

A: The Maya ball game is the first known team sport.

Post-viewing question

Q: What game might captive enemies of the Maya be made to play?

A: Captives might be made to play a ball game in which teams of three attempted to get a rubber ball through a suspended hoop. The Maya viewed captives as a gift to be sacrificed to the gods, so at the end of the game, the losers might be beheaded.

5. The Day of the Dead

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is the Day of the Dead?

A: Known as Día de los Muertos in Spanish, this is the day that the spirits of the dead may visit the living. Descendants of the Maya celebrate this holiday every year.

Post-viewing question

Q: How do Day of the Dead celebrations hearken back to Maya traditions?

A: The worship of ancestors was a Maya tradition. Even though many Maya descendants worship in the Catholic faith, the old ways are still present and have become melded with the new.

