

Follow-up Activities

- The Guatemala civil war began in 1954 when the Guatemalan military, backed by the CIA, led a coup against President Arbenz, the country's popularly-elected president. At that time, La Violencia—a lengthy period of human rights abuses against Maya Indians in Guatemala—began, which has been described as a form of genocide. Generally, indigenous peoples in the Americas such as the Maya have less access to education and health services, are more likely to die from preventable diseases, suffer higher infant and maternal mortality rates and experience higher levels of poverty than non-indigenous populations. Ask groups of students to research the history, causes and effects of the Guatemala civil war and to form human rights watch committees that generate proposals offering solutions to problems indigenous people continue to face not only in Guatemala, but throughout the Americas. Ample background material on human rights issues in Guatemala may be found at the following web site: hrw.org/doc/?t=americas&c=guatem
- The Peten rainforest stretches for thousands of square miles from the Yucatán to Central America. Ask students to research the ecological issues of the Peten region and conduct roundtable discussions reflecting the conflicting goals and aspirations of indigenous people, large landowners and environmental activists. As a follow-up, students may develop environmental action plans addressing the issues of this threatened area. Solid research material may be found at this web site: www.smu.edu/smunews/waka/rainforest.asp
- The Popol Vuh, the sacred text of the Maya that describes their beliefs, mythology and history, contains information on *pok-ta-pok*, a ball game that has an important, yet mysterious and debated role in Maya cultural history. Ask students to research and discuss the legend surrounding *pok-ta-pok* and describe its religious and political significance. As a follow-up, students may create a rule book detailing how to play this ancient game. Information on the history of *pok-ta-pok* may be found at the following web site: www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A830431
- The Maya have left us few clues to their culture and history, and the rather sudden collapse of Maya civilization has been puzzling to scientists for many years. Ask students to study the theories of Tom Sever, NASA's only archaeologist, and his colleagues about the reasons for the decline of the Maya. Students may write journal entries summarizing Sever's views and write research papers describing in detail how space satellites are being used to unravel ancient mysteries. The following web sites provide excellent research material: science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2004/15nov_maya.htm
science.nasa.gov/newhome/headlines/essd07apr97_1.htm

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.facultysenate.villanova.edu/maya/itza.html
Villanova University offers an extensive photo gallery of Chichen Itza.
- www.marc.ucsb.edu/elpilar/education/maya_history/maya_chrn.html
The Mesoamerican Research Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara provides a detailed time line on the history of the Maya Empire.
- www.flmnh.ufl.edu/maya/maya4.htm
The Florida Museum of Natural History presents "Images of the Maya," which features a detailed history of Maya textiles.

Suggested Print Resources

- Coe, Michael D. *The Maya*. Thames & Hudson, New York, NY; 2005.
- Kallen, Stuart A. *Mayans*. Greenhaven Press, San Diego, CA; 2000.
- Lourie, Peter. *The Mystery of the Maya: Uncovering the Lost City of Palenque*. Boyds Mill Press, Honesdale, PA; 2001.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MAYA

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Program Overview

The Maya of Mesoamerica was one of the flourishing Native American civilizations that existed at the time of the Spanish conquest. With its culture spanning more than 2,000 years, the Maya of the Yucatán and present-day Guatemala predate both the Aztecs and the Incas in the Americas. Maya civilization flourished first in the forests of Guatemala, and created remarkable cities such as Tikal, Copan and Palenque, and ceremonial centers such as Chichen Itza and Uxmal which all featured elaborate temples and pyramids. A Toltec invasion and occupation of Chichen Itza led to the gradual decline of the Maya. Despite the Spanish conquest which completed the downfall of Maya civilization in 1542, more than two million Maya continue to live in a manner similar to their ancestors.

Episode 1: Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza is a ruined city of the ancient Maya located in an arid region on the Yucatán Peninsula. Underground wells gave the city its name—chi (“mouths”) and chen (“wells”)—and provided essential water that enabled Chichen Itza to develop and prosper. Archaeologists speculate that the city was founded around the sixth century CE by Maya peoples. Some evidence suggests that the Itza may have invaded the city of Chichen in the tenth century, constructing major buildings such as the astronomically-significant Great Pyramid, which features a carving symbolic of the god Quetzalcóatl (Kukulcan to the Maya) and a red jaguar throne studded with jade. Chichen may have been surpassed by the rise of the city of Mayapan and was largely uninhabited by the time Spanish *conquistadors* came to Mexico in the 16th century. Abandoned for centuries to the jungle, Chichen Itza remained sacred to the Maya. Excavation began in the 19th century, and the city became a major archaeological site.

Vocabulary

Maya — A member of a Mesoamerican Indian people inhabiting southeast Mexico, Guatemala and Belize, whose civilization reached its height around A.D. 300-900. The Maya are noted for their architecture and city planning, their mathematics and calendar, and their hieroglyphic writing system.

Inquisition — A Roman Catholic judicial system set up to fight heresy and witchcraft. Many people were executed during the Spanish Inquisition beginning in 1478.

conquistadors — Spanish for “conqueror.” These Spanish explorers were responsible for the European conquest of the New World, especially Mexico and Peru in the 16th century.

Quetzalcóatl — The Aztec god of wind, life and the morning, as well as the creator of mankind.

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pok-ta-pok — A game played by the ancient Maya in which a large rubber ball was volleyed back and forth on a ball court without using the hands.

cenotes — Sacred natural wells for the ancient Maya who considered them to be entrances to the spiritual underworld.

Episode 2: Tikal

Tikal was a large city and religious center of the ancient Maya civilization located in a tropical rainforest in present-day Guatemala. Tikal was first occupied as a small village between 900 and 300 BCE and later became an important ceremonial site with the building of major pyramids and temples. At the height of its influence between 600 and 900 CE, Tikal had a population of around 10,000, with an outlying population of 50,000. This period in Tikal saw the construction of great plazas, pyramids and palaces and the emergence of Maya hieroglyphic writing, mathematics and art. In addition, Tikal was an important junction on Mesoamerican trade routes based in central Mexico. The city began to decline late in the eighth century CE and the city was abandoned by the tenth century.

Vocabulary

Popol Vuh — The sacred text of the Maya that describes their beliefs, mythology and history.

Roman Empire — An ancient empire founded in 31 BCE that was centered in the city of Rome. At its peak, the empire included most of Western Europe, North Africa and the Near East. It fell to Germanic invaders in 476 CE.

Shibalba — The underworld in ancient Maya mythology.

Ahau — A god-king in ancient Maya mythology.

Shaman — A person who acts as a medium between the visible world and the spirit world in certain tribal societies and is thought to have magical healing and prophetic powers.

Episode 3: Copan

Copan is an ancient Maya city located in what is today western Honduras. The city began as a small agricultural settlement around 1000 BCE and as it grew in importance over the centuries, its population expanded to approximately 20,000 people. In addition to residential areas, the architectural center of the city features stone temples, two large pyramids, several stairways and plazas and a *pok-ta-pok* court, and its structures are particularly noted for their friezes and beautifully carved hieroglyphics. Astronomers in Copan developed a highly advanced and accurate solar calendar. A long dynasty of Maya kings ruled Copan from the fourth to the eighth century CE, the end of which marked the decline of Copan, which the Maya had completely abandoned by about 1200 CE.

Vocabulary

hieroglyphs — Picture symbols in an ancient Mesoamerican writing system.

stele — An upright stone slab with an inscribed or sculptured surface.

Yax Kuk Mo — The founding ruler of the Copan dynasty.

Episode 4: Palenque

Palenque is an ancient Maya city located in what is now the Chiapas state of Mexico. It was first occupied 1,500 years ago but only fully developed under Maya King Pakal in the seventh century. The ancient red-stoned temple complex in the city is now faded gray and surrounded by jungle, but the remains are remarkably well-preserved with decorative reliefs that feature images from Maya mythology. The most impressive structure is the Temple of the Inscriptions, which was only rediscovered in 1952 and is noted for its extensive hieroglyphics. Although the reasons for the decline of Palenque are uncertain, it is known to have been abandoned in the tenth century.

Vocabulary

Hernando Cortés — Famous *conquistador* best known for conquering and ending the Aztec Empire in 1519.

sarcophagus — A stone container inscribed with symbols and inscriptions that holds a coffin and mummified remains.

raffia — Leaf fibers of the raffia palm tree used to make baskets, mats and paper by the Maya.

Follow-up Discussion Questions

- Discuss the importance of the city of Chichen Itza at the turn of the first millennium CE. Describe relations among people living within the Maya Empire.
- Who was Kukulcan? Explain his cultural and religious significance for the Maya people.
- What were the three worlds according to Maya beliefs? Compare and contrast Maya cosmology with other belief systems.
- Explain the significance of the god-king in Maya culture. How did god-kings demonstrate their omnipotence?
- How do modern archaeologists gain a glimpse of Copan's distant past? Why is much information associated with Copan's cultural heritage in danger of decay?