

Art of the Maya at NOMA



Wall Panel Commemorating a Military Victory by a Warrior King, circa 600-900 C.E., Limestone, Mexico, Chiapas, El Cayo site



Plate with Dancing Figure, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, Waachtun site, Diameter: 42.5 cm.

This packet features selected works of art from the Maya culture from the permanent collection of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Included in this packet are descriptions of twelve works of clay and stone, an essay on the role of the arts in Maya society, a vocabulary list, and suggested classroom materials.

List of Works

Commemoratory Stele Portraying a Warrior King and Captive, 780 C.E. Limestone, Maya, Guatemala, El Peten, El Caribe site, 148.6 x 96.5 cm.

Tenoned Architectural Ornament Depicting the Head of a Sun God, circa 600-900 C.E. green andesitic tuff, Honduras, Copán, 47.9 x 44.7 cm.

Wall Panel Commemorating a Military Victory by a Warrior King, circa 600-900 C.E., Limestone, Mexico, Chiapas, El Cayo site

Cylindrical Incensario Depicting a Sun God, terracotta and polychrome, circa 600-900 C.E., Mexico, Chiapas, 70 cm.

Codex-Style Cylindrical Pot Depicting Monkey Scribes, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, 11 x 12.2 cm.

Lidded Burial Urn with Jaguar Motif, circa 900-1200 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, Quiche, 121.9 cm.

Plate with Dancing Figure, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, Waachtun site, Diameter, 42.5 cm.

Cylindrical Vessel Depicting Enthroned Lords and Attendants, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, H. 17.5 cm.

Ballplayer Figure Depicting a Royal Captive, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta, Mexico, Yucatan, Jaina Island, 23.7 cm.

Cylindrical Vessel Depicting Four Ballgame Players, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta and polychrome, Mexico, Yucatan, 18.4 x 12 cm.

Lidded Bowl Depicting the Water Bird Fishing on the Waters of the World, circa 200-600 C.E., Terracotta and polychrome, Mexico, Campeche, H. 22 cm.

Whistle in the Form of the Moon Goddess, Ixchel, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta and polychrome, Mexico, Yucatan, Jaina Island, H. 19.5 cm.

Selected Objects

Commemoratory Stele Portraying a Warrior King and Captive, limestone, dated 780 C.E., Guatemala, El Peten, El Caribe site, 148.6 x 96.5 cm.

The Maya often commemorated important persons on monumental stone stelae that were incorporated into civic planning. The stelae are usually sculpted in **low-relief** and the combination of profile-frontal representation of the warrior is a favorite sculptural device. In this stele the warrior wears a loincloth, decorated waistband and high wristlets. On his head is a huge skeletal headdress, possibly a representation of the Death God, Ah Puch. His headpiece is wrapped by a turban and decorated with a long, feathered, sweeping tassel. In his right hand he carries a tasseled spear. In his left he holds a shield. Many warlike figures represented on Maya monuments carry similar shields with sun faces. The captive, seen completely in profile, kneels in submission by the feet of the warrior. His hair is tied in a top-knot which is the sign of a captive.

On the left and right are inscribed twelve **glyphs**, including long-count date glyphs that can be computed to correspond to the year AD 780. The bottom part of the stele is missing.



Tenoned Architectural Ornament Depicting the Head of a Sun God, green andesitic tuff, circa 600-900 C.E., Honduras, Copán, 47.9 x 44.7 cm.

This head comes from Copán, a large Maya site rich in architectural decoration. The stone from which the sculpture was carved was quarried from a hillside a half a mile away from the city and dragged there on wooden rollers by manual laborers. This head of the Sun God was probably attached high on a temple wall as it is carved so that it should be seen from below. The Sun God's characteristics include a sun-sign on his forehead, grotesque animal figures with seashells atop his thick hair and crossed semi-circular eyes, one of the best known features of Copán heads.



Wall Panel Commemorating a Military Victory by a Warrior King, circa 600-900 C.E., Limestone, Mexico, Chiapas, El Cayo site

[Pictured page 1 left]

This scene probably represents an historical dynastic event of a transfer of power through a bloodletting ritual. In such ceremonies, figures draped with cloth and holding sharp instruments humble themselves at the moment they are invested with power. The kneeling figure probably has a perforator in his right hand. He kneels in front of a priest-ruler. On the other side of the priest ruler is an attendant in the Maya pose of reverence, holding his right hand on his left shoulder.

Cylindrical Incensario Depicting a Sun God, terracotta and polychrome, circa 600-900 C.E., Mexico, Chiapas, 70 cm.

Incense burners like this example have been found at Palenque and are distinguished by an open tubular form and exquisite modeling. The usual decoration is a series of four or five tiered grotesque heads dominated by a realistic human head in the center. The majority of incensarios from Palenque portray jaguar gods or zip monsters. NOMA's head, however, portrays a sun god indicated by *kin*, or "sun," glyphs, resembling an "x," on the lateral panels.



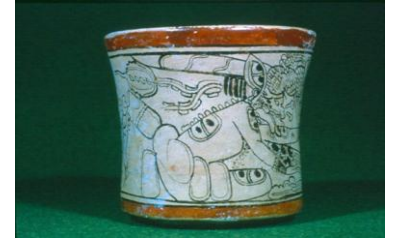
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Codex-Style Cylindrical Pot Depicting Monkey Scribes, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, 11 x 12.2 cm.

Almost all Maya ceramics in modern collections come from graves, and most of the imagery is related to death and the underworld. The two figures on this pot are marked with god signs on their arms, thighs and backs. The bones drawn just above the nostrils, the prominent teeth, and the large fleshless jaws suggest skeletons, appropriate for death gods. Each figure wears a spangled turban. Attached to the turban is a freely drawn water-lily, flower of the underworld in Maya mythology. Other features suggest they are the Monkey Scribes, the gods of writing, artists, and calculations. The Monkey Scribes are named Hun-Batz and Hun-Chuen sometimes translated as One Monkey and One Artisan - and were older brothers of the famous Hero Twins. Both figures are depicted furiously working on a spotted jaguar skin, an additional symbol of the underworld.



This vessel is painted with a bold black line over a creamy slip in a manner which has been christened the “**codex**” style because it resembles Maya books.

Lidded Burial Urn with Jaguar Motif, circa 900-1200 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, Quiche, 121.9 cm.

Such funerary urns with conical lids are known to the Maya throughout their history. The lid and cover of the urn have finger indentations made as decoration while the clay was wet. Modeled in **high-relief**, a jaguar head with paws protrudes from the mouth of a reptilian Earth monster. In the Maya **pantheon**, the jaguar god is frequently associated with death and is an appropriate image for a burial urn.

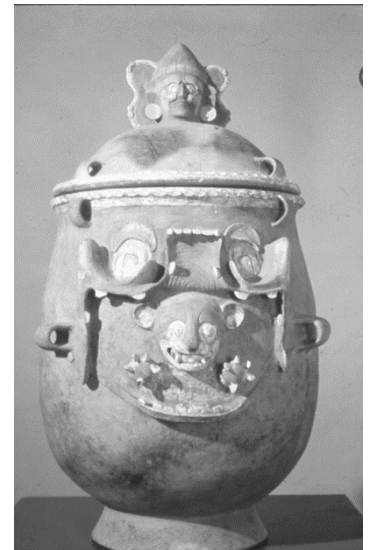


Plate with Dancing Figure, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, Waachtun site, Diameter: 42.5 cm.

[Pictured page 1 right]

This figure’s loincloth and long headdress convey the continuing motion of the dance in which he is engaged. On his headdress is a long nosed zoomorph that often appears in scenes of sacrifice. This suggests that the figure is to soon perform autosacrifice, or perhaps has recently died, which was seen as the ultimate sacrifice. The dancer may be engaged in the Maya Dance of Death. Note the costuming, jewelry and the motion of the clothing and necklace. The figure is surrounded by nine large non-standard pseudoglyphs some of which are repeated.

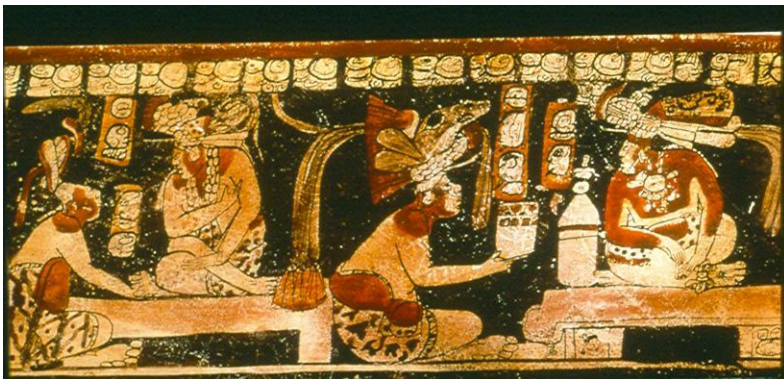
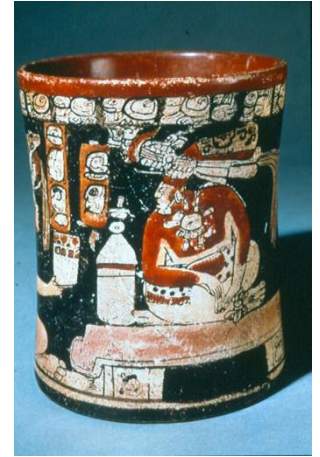
Cylindrical Vessel Depicting Enthroned Lords and Attendants, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta with polychrome, Guatemala, El Peten, H. 17.5 cm.

Like Greek **red-figure vases**, the black backgrounds of pots such as this example were painted first, leaving outlined spaces for figures in reserve. The figures were painted against the reserved lighter ground.

Characteristic of Maya ceramics is an extremely simple cylindrical shape devoid of tripod elements or a lip. This basic form is intended to provide a wall for painted narrative scenes, usually mythological, and is well suited to processional compositions.

The depiction of two enthroned rulers, distinguished from one another by their headdresses and ornaments, recurs in Maya pottery and indicates that dual kingship may have existed among the Maya as among the later Aztecs of Mexico.

In the roll-out photograph of this vessel, the lord at the left sits on a simple throne and he is attended by a woman, who touches his foot. The second enthroned ruler sits on an elaborate throne. The architectural support that frames this scene suggests the interior of a palace. The enthroned lord receives a ceramic offering from the seated male attendant. Both attendants and lords of this vessel wear body paint, tattoos, or possibly god markings, which may indicate that this scene transpires in a supernatural world.



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Ballplayer Figure Depicting a Royal Captive, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta, Mexico, Yucatan, Jaina Island, 23.7 cm.

Unlike the great ceremonial centers of the Maya mainland who carved objects in stone, the Jaina Island objects from this culture were delicately made of clay. In all known cases these three dimensional figurines were made as mortuary objects for burials. Jaina Island, off the coast of Campeche, was used predominantly as a sacred burial ground until the time of the conquest.

This modeled ball player stands frontally on splayed feet, a characteristic Jaina pose. He does not wear the standard Ballgame costume and has recently been interpreted as a boxer rather than ball player. He is not dressed for rigorous play but instead wears the simple clothing of a penitent or captive. The heavy cloth draped over his left arm characterizes captives, as well as kings, who undergo bloodletting. Also indicative of the bloodletting ritual are the stylized beads of blood on his cheeks and chin. The figure also has a nose bridge to the forehead. The shorn hair and the bruised and swollen nose and forehead suggest that this figure is a royal captive.



Cylindrical Vessel Depicting Four Ballgame Players, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta and polychrome, Mexico, Yucatan, 18.4 x 12 cm.

Each of the four male figures stand in a different pose and wears the traditional Ballgame accessories: **yokes** on hips, knee pads and mitten-like gloves. The absence of a ball in this scene suggests that the players may be engaged in a pre- or post-game ceremony. It has been speculated that the purpose of the game was to keep the hard rubber ball in play, bouncing from one player to another and scoring when the ball touched the court of the opposition.



Lidded Bowl Depicting the Water Bird Fishing on the Waters of the World, circa 200-600 C.E., Terracotta and polychrome, Mexico, Campeche, H. 22 cm.

Maya **zoomorphic** bowls such as this one probably served as incense burners. Smoke would rise through the neck and escapes through the open mouth of the modeled bird. The head of a water bird rises from the lid of the vessel to serve as a handle. In Maya mythology, the water bird fishes on the waters of the world. A “sky dragon,” a symbol of the terrestrial world, is painted on either side of the lid and winged serpents decorate each side of the bowl. Glyph signs on the legs resemble the glyph for day and may indicate the terrestrial world. The legs are painted and



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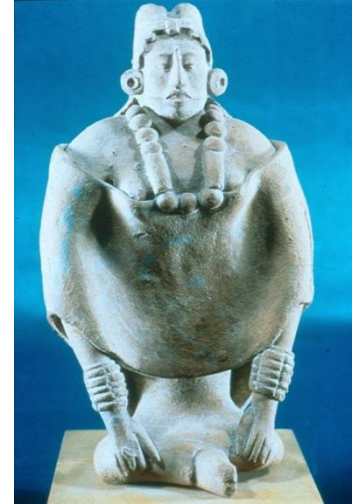
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modeled to represent **peccary** heads. The peccary is a common theme in these types of bowls as they may represent the pillars of the world set in the four directions.

Whistle in the Form of the Moon Goddess, Ixchel, circa 600-900 C.E., Terracotta and polychrome, Mexico, Yucatan, Jaina Island, H. 19.5 cm.

Jaina figures were burial offerings and customarily placed on the chest or arms of the deceased. The figurine is hand-modeled. The upper garment worn by the figure is a thin clay version of the *quechquemiltl* or shoulder shawl that is worn low on the shoulders (Compare the clothing to a *huipil*). The bead decoration, earrings and necklaces were applied while the clay was still wet. The figure is adorned with wristlets. This whistle figurine displays the cranial deformation, nasal modification and scarification considered beautiful by the Maya.

Jaina Island was a center of figurine production. Either mold made or hand modeled, the figurines function as whistles or rattles. Some of the images are rare in other media. Dwarf figurines may have been regarded as appropriate for burial offerings. At Maya courts dwarfs were considered special beings, connected with the supernatural world, and by association, connected with the gods. Usually dwarfs were special entertainers of the royal family and are seen in figurines as richly dressed. They were also valued for special attributes that designated them as messengers.



Maya Works of Art and Ritual

by William L. Barnes

The visual arts pervaded ancient **Maya** culture at every level. Elite members of Maya society, those who could afford the finest works of art, decorated every facet of their lives. They had in their wardrobes the most elaborate costumes conceivable, made up of millions of the rarest and most beautiful feathers, the finest of dyed and woven cotton, pound upon pound of intricate emerald, jade, and crystal lapidary works, and shiny objects of pyrite, magnetite, and gold. The elite's interest in decoration and elaboration even extended to their own bodies, as they shaped and altered its natural forms - binding the cranium to flatten and elongate the skull, filing teeth and inlaying bits of jade and turquoise into them, and inserting bone or other material along the bridge of the nose to give it a graceful arc. The artist's role in ancient Maya society was that of a consummate architect, able to construct elaborate vaulted palaces and towering stepped pyramids, gracing the latter's tops with elaborately decorated temples. The role was also that of an astronomer, as the artists oriented key buildings to take advantage of astronomical phenomenon. Artists were also painters, scribes, and sculptors, recording information in native screen-fold books, upon carved upright monuments called stelea, and on ceramic and carved stone vessels - often telling us what they were used for, and who used them. Often signing their works with their own name-**glyphs**, artists were also regularly called upon to carve and paint extensive texts directly upon buildings and the risers of grand stairways. Like their medieval European scribe counterpart, the Maya man of letters strove to produce the most beautiful of texts. With their elaborate hieroglyphic writing system, Maya artists had the opportunity to turn every aspect of their script into an artwork in miniature, oftentimes altering the text itself to make it more aesthetically pleasing.

Artistry was even exercised at the most mundane levels of craft production, with the makers of **obsidian** and flint knives knapping out non-functional blades in elaborate shapes, giving them the forms of gods and heroes. Even the most humble households had small statues in them, images of the gods and personified natural forces, objects

of worship and veneration. It was in this same pervasive manner that religion also enriched the lives of the ancient Maya.

A rich **pantheon** of **deities** inhabited both the seen and unseen worlds. Many supernaturals were interrelated in some fashion and were linked to great mythic cycles as well as the workings of the world. These beings were either directly or indirectly the subject of many great works of art. Their monumental faces graced the facades of pyramids, they pranced through the almanacs of skillfully painted books, and they even perched atop the king's scepter. It was these same gods that guaranteed the orderly function of the universe, and it was to these gods that all humans owed the greatest of debts, their lives. In part, this could be repaid by performing **autosacrifice**. A pennant would take a long **perforator** and pass it through a fleshy part of their body, preferably a part with many blood vessels and nerve endings close to the surface. The blood drawn from this act would then be spattered on ritually prepared strips of **paper** and burned, the smoke carrying the sacrifice up to the gods. Long periods of fasting would precede these acts of sacrifice, and often the pain was so intense, perhaps from the thorns woven into the ropes passed through the wounds, that they would enter visionary states and communicate with the supernatural. Often the pennant would contact his ancestors, who, as depicted in many artworks, were clad in their royal regalia, emerging from the mouths of hallucinatory "vision serpents." Ceremonies such as this would accompany the installation of a new ruler, and are often the subject of Maya commemorative art. In addition, rulers captured in warfare would often be forced to perform ritual bloodletting, before being asked to commit the greatest of sacrifices.

The ruler who died a more peaceful death, was often buried in an elaborate tomb. Often these tombs were located inside great pyramid mounds, or beneath the floors of great temples. Accompanying these rulers would be the finest of ceramics, all painted with scenes of the underworld, and filled with material that would comfort the ruler in the afterlife: cacao, maize, screenfold books, and rich jewelry and fabrics. Upon death, a ruler's soul would travel to the Maya underworld, **Xibalba**. Unlike our conception of Hell, this world was a watery place, but was nonetheless unpleasant. The lords of death were depicted by Maya artists as decaying fetid corpses, with

bellies swollen with disease and gas - huge scrolls of which are often depicted emanating from their backsides. It was hoped that the deceased Maya rulers, embodiments of the sun, would descend into the underworld, and follow in the footsteps of the legendary Maya hero twins Hunapu and Xbalanque who defeated the lords in Xibalba and defeated death itself. The ruler then, after descending into the gaping maw of the earth - often personified in art as a partially skeletal or reptilian monster - would conquer the Xibalbans, and rise up out of the underworld. This epic feat was staged daily by the burning sun - as it traveled through the underworld every night, and arose victorious every morning.

In transgressing the bounds between the natural and the supernatural world, the ruler and the sun were likened to the greatly feared and venerated jaguar, arch predator of the jungle. An animal who knew no fear or limitations, the jaguar hunted on the earth, in the water and in the air among the branches of the trees in which it perched. Its regal status as “king of the beasts” as we would call it today, was echoed by Maya kings who sat and stood atop jaguar shaped thrones, and jaguar pelt covered pedestals. Caves were seen as entryways to the watery underworld, and as jaguars preferred to live in such caves and to hunt in and dwell near the water, they were closely associated with the underworld. The sun itself, as it passed through the underworld, was often personified as the Jaguar God of the Underworld, a being whose countenance combined human and jaguar traits. Shamans and rulers both possessed the ability to transform themselves into their animal alter-egos, and these were more often than not jaguars. Like the jaguar then, they would possess the ability to stealthily transgress the boundaries of the world, both natural and supernatural.

A place very close to and perhaps seen as an entrance to the underworld was the ballcourt, home to the Maya ballgame. Played with a large, heavy rubber ball (rumored to have had a skull in its center) in large masonry courts, the object of the ballgame was to keep the ball in play, just as the object of Maya ritual was to keep the sun moving through the heavens. The legendary Hero Twins were consummate ball-players, as were their fathers before them. Just as they would try and emulate the Hero Twin’s victory over death, Maya rulers were often called upon to exhibit their skill at the ballgame, even at the time of their coronation. With elaborate feathered

and bejeweled costumes and various protective elements such as large **yokes** around the waist, Maya rulers surely played a less rigorous game than their professional counterparts. But when, more often than not, captured rulers and high ranking officials were forced to play in a ballgame whose outcome was no mystery to the spectators, it must have been thrilling nonetheless. Many a ruler seems to have met their end trussed up like a ball, hurled down the sides of an oversized ceremonial ballcourt.

We know of all this in large part due to the legacy of the Maya artist, who recorded a vast visual record of Maya society in paint, plaster, and stone. Unlike their central Mexican counterparts, whose Pre-colonial empires were still in full flower at the time of the Spanish conquest which began in 1519, the vast majority of ancient Maya cities had faded from the stage. Much less was written by inquisitive Spanish ecclesiastics about the extensive Maya cities they did happen upon than was recorded about the Aztecs. So it is to the records of the ancient Maya themselves that we must turn for our information - and here the voice of the ancient Maya artist can still clearly be heard.

Vocabulary

Autosacrifice: The act of letting one's own blood in an act of reverence or penance. Often accompanies the accession of a new ruler, particularly in Maya art. Usually accompanies extensive fasting and other ritually prescribed behavior. Blood was let by piercing the skin and passing cords or grass through the wound. This blood would often be splattered on paper and then burnt as an offering to the gods.

Caiman: Part of the crocodile family, the caiman appears often in Mesoamerican myth and art. In some accounts the earth itself is the spiny back of a caiman, floating on the sea. Most creator gods are in some way referred to as a caiman.

Calendar: Ancient Mesoamericans paid heed to two separate, but overlapping calendars. One was the 360+5 day solar calendar, by which they reckoned their years. The other was a 260 day ritual calendar that was made up of twenty 13-day "weeks." While these two calendars operated independently, they would overlap every 52 years which would signal the end of the Mesoamerican "century." Usually the Maya would record dates using both calendars, combining them with other calendric data to create their "long count." The Maya long count, much like our system of BC/AD year reckoning, can fix any particular happening in time.

Codex: From Latin meaning ancient text. There exist pre-Hispanic manuscripts written by the Maya on treated deerskin or bark paper. The *Codex-style* refers to vessels decorated with text and images. They are usually painted black and/or red on buff, and consist of outline drawings which resemble Maya codices.

Deities (plural of deity): A god, goddess or divine person. The Maya had a number of interrelated deities, the exact significance of which are still debated by scholars to this day.

Glyphs: A single element of Maya hieroglyphic writing. Painted or carved by artist/scribes, glyphs were used on stelae, ceramics, architecture, jewelry, codices, and even bones. Maya hieroglyphs are logographic (representing a single word), phonetic (represents a single phoneme), and ideographic (represents an idea, i.e. a small shell stands for "zero"). Combined to form discrete texts, they describe the images they accompany, give the names of the protagonists, sometimes including their ancestry and great events in their lives, and also give the exact date of the piece, including the particular astronomical events of that day. Oftentimes, what the scribe/artist is describing may have happened far in the past,

or may occur in the future. Also, they do not always tell the truth, and scribal error is common.

High-relief and low-relief: Relief is a sculptural term and is the projection of a figure or ornament from the sculpting plane. High and low refers to the projection of the figure or ornament from the surface of the sculpted material. The higher the relief the deeper the shadows.

Homonym: A word identical with another in spelling or pronunciation, but differing from it in origin or meaning.

Huipil: (pron. we-peel) Embroidered "blouse" made and worn by Mesoamerican women. It is usually wide at the top and comes to a point in front of the wearer, having a triangular shape. Can be used to identify female figures in art (or males being humiliated).

Long Count: The way in which the Maya recorded their historic data. The Maya used a vigesimal (base 20) counting system, rather than the decimal (base 10) system that we use. As the long count is written today, almost every place in a number refers to a specific occurrence of 20 lengths of times - i.e. days, 20 day periods, years, 20 year periods, 400 year periods, and so on. Each period had a name, and inscriptions and paintings usually record a number with the name-glyph of a period next to it. Today scholars record dates using their numbers only: i.e. 9.12.5.3.2.

Maya: Indigenous people who inhabit the Southeastern portion of Mexico, including the Yucatan peninsula, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and parts of Honduras, and speak one of the 35 Mayan languages. In ancient times it is thought that there were two main Mayan languages - Chontal, spoken in the southern and central part of Maya country, and Yucatecan, spoken in the northern and central regions.

Mesoamerica: A term coined by anthropologist Paul Kirchoff in the 1940s. It refers to the areas of North and Central America where indigenous people shared among other things the use of a 260 day ritual calendar, religious beliefs including the definitions of gods, the practice of bloodletting, the cultivation of maize (corn), the use of cacao as a drink and type of money, a ballgame played with a rubber ball, screen-fold books (codices), the construction of pyramids and plazas (urban life), and a sense of common cultural identity. The traditional boundaries stretch from Northern Mexico, to western Honduras and El Salvador.

Obsidian: A volcanic glass that was widely exploited by Mesoamericans who valued its ability to hold a razor sharp edge very well. Usually

a dark blackish-brown color, obsidian can also be a greenish color, and often has streaks of other colors in it. Archaeologists can use the chemical makeup of obsidian to tell which area that it was quarried from. They can then trace trade routes in the material throughout Mesoamerica. Some optical surgeons still use obsidian blades today due to its ability to hold a cutting edge only molecules big, besting by far the sharpest scalpels. Polished obsidian plates were also used as mirrors and object for divination.

Paper: Mesoamericans made extensive use of paper. For the most part their paper was made from the inner bark of fig trees - which would have to be stripped, boiled and pounded to make large sheets of paper. Paper was used to make flags and banners, clothing decoration, to wrap precious objects, and as an offering to the gods, usually spattered with rubber or human blood and then burned.

Peccary: A type of wild pig with hooved feet and a long nose native to the tropical rainforests of Mesoamerica. It measures 1 - 1 1/2 feet high at the shoulder. Many Maya nobles had a peccary as part of their names. There is thought to have been a peccary constellation that may have been part of our Orion or Virgo.

Perforator: An instrument used in the ritual of blood letting to pierce the skin. These could be made of razor-edged obsidian, or perhaps be sharpened cactus or stingray spines.

Popol Vuh: Translated as “book of council” this is one of the few Mesoamerican epic tales to survive Spanish conquest and colonization. Written in Quiché Maya, a language of the Highlands. Copied down by a Spanish friar, the book is held in the Newberry Library at the University of Chicago. It relates tales of the creation of the world, the famous Hero Twins, and the founding of the original Quiché lineages.

Quetzal (pron. keht-zal) Called *kuk* in Maya, this rare bird is native to the southern cloud forests of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. It was prized by Mesoamericans for its extraordinarily long, beautiful, iridescent green tail-feathers - often a meter in length. These feathers were used in the costumes of elite members of society, and were prized as much as gold. It was forbidden to kill a quetzal, and trapped birds were released once their tail feathers were plucked.

Slip: An extraordinary fine clay suspended in water. Used to paint the surface of earthenware vessels. Unlike a glaze, when fired in a

kiln, slips are matte, but can be burnished to a fairly high sheen. Slips are most often of a red, brown, cream, or white hue. The variations in color depend on the chemical content of the clay used to prepare them.

Stelae (plural of stele) (pron. steel-e, steel-ah): An upright slab of stone, usually flattened on at least one side, and carved with figures and glyphic text in relief. Wealthy and powerful Maya used to commission stelae to commemorate important events.

Triad: A group of three persons or things.

Xibalba: (pron. shee-bahl-ba) The Maya underworld. Thought to have been a watery place, it was inhabited by the dead, and the lords of Xibalba. These lords, depicted as partially de-fleshed and stinking creatures, led a life similar to their earthly counterparts - living in palaces with extensive royal courts and numerous subjects.

Yokes: An element of a ball player's uniform. When depicted it by Maya artists it sometimes looks like a life-preserver wrapped around the torso or waist of a player. Its purpose was to protect the torso from the very heavy rubber balls used in the ballgame, as well as serving as an instrument with which one could keep the ball in play.

Zoomorphic: The symbolization or representation of a man or god in the form of an animal.

Curriculum Objectives and Activities

Geography & Social Studies

- What are the differences and similarities in climate between the Maya world in the Yucatan and Central America and New Orleans? How does the climate vary in the Maya area depending on elevation. Why is this?
- Compare and contrast agricultural production and practices of each area. What is grown today in both areas? What was grown in the Maya world before the Spanish Conquest?
- Compare and contrast bodies of water in the Yucatan and Louisiana and their importance to each area. What body of water do they share?
- What were the populations of Maya centers like Copán or Chichén Itzá?
- What animals were sacred to the Maya? What kind of properties would these animals have that would make them special? (snake, caiman, water bird, turtle, frog, jaguar, peccary)
- Death and the Underworld were common themes in Maya art. Why is this? Who were buried in the elaborate burials? What would you put in a burial for a king?
- Discuss the Maya ballgame. What are the similarities and differences to modern day soccer? What are the differences in uniforms and equipment?

Language Arts and Reading

- Make a journal and record the events in your daily life for a number of days. Base your entries on Maya codices (for example, drawings of figures). What information is important? Create glyphs (See activity #2 below) to describe your events. Choose one event and make a mock stele to describe the event.
- Read about the Spanish Conquest of the Maya land. (See Suggested Reading)
- Research the Mayan language. What words have been passed down into English? What words have been passed down into Spanish? Are there people today who speak the Mayan language?
- The *Popol Vuh* is a document of Maya mythology. Discuss the writings in the *Popol Vuh*, and how our own stories of creation and heroes differ.

- Discuss the mythology of the Maya. What are the creation myths and the astronomical myths? How are they different or similar to other myths around the world? Research the Native American, Chinese, Indian and Greek myths for a comparison.

Math

- The Maya used a vigesimal counting system (based on units of 20), rather than our own decimal one (based on units of 10). Where the decimal number 123 means one unit of 100, two units of 10, and 3 single units, what would the same number mean in a vigesimal system where the places would stand for units of 400, 20, and 1 respectively. Would you have to count to 20 in the first place before the second place would increase?
- Calculate distances between New Orleans and Maya centers in the Yucatan and Central America in miles? In kilometers?
- Calculate dates and math problems using Maya Glyphs. (See Activity #3 below)

Science

- Discuss the properties of wood, stone, plaster, limestone and ceramics and their ability to hold up over time. Which one will last the longest if preserved? What may cause deterioration in some of the materials? Why are some objects broken or hard to decipher? How can their placement in the soil help determine age?
- What are some similarities and differences in the flora and fauna of New Orleans and the Yucatan? What animals on sea and land did the Maya depict in their art?

Visual Arts

- Draw a self-portrait inspired by a Maya Stele. Draw a face in profile with an elaborate headdress. Use the Maya number glyphs to show your age.
- Examine the realistic and abstract aspects of the Maya ceramics and sculptures. What is abstract? What is naturalistic? Discuss the differences between naturalism and abstraction.

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