

- Maya weavers are still among the world's finest and their colorful fabric is very popular today. Their ancient designs contain symbols for the universe. Have students conduct research on Maya weaving and share pictures or samples of Maya fabric with the class.
- Research the works of John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood. Find a drawing from their books that you like best and try to recreate it.
- Research the gods of the ancient Maya. Compare and contrast them to the gods of other ancient cultures like the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Inca.

### Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at [www.LibraryVideo.com](http://www.LibraryVideo.com).

- **[www.mesoweb.com](http://www.mesoweb.com)**  
Mesoweb, a website exploring Mesoamerican cultures, features a tour of the dig at Palenque, a look at Maya sculpture and an encyclopedia of related terms.
- **[www.michielb.nl/maya/astro.html](http://www.michielb.nl/maya/astro.html)**  
The Maya Astronomy Page provides information and resources on many aspects of Maya culture, including the Maya number system, calendar and astronomy.
- **[www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/](http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/)**  
From Humanities-Interactive, "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries" is an online exhibition of artifacts that depict the culture, religion, and art of the ancient Maya civilization.
- **[www.learner.org/exhibits/collapse/mayans.html](http://www.learner.org/exhibits/collapse/mayans.html)**  
From the Annenberg/CPB Project, this interactive resource about the Maya helps students learn about the rise and fall of civilizations and how archaeologists interpret evidence about ancient cultures.

### Suggested Print Resources

- Coulter, Laurie and Sarah Jane English. *Secrets in Stone: All About Maya Hieroglyphs*. Little, Brown & Co., Boston, MA; 2001.
- Crandell, Rachel. *Hands of the Maya: Villagers at Work and Play*. Henry Holt & Company, New York, NY; 2002.
- de Landa, Diego. *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest*. Original source, translated by William Gates. Dover Publications, New York, NY; 1978.
- Lourie, Peter. *Mystery of the Maya: Uncovering the Lost City of Palenque*. Boyds Mills Press, Honesdale, PA; 2001.
- Perl, Lila. *The Ancient Maya*. Franklin Watts, New York, NY; 2005.

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# ANCIENT MAYA

Grades 3-7

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting this program. The guide provides you with a summary of the program, pre-viewing and follow-up questions, activities, vocabulary and resources.

**Before Viewing:** Give students an overview of the program. Use the program summary to help provide this introduction. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

**After Viewing:** Review the program and vocabulary and discuss what students learned. Use follow-up questions and activities, and encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and reading resources provided.



Historical Overview

The Maya civilization, which developed in what is now Mexico and Central America, spanned a period of more than 3,000 years. At their peak, the Maya were accomplished mathematicians, astronomers, architects, artists and farmers. The Maya were never unified under one central power, but developed centers of power around their magnificent cities whose dominant architectural form was the pyramid. Often referred to as the “mysterious Maya” because of their culture’s sudden and unexplained decline around AD 900, the Maya civilization is being studied by archaeologists to uncover its secrets.

Vocabulary

**archaeologist** — A scientist who studies past cultures by analyzing their remains.

**city-state** — A city and the surrounding area it ruled.

**Yucatan Peninsula** — A large peninsula in Mexico inhabited by the ancient Maya and their descendants.

**Palenque** — An ancient Maya city where Lord Pacal’s tomb was found.

**temple** — A building created in honor of a god.

**sarcophagus** — A stone coffin.

**patron god** — A god who protects an aspect of Maya life, (e.g., Yum Kax, the god of corn).

**Tikal** — An important city-state and center for trade in the Maya world.

**Chichén Itzá** — A leading Maya city; its grand pyramid is well-known.

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

**glyph** — A word symbol in hieroglyphic writing.

**descendants** — People who can trace their ancestry to earlier generations.

**metate** — A volcanic stone on which the Maya ground their corn.

**cacao bean** — Also known as the cocoa bean; the seed from which cocoa and chocolate are produced.

**plantains** — A tropical fruit resembling a banana.

**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.

Time Line

1500 BCE - CE 250	Early Maya (Preclassic)
250 - 900	Maya Golden Age (Early Classic/Late Classic)
900 - 1500	Late Maya (Postclassic)

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Discuss why people of today are interested in the lives of people who lived long ago. Have students brainstorm to create a list of items about ancient people that modern people might like to know.
- Consider some of the challenges in finding out about the lifestyle of people who lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago. You can compare the discovery of an ancient way of life to the solving of a mystery or the piecing together of a puzzle.
- Locate the countries of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador on a map of Central America. Inform students that the video will tell them about an ancient people called the Maya who built a great civilization that stretched from the Yucatan Peninsula in eastern Mexico as far south as El Salvador.
- Point out that the Maya are considered even more mysterious than many other ancient peoples because archaeologists cannot explain why their civilization declined rapidly after hundreds of years of remarkable achievement. As they watch the video, ask students to make notes of unanswered questions about the Maya civilization.

Focus Questions

1. What architectural forms are most distinctive in Maya cities? How are they similar to Egyptian architecture?
2. Explain the importance of the king or lord in the Mayan city-state. What was his role in religious ceremonies?
3. Describe a major Maya city such as Tikal or Chichén Itzá.
4. What major achievements in math and science were made by the Maya? Compare them to advances made by other ancient civilizations.
5. What was the Maya writing system like? Why was it unique in Native America?
6. People of Mayan ancestry still live in Central America and Mexico. What traditions have the ancient Maya passed down to their descendants?
7. What were some of the most important crops of the Maya?
8. What was life like for a Maya girl or boy? What did kids do for fun and how did they adorn themselves?
9. Give three theories for the rapid decline of the Maya civilization around 900.

Follow-up Discussion

- Describe some remarkable achievements of the Maya civilization.
- Review the unknown aspects of Maya culture that have led us to refer to them as “the mysterious Maya.”
- Discuss the role of the archaeologist as a scientist who studies the past. Identify tools and techniques that may assist archaeologists in uncovering answers to our questions about the Maya.
- Imagine that you are a member of Stephens and Catherwood’s expedition. What might it have been like to travel through the jungle to get to the Maya ruins? What obstacles and challenges would you have faced?
- The Maya pyramids were believed to be religious buildings used for sacred rituals. However, archaeologist Alberto Ruz uncovered the tomb of a Maya king inside the pyramid in Palenque. Have students discuss this discovery and relate it to the Egyptians’ use of pyramids. Speculate on how these two vastly different cultures on different continents created similar structures with similar purposes.

Follow-up Activities

- The Maya were excellent farmers and cultivated hundreds of crops that are grown around the world today. Have students research Maya food and create a menu of Maya dishes. Look up recipes that modern Maya people make from corn, beans and squash. Try these recipes out in class or at home.
- Students can learn how the Maya developed their hieroglyphic writing system. Have them choose an object and draw a picture of it while looking at the object. Put the object aside and draw a second picture while looking at the first picture. Draw a third picture from the second. Repeat this process four times, each time making the picture simpler. Shape the picture into a rectangle with rounded corners to create a word or “glyph” for the object. The class can work together to create an alphabet book of Maya words.
- The Maya believed that each person had an animal spirit called a “nagual-an” that communicated its powers to humans. The quetzal and the jaguar were especially sacred. Have students find out more about animals of the Mesoamerican rainforest where the Maya lived. What special abilities do they have? Have students design a mask, a headband ornament (worn by the Maya during ceremonies), or a pendant representing their spirit animal. Decorate them with feathers, shells, beads, seeds or even imitation animal skin in the style of the ancient Maya.

(Continued)