

**The Ancient Mayans Unit Plan:
Understanding Mayan Culture**

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Rationale

The study of Ancient Mayan civilization will fascinate students as they discover and make numerous connections with their own cultures and lives. The Ancient Mayan civilization existed between 200 BCE and 800 CE in Mexico and surrounding areas, will be this class' first exposure to an ancient culture that existed in North America. Ancient cultures previously studied were Egypt and Ancient China. By the end of this unit students will be able to compare and contrast ancient civilizations, and will also be able to identify many similarities and differences between three ancient civilizations and modern-day Canada. Students will gain an understanding of and recognition for the many advances that the Mayan culture made, and how some of these useful inventions are still used today.

Students will be able to form opinions on Ancient civilizations and will gain an understanding of the mathematical and calendar systems of the Mayas, the classroom will promote a respect of students for ancient cultures and an appreciation of their contributions to today. Students will gain knowledge of why the Mayan civilization perished, and will be able to discuss why some other ancient cultures (Egypt and China) were able to survive for so long versus others (Maya).

By looking at geography, economy, daily lives, religion, inventions, agriculture, social structure and history of the Mayans, students will gain a broad understanding of Ancient Mayan culture. By comparing and contrasting the lives of ancient peoples students will develop and demonstrate critical thinking while identifying connections between current and ancient cultures.

Unit Goals (In accordance with the IRPs): SWBAT

- Identify connections between ancient and current cultures
- Describe daily life, work, family structures, and gender roles in selected ancient cultures
- Describe various ways ancient peoples exchanged goods and services
- Assess how settlement patterns, economies, and occupations of ancient peoples were influenced by their physical environments
- Demonstrate understanding of the contributions of ancient cultures to science and technology
- Evaluate how ancient cultures were influenced by their environment
- Evaluate the impact of natural process and human-induced changes on communities

Unit Question

How did the Ancient Mayans live in comparison to civilizations that you have previously studied?

Assessment

KWL Sheets from Lessons 1 - 15%

Venn Diagram from Lesson 5 - 15%

Mayan Math Sheets from Lesson 7 - 15%

Group Work (oral assessment/observation) Lessons 3 & 4- 10%

Final Museum Project/Display - 45%

Lesson 1: Similar or Different? - Introduction to the Ancient Maya

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Understand that there was an ancient culture in Mexico whose people were called the Mayans
- Compare certain aspects of Mayan culture with Ancient Units previously studied (Ancient Egypt)

Materials:

Overhead Pens

KWL Sheets (from Teacher Resource Package: Mayans, Aztecs and Incas)

Map of the World Current
Book "*Mystery of the Maya*"

Movie "*Imax Mystery of the Maya*"

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Ask students to think about the Ancient Civilizations that they have studied - teacher to write them on the board
- What qualities might lead us to describe these cultures as advanced?
- Prompt students (in seated groups) to provide similarities between the cultures already studied, guide answers: the ability to raise food and store it, freeing people for other activities, a complex social organization, some form of government, some form of writing (helped them to record their knowledge), successful community projects including buildings, irrigation systems and trading routes
- Note similarities on overhead as groups contribute their discussion

Body (25 minutes)

- Hand out KWL sheets, have students fill out the Know and Wonder sections of the sheets. What they know and would like to know about the Mayans. Ask students to put their KWL sheet aside until later
- Introduce students to the Maya, reading/showing pictures of pages 1-3 in the book *Mystery of the Maya*. Point out the Mayan's location on a map of the world today
- Prior to showing movie clip, ask students: Where do the Maya live today? What do you know about their accomplishments? Why do you think a film would have been made about them?
- To help students observe the film carefully, have them record point form details in the re-enactment scenes of village life (i.e. Houses, clothing, boats, laundry, temples, environment)
- Watch 15-minute film clip "*Imax, The Mystery of the Maya*"

- Ask students to share details they noticed regarding examples given above. Write details on overhead as students share

Closure (5 minutes)

- The teacher will revisit and summarize what was discussed in the lesson, especially drawing from the similarities with Ancient Egypt. Students are to present at least 6 solid questions in the Wonder section of the KWL sheet for homework, due next class. Notify students that these sheets will be assessed as part of their final display project

Lesson 2 : Environment in Mesoamerica

Length of Lesson: 80 minutes (Double block on Geography)

Objectives: SWBAT

- Locate where modern Mexico is on a map
- Locate where the Mayan civilization was located
- Identify the climate, geography and environment of Ancient Mayan territory
- Understand the geography of Mesoamerica and its influence on the Maya way of life

Materials:

Map of North America

Two maps of Yucatan Peninsula on

OHP and Copies

Introduction: (3 minutes)

- The teacher will introduce each lesson with one “amazing” fact about the Mayans (Appendix B). (Today’s “amazing” fact: The Mayans occupied over 125,000 square miles - approx 203, 125 square kilometres, which is about the same size as $\frac{1}{4}$ of British Columbia).

Body of Lesson: (70 minutes)

- Map of North America
 - The teacher will show a map of North America and have students point out where Mexico is. The teacher will ask the class if any of the students have ever traveled to Mexico. If so they will be asked to explain what they saw (geography, climate). If not the teacher will explain that Mexico is a very hot, dry, desert-like country.
 - The teacher will identify the other countries that the Mayans occupied: Honduras, Belize, El Salvador and Guatemala.
- Map of Ancient Maya
 - The teacher will introduce two maps of the Yucatan Peninsula that shows where the Ancient Mayans lived (distribute maps, see Appendix A). The teacher will use an overhead copy of the first map, depicting the City and will pen in where the major Mayan cities were. The students will pencil in the same information onto their maps, working in pairs.
 - The teacher will draw attention to the small print on the bottom of the map, asking students to discuss in seated groups what they

think Mayan activities were, based on the climate that they lived in.

- Point out the geography of Mesoamerica: the rivers, the rain forest, and the soil. Ask students to discuss among each other in seated groups how these features might tell us about how the Mayans lived (i.e. Domestication of corn, using rainwater for irrigation, increased population). Note student ideas on overhead
- The second map shows where the different regions of Ancient Maya were (Lowlands and Highlands), teacher will have students indicate these two regions on their copy of the map.
- KWL Charts
 - Student will fill in their KWL charts with the information they have learned between yesterday and today. These will be collected for student display and final assessment.

Closure: (3 minutes)

- Review the resources the land brings as discussed in class today. No homework for students today.

Lesson 3: The Economy and Social Structure of the Ancient Maya

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Understand the economy of Ancient Mayan civilization
- Comprehend the social structure of the Ancient Mayans
- Identify items traded in and out of Mesoamerica

Materials: Jigsaw group sheets

Introduction (10 minutes)

- A new “amazing” fact for today: During droughts, Mayans would eat pet docs to survive.
- Ask students to think about what we covered last class. Three new things learned last class: geography affected living (corn, irrigation, population)

Body of Lesson (25 minutes)

- JIGSAW
 - Teacher will divide students into five groups, each group will be given a different piece of information about Mayan economy or social structure (in Appendix A). Groups will individually discuss their handouts and write notes about it, preparing to share with others the knowledge they are learning.
 - Groups will be dispersed, and reassigned by the teacher, so that there is one specialist from each knowledge group in the newly assigned groups. Each specialist will teach what they have learned to their group, with other members recording the information in point form (to be added to their display projects).

Closure: (10 minutes)

- Teacher will summarize what they heard students discussing in their groups, and review key points from these discussions.
- Students will be given a brief writing assignment for homework: to write one paragraph in their journals about the Mayans (two things they enjoyed, one thing they would like to learn more about, and one thing they would change if they could)
- Handouts used in the jigsaw are handed out and placed in the student final display projects

Lesson 4: The Mayan People and Their Customs

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Identify the main customs of the Ancient Mayans and explain why those customs were practiced
- Explain the religious structure of Ancient Mayan culture and compare the similarities and differences with Ancient Egyptian religion.

Materials: Ancient Mayan Religious Belief Sheets

Introduction (10 minutes)

- A new “amazing” fact for today: The Mayans thought chocolate was the drink of the gods. Today we will be studying the customs and religion of the Mayans.

Body (30 minutes)

- Introduction of the Mayan Religion.
 - The teacher will explain how Mayan religion was like that of the Egyptian religion. The Ancient Mayans worshipped many gods just as the Ancient Egyptians had. “Religion was important to every part of Mayan life. The Mayas worshipped many different gods. Each day, month, city, and occupation had its own special god or goddess. The Mayas had a variety of religious festivals and celebrations.”
- Jigsaw on Ancient Religion
 - First, students will remain seated in their desk groupings (7 groupings of 4 students), and will receive a paragraph describing one part of the Ancient Mayans religious beliefs (Appendix A). In their groups they will discuss the one belief that group was assigned to, taking notes for the second part of the jigsaw.
 - Second, students will move into groups, directed by the teacher, so that each group now has four people from different groups, each specialist will teach their group what they learned about Mayan religion.

Closure (5 minutes)

Teacher will summarize what each group spoke about, and then will handout summaries of the paragraphs for the student displays.

Lesson 5 Rulers, Noblemen and Women?

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Compare and contrast the Mayan social structure with that of Ancient China's

Materials:

Pyramid Social Structure Overhead

Venn Diagram Copies

Introduction (10 minutes)

- A new “amazing” fact for today: The only Mayans who knew all of the Mayan language were the priests”. The Maya were the first people in the New World (North America) to keep historical records (before the natives in Canada).

Body (30 minutes)

- Introduction and Explanation of Pyramid Social Structure
- Class Discussion of Similarities and Differences between the Social
 - As discussed in the lesson on agriculture and economy, the teacher will introduce the pyramid structure of the Ancient Mayan culture (Appendix A), and will ask the students what it reminds them of. If students need prompting the teacher will remind them of the pyramid from Ancient China.
- Structures in Ancient China and Ancient Maya
 - The teacher will record student ideas on the overhead as the discussion is taking place
- Venn Diagrams
 - The students will complete a Venn Diagram (which they have done before), one circle will be labelled Ancient Maya and the other Ancient China. Students will receive a criteria sheet for this activity, so assessment expectations are clear.

Closure (5 minutes)

- Teacher will review similarities and differences between the Ancient Chinese and the Ancient Mayan social structures.

Lesson 6 Architecture: Cities and Temples

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Explain the pros and cons of living in a thatched roof hut
- Develop note taking skills

Materials: Plan a Classic Maya Thatched Roof Hut Overhead

Introduction (10 minutes)

- A new “amazing” fact for today: The Maya were the first people in the New World (North America) to keep historical records (before the natives in Canada).
- Place “Plan of a Classic Maya thatched-Roof Hut” on the overhead. Have students guess the different parts of the hut (in groups, seated). Reconvene and have one spokesperson share with the class (one feature of the hut per group). Ask students if they would like to live in a hut like this one?

Body (30 minutes)

- Place the Note Taking Overhead on display for the class and ask students to take key point form notes from the overhead
- Have students share some of the most important points they notated from the “Maya Cities” passage. What techniques did you use?
- What did you think the houses were made of? Stone mortar foundation, stone or plaster covered wooden poles for walls, and a wooden frame roof covered with leaves or grasses
- Who lived in the huts? Extended families
- Where did people sleep? In hammocks strung up in the houses during the rainy season, or outdoors if weather was good
- Where did the people prepare their food: in fire pits located outside the huts
- How was water carried from its source to the home? Ceramic pots were filled with water and put on racks or carried on people’s heads
 - Ask students if they would like to live in a thatched roof hut? Why or Why not? Did your answer change? If so, why?

Closure (5 minutes)

Handout Thatched Roof Hut activity sheet and have students complete for homework, to go in their displays.

Lesson 7: Mathematics: Counting & Calendars

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Demonstrate the Mayan Base 20 counting system
- Explain the origins of the Base 20 system
- Express an understanding of the Mayan counting system by giving an example of one context in which it was used in ancient times
- Understand the significance of the Mayan calendar

Materials:

Dictionaries

OHP pen
Mayan Calendar OHP
Mayan Math Sheets

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Tip for today: The 365-day Mayan year contained five straight days of bad luck. It was considered unlucky to do anything during this time, and the Mayans were the first people to have the number zero.
- The Mayan number system is based on units of 20 (a vigesimal system). Teacher will ask the students what unit the Canadian number system is based on (units of 10 - a decimal system). Teacher will ask the students to look up the meaning (in the dictionary) of the following words relating to methods of calculating mathematics: Vigesimal, Decimal and Binary.

Body (30 minutes)

- Introduce the Mayan Number System
 - Ask the students why the Maya used units of 20? Fingers and toes
 - Why would it be natural for the Maya to use their toes for counting? Climate, no shoes.
 - The Maya were one of the first civilizations to use zero in their calculations, symbolized by an oval shell.
 - Ask students if they think that the shell is a good symbol for zero?
 - Ask students what they would use for a symbol of zero if they could choose?
- Introduce the Mayan Calendar
- Math Activity Sheet.
 - Distribute “Maya Mathematics” sheets, and have students complete these for assessment. The sheets have questions about the calendar and number system, as well as a few math questions.

Closure (5 minutes)

Teacher to review information learned today, with focus on the Mayan calendar and number systems we use today. Students will be asked to complete the Mayan Mathematics sheets for homework, due next class.

Lesson 8: The Great Decline

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Objectives: SWBAT

- Critically assess why the Ancient Civilization of the Mayans disappeared
- Evaluate the impact of the natural processes and human-induced changes on communities.

Materials:

“Theories of Decline” OHP

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Teacher will introduce that in 800 CE the Mayans began dispersing and their civilization disappeared. They abandoned their large cities and scattered throughout the countryside. Although, descendants of the Mayans are alive today, their thriving communities disappeared. There are many theories as to why this happened, but no one really knows why.

Body (30 minutes)

- Introduction of Theories
 - Theories will be displayed on overhead (see Appendix A)
- Small Group Discussion
 - Students will discuss in seated groups how each of the reasons for the decline could have happened. Each group will present one theory that each member of that group agrees on, with supporting points.
- Class Discussion
 - The class will discuss the reasons for decline, with each group presenting their ideas with supporting thoughts. The teacher will prompt the class with questions to reach critical thoughtfulness (ie. Why do you think the Mayans left their cities? Give reasons? Can you think of another Ancient Culture where this happened? Which one? Why?)

Closure (5 minutes)

Teacher will comment on comments made in discussion. For homework students will be asked to write a paragraph on why they think the Mayans left their cities (assessment is in Appendix A).

Lesson 9: Group Museum Display Project - Preparation Time

Length of Lesson: 40 minutes

Materials: Copies of Rubric & Project Sheet “Greatness of Ancient Culture”

Poster Board

Students’ Social Studies books

Scissors

Felt Pens

Pencil Crayons

Introduction: (10 minutes)

- Teacher assigns groups to work together on the project
- Distribute Group Display Project Rubric and Criteria sheets
- Read the details from the Criteria sheet (see Appendix A)
- Answer questions or inquiries students may have

Body: (30 minutes)

- Set out guidelines to be accomplished today: decisions to be made on the civilizations by the teacher
- Have students brainstorm and begin preparing work to place on display. Encourage students to use creative means of delivery (this increases their marks).

Closure

- Remind students when the display is due by, and that they will receive further in class time to work on the project. Encourage team participation and equal share of work, as students will be asked to evaluate their team members at the end of the project.

Annotated Bibliography

Mayan, Incan and Aztec Civilizations. “Mayan Agriculture”. Mark Twain Media Inc., Publishers, place and date unknown. No page numbers.

- Information on Mayan agriculture for the jigsaw activity was found here.

Mayan, Incan and Aztec Civilizations. “Mayan Religion”. Mark Twain Media Inc., Publishers, place and date unknown. No page numbers.

- Information on Mayan religion for the jigsaw activity was found here.

Mayan, Incan and Aztec Civilizations. “Mayan Mathematics and Astronomy”. Mark Twain Media Inc., Publishers, place and date unknown. No page numbers.

- Part of the math activity sheet was found here.

Mystery of the Maya. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa: 1995. Pages 3-5.

- Used to introduce students to the Mayan Civilization, pictures and text provide a clear expression of the beginning of the Mayans.

Mystery of the Maya: Teacher’s Guide. “Chapter 3: The Environment”. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa: 1995. Pages 11-13.

- Information on the climate and vegetation of Ancient Maya was attained here.

Mystery of the Maya: Teacher’s Guide. “Appendix: Synopsis of the Film *Ancient Maya*”. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa: 1995. Pages 55-56.

- Teacher resource of synopsis used to give background and refresher of Information in the film.

Annotated Bibliography Continued.....

Mystery of the Maya: Teacher's Guide. "Chapter 9: Conclusion". Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa: 1995. Pages 43-45.

- Utilized ideas regarding theories about the great decline of Mayan Civilization in Lesson 8.