Me Oh Maya

About the Show

A basketball game gets interrupted and the boys find themselves in Chichen Itza, Mexico, in the middle of a Mayan ringball court a thousand years ago! Of course in this game, the stakes are a little higher because if they lose, they lose their heads!

Introduction

Mayan culture, like other ancient civilizations, fascinates students. You can use this lesson in conjunction with any study of ancient cultures and to compare and contrast what was happening in the Americas and Europe during this time.

Historical Background

The Maya are probably the best-known of the ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica. Originating in the Yucatán around 2600 B.C.E, they rose to prominence around 250 C.E. in present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, northern Belize, and western Honduras. The Maya developed astronomy, mathematics, art, architecture, calendars, and hieroglyphic writing. They were also skilled farmers, weavers, potters, and traders.

Chichen Itza was the last of the great Mayan cities built during the period of Mayan dominance in Mesoamerica. By the middle of the 9th century, it had become one of the leading political and economic centers of the region. How long its hegemony lasted is unclear. Archaeologists once believed it lasted until the 12th century, but evidence now indicates a shift before 1000 that might have marked the beginning of the decline. ("Me Oh Maya" is set in 960 C.E.) The collapse of the Mayan civilization is one of the great mysteries of history.

Curriculum Connections

- ancient civilizations
- Belize
- Central America
- Guatemla
- Honduras
- Mayan civilization
- Mexico

Subject Areas

- language arts
- math
- social studies



Historical Background *continued*

As in other cultures, the Maya used personal appearance, clothing, and adornments to indicate social status. Body paint was often used to mark special groups.

The fact that the Maya played ball games is known from archeological evidence and carvings. Although the games may have been played informally, the more formal version featured a specially constructed ball court. The size of the playing area varied from court to court, but the largest known court, the Great Ball Court at Chichen Itza, was about the size of a football field. In addition to being played for sport, the Maya ball game was also closely associated with religious rituals and beliefs.

There are about six million Maya today living in Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. Each of the 31 Maya groups throughout Central America speaks a different, though related, language.



Want students to get even more excited about history?

Check out the Mayan adventure for kids at

www.timewarptrio.com/adventures/maya/

Put It Back, Jack! and other interactive games to play.

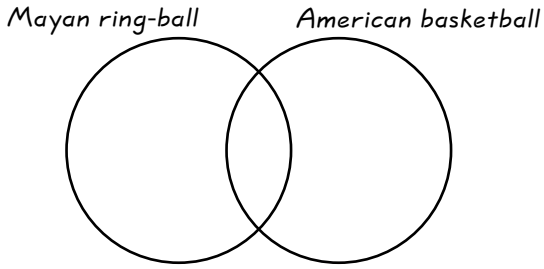
Plentifax 487—the ultimate time traveler's guide—gives facts about the way the Mayan people lived, and more!

Cool Books that kids will love.

Activity 1

Basketball Rules

In this activity, students first create a Venn diagram comparing something familiar (home and school). They then use a Venn diagram to compare Mayan ring-ball and American basketball.



Instructions

1. Explain that the Venn diagram is a graphic organizer that can be used to compare the similarities and differences between two things. Set up two intersecting rings on the floor with the yarn or string.
2. Ask a volunteer to write "HOME" on one sentence strip and "SCHOOL" on another strip with a marker. Have a volunteer place one strip at the top of each circle.
3. Ask the class to brainstorm characteristics of school and home. Have students write their responses on sentence strips. Answers may include *adults, eating, rooms, books, getting dressed, sleeping, allowance, homework, teachers, tests, parents.*
4. Have students place their sentence strips in the appropriate part of the diagram. The common characteristics should go in the overlapping section.
5. Discuss the results with the students. How does the Venn diagram help demonstrate the differences and similarities of home and school?
6. Organize students into pairs or groups. Tell them that they are going to create their own Venn diagram to compare Mayan ring-ball and American basketball. They will need to research the characteristics of each sport.
7. Have partners or groups share their diagrams with the class. You might want to make a whole-class Venn diagram to see how many similarities and differences students were able to find.

Objectives

- to draw inferences
- to compare and contrast attributes and characteristics
- to practice research skills
- to distinguish between similar and dissimilar characteristics
- to understand a Venn diagram

Materials

- 2 different colors of string or yarn and matching markers
- large sentence strips

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Culture: Students explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and/or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions and by posing problems.

Activity 2



Headlines!

By writing a newspaper article for the fictitious Mayan News, students familiarize themselves with journalism and how to write headlines.

Instructions

1. Explain that headline editors, not reporters, often write newspaper headlines. Have students pretend that they are headline editors for the *Mayan News.* Their words, or glyphs, will be read by thousands of sports fans. (If possible, display a map of the Mayan empire and point out the vast circulation area of the *Mayan News.*)
2. Have students bring in sports sections from different newspapers. Ask students to read examples of sports headlines. What strong verbs have the writers used? (Possible examples include: *annihilates, clobbers, crushes, destroys, routs, soars past, squeaks by, tramples, triumphs over, trounces.*) You may want to brainstorm additional examples.
3. Have the class create a word splash of strong verbs. Then, have partners create a headline for the ring-ball game. Encourage the student journalists to share their headlines with the class.

Take It Further

Students can translate their headlines into the Mayan language (see Resources). Students can also write their own account of the game (or an imagined game) to accompany their headline.

Objectives

- to improve writing by using strong verbs
- to become familiar with journalism

Materials

- newspapers
- map of the Mayan empire (optional)

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Time, Continuity, and Change: Students identify and use processes important to reconstructing and reinterpreting the past.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g. libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Resources

Recommended Books

For Teachers

Breaking the Maya Code
by Michael D. Coe. (Thames & Hudson, 1999) A personal account of the deciphering of Mayan script.

The Cities of Ancient Mexico
by Jeremy Sabloff. (Thames & Hudson, 1997) An intriguing look at life as it might have been in the cities of ancient Mexico.

The Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya
by Simon Martin, Mary Miller, and Kathleen Berrin. (Thames & Hudson, 2004) An illustrated examination of royal life in ancient Mayan culture.

Exploring Mesoamerica by John M.D. Pohl. (Oxford University Press, 1999) In-depth coverage of 18 of the best-known archeological sites of ancient Central America, including Mayan sites.

Handbook to Life in the Ancient Maya World by Lynn Foster. (Facts on Files, 2002)
A useful compendium of essays on various aspects of the ancient Mayan civilization.

Maya Monuments by Nigel Hughes. (Antique Collector's Club, 2000) Stunning photographs make this a useful visual reference book.

Scribes, Warriors, and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya
by William L. Fash. (Thames & Hudson, 1991) The remarkable archeological discoveries made at Copán are presented with black-and-white photographs, maps, and other primary sources.

For Students

Fiction

The Corn Grows Ripe
by Dorothy Rhoads. (Puffin, 1993) Tigre, a 12-year-old Mayan boy living in a modern day village in Yucataan, must learn to be a man when his father is injured.

Heart of a Jaguar by Marc Talbert. (Aladdin, 1997)
Set just after the great city Chichen Itza was deserted, 14-year-old Balam struggles with his family and community to cope with drought. For older readers.

The Hummingbird King: A Guatemalan Legend
by Argentina Palacios. (Troll, 1993) An evil uncle plots against his nephew in this illustrated folktale.

Lady of Palenque by Anna Kirwan. (Scholastic, 2004) The Royal Diary series. Set in Chiapas, 749 A.D., this is the story of 13-year-old Princess Green Jay, who is betrothed to an older man partly because she can read and write.

Me Oh Maya by Jon Scieszka. Illustrated by Adam McCauley (Puffin, 2005) The Trio land in the middle of a ball game in ancient Mexico—will they be sacrificed to the gods?

Rain Player by David Wisniewski. (Clarion, 1995) Inspired by ancient Mayan culture, this folktale tells the story of Pik, who challenges the god of rain to a ball game. For younger readers.

The Well of Sacrifice by Chris Eboch. (Clarion, 1999) Eveningstar Macaw, who lives in a 9th century Mayan city, must confront the evil High Priest to rescue her family and save her own life. For older readers.

Nonfiction

Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Maya by Leonard Everett Fisher. (Holiday House, 1999)
A description of the 12 most important deities, with full-page paintings inspired by Mayan glyphs.

Hands of the Maya: Villagers at Work and Play by Rachel Crandell. (Holt, 2002) Traditional Mayan life and culture are conveyed through photographs of people at work, making tortillas, carving stone, weaving, washing, etc.

A Maya by Frederico Navanete Linares. (Lerner, 1999) Accompanied by detailed illustrations, the Mayan civilization is portrayed through historical text and a fictionalized account of a Mayan artisan's day.

The Maya by Peter Chrisp. (Raintree, 1999) Look into History series. An illustrated examination of the Mayan civilization.

The Maya by Charles George and Linda George. (Blackbirch Press, 2004) A detailed overview of the history and culture of the Maya.

Mayeros: A Yucatec Maya Family
by George Ancona. (Lothrop, 1997) This photodocumentary presents the life and customs of the descendants of the Maya now living in the Yucatan.

Resources

The Mystery of the Maya: Uncovering the Lost City of Palenque by Peter Lourie. (Boyds Mills, 2001) This photoessay recounts details of the archaeological dig at a Mayan city and provides a history of the Maya.

Tikal by Elizabeth Mann. (Mikaya Press, 2002) An illustrated guide to this important city, home to palaces, plazas and stone pyramids.

Web Sites

COLLAPSE: THE MAYA
http://www.learner.org/exhibits/collapse/mayans_sub.html
This Annenberg site explores the reason the Maya civilzation collapsed.

LOST KING OF THE MAYA
www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/activities/2804_maya.html
Based on the NOVA program, this site provides information about archeologists who are uncovering the history of Copán, a classic Mayan site in northern Honduras. Includes maps, lesson plans, teacher's guide, and a resource list.

MAYAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE
maya-art-books.org
Developed by the International Photographic Archive of Maya Art, this site helps facilitate academic access to information about Maya daily life 1,000 years ago in Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, and Honduras. Includes links to other scholarly sites.

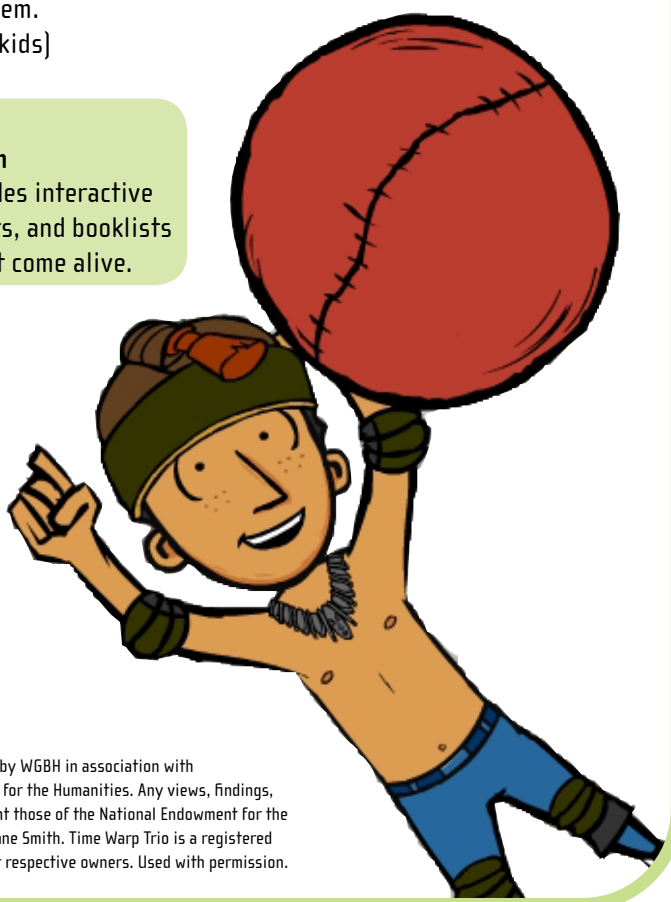
MAYAN NUMBERS
niti.org/mayan/lesson.htm
This site from the National Indian Telecommunication Institute explains the Mayan numbering system. (Particularly good for kids)

MYSTERY OF THE MAYA
http://www.civilization.ca/civil/maya/mminteng.html
This site, part of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, provides detailed Information about Mayan civilization, and was created in conjunction with the IMAX film, "Mystery of the Maya."

READING MAYA HIEROGLYPHS
www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/maya/glyphs.html
This site teaches students the Mayan numbering system. (Particularly good for kids)

TIME WARP TRIO
www.timewarptrio.com
This site for kids includes interactive games, fascinating facts, and booklists that help make the past come alive.

Please note:
Although these sites were verified at the time of publication, Web site addresses and content are frequently subject to change.



©2005 WGBH Educational Foundation. All rights reserved. Time Warp Trio™ is produced by WGBH in association with Soup2Nuts for Discovery Kids. Major funding was provided by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in these classroom materials do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Based on THE TIME WARP TRIO book series written by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith. Time Warp Trio is a registered trademark of Chucklebait, LLC. Used with permission. Third party trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Used with permission.