

THE MAYANS

The Mayans were an ancient civilization. They lived in what is now the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize. These countries are south of Mexico. The Mayan civilization existed from 2000 BC to 1517 AD.

The Mayan civilization was divided into city-states. Each city-state had a ruler who was supposed to be a god. These leaders were referred to most commonly as "ahaw." Not all rulers were gods. Sometimes if a man was too young to inherit the throne or the king was away or sick, a younger man would rule.

The Mayans had a group called the council. The council had power to rule. The council was made up of nobles and leaders.

The Mayans had a judicial system. A judicial system is a system of laws and courts. The Mayans had strict rules with severe punishments. For example, murder, arson and crimes against gods could be punished with death. As there were no prisons, punishments could be carried out immediately. However, if someone did not agree with the verdict, they could have the case looked at again by a higher court who would decide on the case.

Religion was extremely important to the Mayans so high priests were another important part of Mayan leadership. Mayans believed in many gods. The most important god was Itzma. Itzma was the god of fire and also of night and day. Later, the most important god became Kukulcan.

One thing that Mayan culture is known for is Chichen Itza. Chichen is a place where there are many pyramids built for gods. The most famous pyramid is El Castillo. It was built for the god Kukulcan. This pyramid shows the Mayans deep understanding of time. The pyramid has 365 steps up to the top of the pyramid. That is a step for every day of the year. Mayans also had a calendar system that included months with days.

Sadly, the Mayan empire was destroyed in 1517 by a group of conquistadors. 'Conquistadors' means conquerors in Spanish. The conquerors were led by Hernando Cordoba.

WORDS TO KNOW

Civilization – way of life of a particular area

Verdict – decision or outcome

Conquistador – Spanish explorer

SYMBOLS

Underline the "Words to Know" found in the passage. (see bottom)

? Something you have a question about

! Something that surprised you

✓ My favorite fact

COLOR

YELLOW

When did the Mayans

live?

GREEN

What is Chichen Itza?

Color?

What is the Mayan council?

What is the Mayan council?

DAILY LIFE

CHECK THE CORRECT ANSWER

Mayans society could be broken up into ____ groups.

- Two Three Four

What were the blankets called that the Maya wore over their shoulders?

- Apunka Itza Manta

What were the commoner huts made of?

- Stone Mud Wood

TRUE OR FALSE

The nobles and commoners lived in the same types of homes.

TRUE FALSE

Mayans enjoyed chocolate and introduced it to the world.

TRUE FALSE

WRITE IN THE BLANK

There were even sweat baths where water was poured on _____.

The commoners were the average _____.

WORD SEARCH

M I B S Q E N O B L E S W I C I N W COMMONERS
M K H C L B H J Z E C G E R L R D D V NOBLES
K J A V D W X M H U V L D O S F Q D Y MANTA
K I U I F S G M L G A S O C I E T Y K CHOCOLATE
C H O C O L A T E K M C L M I K N J O THE
R F Z B L N U D S T L W T B A T H HUTS
R S Q B T R C O M M O N E R S L S H A T S O C I E T Y
U M T A E X K H W R Y S S K R X E K C A C A O
F W Q L H U T S F G D X R B S U I U A I CULTURE
I I V Z B O O Z T U Z F P K Z M J L C V

RELIGION AND MYTH

Religion was very important to the Mayans. They believed in many gods and many myths. One of the most famous myths was called the Hero Twins.

The story is that there were two brothers that loved to play the Mayan ball game. They were known as One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. However, they did not play quietly. Their game was so noisy that the god of the underworld got mad and forced the boys to go to Xibalba which was the name of the underworld.

The gods of the underworld forced the boys to take some challenges, but they did not pass. They were later sentenced to death.

One of the boys, One Hunahpu, had a child with one of the Mayan goddesses. She had twins. Their names were Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The twins were good ball players like their dad and uncle. However, they also played too loudly and were forced to go to Xibalba. Unlike their father and uncle, they failed the tests in the underworld.

The gods of the underworld challenged them to a ball game. The boys were aware that the gods were cheating. The boys told the gods they would only play if they fought fairly. The boys also knew that if they won they would be killed so they had a plan. They decided to make a strategic plan. They knew that if they died by burning that they could become ash in the river and come back to life. So they lost the game on purpose. They were burned and their ashes became catfish. The boys eventually became Hero Twins again.

The boys had some powers of the gods. They could kill things and bring them back to life. The gods were so impressed that they asked the boys to kill them and bring them back to life. The boys tricked them. They killed them and did not bring them back to life.

The Hero Twins were made rulers of Earth. One became the moon and the other became the sun.

WORDS TO KNOW

Myth – traditional story with false beliefs

Strategic – carefully planned

Underworld – mythical world for the dead

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SYMBOLS

Underline the "Words to Know" found in the passage. (see bottom)

? Something you have a question about

! Something that surprised you

✓ My favorite fact

COLOR

YELLOW

What was Xibalba?

GREEN

What was the name of the twin Hero Twins?

What was the secret plan of the game?

CHICHEN ITZA

CHECK THE CORRECT ANSWER

Which are the two main structures of the Chac Mool?

- Sacred Cenote El Castillo Temple of Warriors

How high is the Castillo?

- 79 feet 87 feet 91 feet

Where is the underground lake?

- Sacred Cenote Cenote Temple of Warriors

TRUE OR FALSE

There are temples at each end of the ball court and when the smallest sound can be heard from one end to another.

TRUE FALSE

Each staircase in El Castillo has 91 steps and together with the older structure there are 365 steps for each day of the year.

TRUE FALSE

COMPLETE THE BLANK

Kukulcan is considered to be in the form of a _____

The columns in the Temple of Warriors have carvings of warriors wearing _____

WORD SEARCH

A P B K U K U L K A N V J J K E D PYRAMID
T Y Z Q I R J I G Z R V V C I J N S Q FATALTY
Q T E F D C P Y S X S Z Z Q T O L G M CENOTE
T L I B Y Y M C V L R L T C B X I G N M WARRIORS
K A X S N A K E X O I X F E X A U R T AIRS
D Y E Q U I N O X G A V L N I Y O F KUKULCAN
E O W A R R I O R S T N X O K S M M X
C R P Y R A M I D H S K X T I B V Q A Y
Q E A H Q M Z X Y E R T S E N L A O C C
E F W E C U A H W O E T P X O H Q I W R CARVINGS