



# Pre-columbian Art

Utah Museum of Fine Arts

Evening for Educators

March 10, 2004, 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

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## List of Images

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1. Mexico, Campeche region, Island of Jaina, Maya culture, Late Classic Period (600-900)  
**Standing Lady**  
Earthenware and pigment  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1984.145
2. Guatemala, Highland region, Maya culture, Late Classic to Early Post-Classic Period (600-1200)  
**Jaguar Effigy Vessel/Incense Burner**  
Earthenware and pigment  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1987.048.001
3. Guatemala, possibly northern Petén region, Maya culture, Late Classic Period (600-900)  
**Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif**  
Earthenware and pigment  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1979.269
4. Mexico, Guerrero region, Xochipala culture, Olmec tradition (1200-400 B.C.)  
Pre-Classic Period (2000-100 B.C.)  
**Crying Baby**  
Earthenware and whiteslip  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1981.039.001
5. Mexico, Central Veracruz region, Maya culture, Early Classic Period (300-600)  
**Bat Effigy Head**  
Earthenware  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1987.048.002
6. Guatemala, Cotzumalhuapa region, Maya culture, Early classic Period (300-600)  
**Carved Yoke**  
Mottled stone with traces of cinnabar  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1979.180

## Standing Lady - Maya Culture



Mexico, Campeche region, Island of Jaina, Maya culture,  
Late Classic Period (600-900)  
**Standing Lady**  
Earthenware and pigment  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1984.145  
Photograph by Elizabeth Firmage

During the Late Classic period female figurines like this one were of great importance among the Maya and mass productions allowed even the poorest people to obtain and use these figures as offerings at the time of the burial of a member of the family. All molds were made of fired clay and this example displays many intricate details. Clay was pressed into the mold to form the front of the effigy in a single operation; the back is plain and was added by hand while at the same time tiny clay pellets were sealed inside to form a rattle. Blue, white, and red pigments, of which only traces remain, were used to enhance the beauty of the figure.

Female figures had considerable popularity and usually depicted persons of importance as shown by the deformed head, a practice carried out in infancy and created by binding the forehead of babies to force the soft skull to conform to the Maya ideal of beauty. Emphasis is placed on the elaborate headdress with a peaked crown. Above the forehead a prominent crosshatch design appears in the shape of the wind symbol *ik* and may indicate a shaved area that emphasizes the skull deformity. The raised dots above the nose denote the usual scarification pattern that indicates the rank of the lady. She wears an elaborate cape with a meandering fret design. Both hands are open, palms out, in a gesture that has still not been interpreted.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>All information taken from Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian notes.

# Jaina Standing Lady

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## A social studies lesson plan for *Standing Lady* written by Gladys Muren

### Historical Background:

The Island of Jaina is located off the western coast of the state of Campeche, Mexico [Fig. 1]. The city of Jaina was settled on the island around 300 A.D. and flourished until its final dissolution around the year 1000 A.D. Jaina was a major ceremonial center and burial site for the Maya nobles and elite of the mainland: it is a true example of a Mesoamerican necropolis. Over 20,000 tombs have been counted from this site, over 1,000 graves have been excavated and analyzed by archaeologists. The name of this burial island probably comes from the Yucatan Maya phrase “Hail na,” or “watery house.” Its western location may have been symbolic for the setting sun, and possibly a metaphor for death. In fact, this cemetery may have marked the entrance to Xibalba, the Maya underworld. Jaina is most famous for the number of small clay figures left with the dead, which were placed in their hands or on their chest. *Standing Lady* in the Utah Museum of Fine Art is an excellent example.

It is unclear where the figurines were made since the island was too small to accommodate numerous workshops. Some hypothesize that workshops were located along the route to the island where purchases could be made. Because the demand for manufacturing these small ceramics rose, artisans had to eventually resort to mold-casting to mass-produce their figures. In the case of *Standing Lady*, wet clay was pressed into a mold to form the front of the figure in a single operation; the back is plain and was added by hand. Tiny clay pellets were sealed inside to form a rattle. Nearly all the Jaina figurines contain a rattle or whistle of some sort, not as an instrument but to serve some ritual or magical purpose, perhaps to call the soul to its final resting-place in the Underworld. The unique cult figurines from Jaina provide information on Maya society, in particular on the dress of the elite they represent.

### Physical Description:

*Standing Lady* wears an elaborate ankle-length *huipil*, a tunic-like blouse that was woven on a backstrap loom and worn for ceremonies [Fig. 2]. The figurine’s incised pattern includes a diagonal diamond motif with three dots. This geometric motif is common to the Jaina figures and represents Maya cosmology. In Maya iconography, the diamond motif represents the four cardinal directions of the universe and the “tripod” dots represent the three stones that centered the cosmos and allowed the sky to be lifted; they gave balance and support. (These cosmic stones are symbolic prototypes for the hearthstone which has been used in Maya homes for over three millennia; it is composed of three stones which support a clay cooking surface situated in the center of the house.) *Standing Lady*’s noble status is also evident in her large headdress, beaded necklace, elaborate earrings, wide wristbands (probably jade, a stone which was reserved for nobles), her cranial deformation, and ritual scarification; she has, for example, several dots on her forehead. Evidence of paint is visible, including the famous “Maya Blue,” which comes from the mineral azurite.

### Perpetuating Tradition:

The Maya culture is not a vanished one. Today, in the Highlands of Guatemala, indigenous women of Maya descent continue to wear the *huipil* of their ancestors, which they too produce on a backstrap loom [Fig. 3]. The *huipils* are village-specific; that is, village tradition dictates the

colors, designs, motifs, pattern placement, neckline treatment, as well as the length and width of the huipil. Because woven clothing can “send messages” regarding village, language, and marital, social, and economic status, Guatemalan textiles have been called “woven word,” “woven voices,” “text in textile,” “communicative costume,” “silent oratory,” and “living cloth.” Although each village huipil looks similar, the weaver subtly exhibits personal expression. (In some villages, men also wear village specific clothing.) Maya women today weave their vision of the sacred universe thereby preserving and perpetuating Maya tradition.

**Resources:**

Miller, Mary Ellen, *Jaina Figures: A Study of Maya Iconology*, 1975.

*The Albers Collection of Pre-Columbian Art*. “Jaina and the Classic Maya Figure,” 1988.

*Natural History* 75 (4): 40-47

*UMFA Docent Sourcebook*, Department of Educational Services, UMFA, Chapter 38, Section IV, pg. 15.

<http://members.aol.com/cabrakan/maya3.htm>

<http://www.rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/jaina-island.html>.

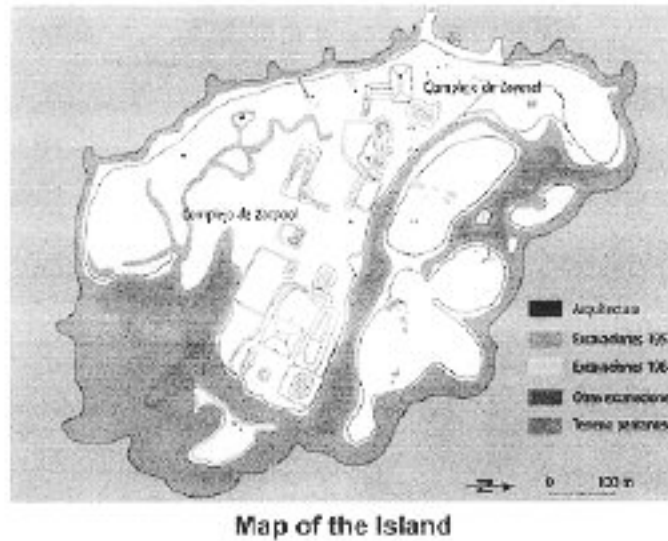
Linda Asteruria de Barrios and Dina Fernandez Garcia, *Mayan Clothing and Weaving Through the Ages*, Museo Ixchel del Traje Indigena de Guatemala, 1999.

**Enclosed Materials:**

1. Map of Jaina Island
2. Comparison of a Jaina Huipil with a Contemporary Maya Huipil
3. Diagram: Backstrap Loom

**NOTE:** YOU MAY CHECK OUT A GUATEMALAN HUIPIL FROM THE UTAH MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.  
MAKE ARRANGEMENTS BY CALLING:  
Educational Specialist: (808) 581-3580

**Fig. 1**  
**Jaina Island, Campeche, Mexico**

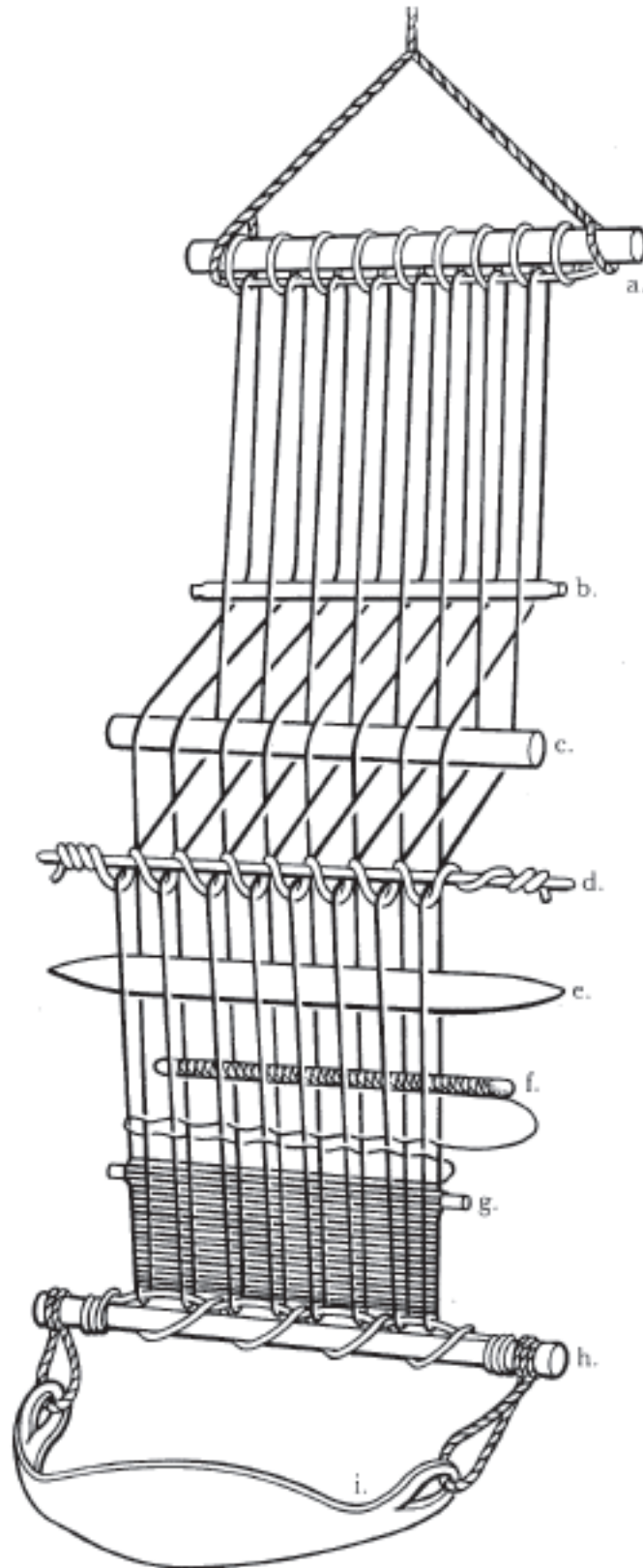




**Fig. 2**  
**Comparison of figurine from Jaina and Lady from the Highlands**  
**of Guatemala**



**Fig. 3**  
**Diagram of a Backstrap Loom**



Hip-strap-loom parts: a. Back-loom bar;  
b. Lease stick; c. Shed rod; d. Heddle stick;  
e. Batten; f. Shuttle; g. Tenter;  
h. Front-loom bar; i. Hip strap



# Lesson: Enriching the Present with Objects of the Past

**Objective:** Each student will research a family item that represents his/her cultural heritage and share their findings with other class members in order to promote understanding and appreciation for one another.

## **State Core Links:**

Social Studies: grade 3 (Standard 5) grade 4 (Standard 4), grade 5 (Standard 8), and grade 6 (Standard 1)

## **Materials:**

Postcard or slide of Standing Woman  
Contemporary Guatemalan huipil

## **Preparation:**

1. Students will examine *Standing Lady* to initiate discussion of her physical characteristics in order to sharpen their observation skills and fine-tune their vocabulary: necropolis, terra cotta, incising, molds, huipil, mythology, headdress and backstrap loom.
2. Students will examine a contemporary huipil from Guatemala and discuss how Maya women today weave and wear the same huipil
3. Students will discuss how people today perpetuate cultural, racial, national, or family tradition.

Examples: Local celebrations: Greek Festival, Swiss Days, Pioneer Days  
Institutional celebrations: school, group, club, family

## **Materials for Activity:**

A long table to display items  
A rope to cordon off the display table for protection  
Paper to make labels, signs

## **Activity:**

Create a classroom museum gallery  
Have class members bring an object that reflects their cultural tradition.  
Display items in a “gallery:” name the gallery after an important person  
Make museum-like labels that state:

Name of owner  
Name of object  
Year it was acquired  
Materials of object  
Provenance, where it applies

Have each class member share the background and meaning of their object.  
Invite parents and other classes to view your museum gallery. The students could act as gallery docents.

**Assessment:**

Observe the comments and reactions of other students as each student shares their object. Have class discuss, or write, what they learned new about their class members and the teacher. Have the class evaluate if the activity added to their understanding and appreciation of other class members and their cultural background. Have class members discuss if they learned more about their own culture through the activity.

Visitors could fill out a prepared questionnaire regarding their “visit” to the class gallery.

**Books for Younger Readers:**

Baquadano, Elizabeth, *Aztec, Inca and Maya*, New York: Eyewitness Books, 2000 Recommended age range: 8 to 14

Casteneda, Omar S., *Abuela's Weave*, New York: Lee & Low Books, Inc., 1993  
Recommended age range: 4 to 10

Coulter, Laurie, *Secrets in Stone: All About Maya Hieroglyphs*, Toronto: Madison Press, 2001  
Recommended age range: 8 to 12

Day, Nancy, *Your Travel Guide to Ancient Maya Civilization*, Minneapolis: Rhinestone Press, 2001

Palacios, Argentina, *The Hummingbird King: A Guatemalan Legend*, Troll Assoc., 1993  
Recommended age range: 9-12

Rhoads, Dorothy, *The Corn Grows Ripe*, New York: Puffin, 1993  
Recommended age range: 9 to 12

**Reference:**

[http://www.textilemuseum.ca/cloth\\_clay/research/links/teachers.html](http://www.textilemuseum.ca/cloth_clay/research/links/teachers.html)

# Lesson: Death and Burial: Preserving Cultural Traditions and Values

**Objectives:** The class will learn that societies display their traditions and cultures as they deal with death and burial.

1. Students will examine Standing Woman to initiate discussion of her physical characteristics in order to sharpen their observation skills and fine-tune vocabulary: necropolis, terra cotta, incising, molds, huipil mythology, headdress.

What do we learned about Maya burial, dress and social class?

2. Students will discuss and compare ancient means of burial: Maya necropolis on the Island of Jaina, Egyptian tombs and pyramids, Greek sarcophagus.

3. Discuss how different cultures today deal with death and burial....every culture must deal with these two aspect of humanity.

4. Students will visit their own community burial site...the local cemetery! They will gather historical and personal facts. (The older the cemetery the better.)

5. Students will share and evaluate what they learned about their community from the visit to the cemetery.

## **Core Standard Links:**

Social Studies: grade 3 (Standard 5) grade 4 (Standard 4), grade 5 (Standard 8), and especially grade 6; also Anthropology and World Civilization.

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## **Materials:**

Postcard or slide of Standing Woman

Notebooks

## **Preparations:**

Teacher should visit the cemetery ahead of time, talk to the caretaker, get permission, understand the layout. Arrange for transportation.

## **Classroom preparation before the activity:**

1. Divide class into small “archeological survey groups” to examine different areas of the cemetery. Arrange for “archeological” notebooks: each member should make detailed notes of his/her findings; or, assign a scribe for the group. An informed chaperone is needed for each group.

2. Elicit from class what they might discover on their “archeological dig.” Discuss what the class will be searching for: information from graves stones; such as, full names, birth and death date, inscriptions in full, artwork. What is the design of gravestone: above the ground, monumental, simple, flush to the ground?. What items that have been left at the burial site: fresh or plastic flowers, toys, other memorabilia?

3. Artists often accompany archeological surveys: if possible, assign someone in each group to sketch, or have everyone sketch.

4. Discuss cemetery “manners:” your local cemetery is sacred too!

**Activity:**

Go on an “archeological dig” at your local cemetery. Not all “evidence” is underground. Divide up in groups to examine different areas of the cemetery and record findings.

**Follow-up:**

1. In class have each group collate and analyze their finds.
2. Each group will make an oral report of their finding to the class.
  - What were the nationalities of the people interred? Any dominant group?
  - What was the average age of death? Were there war casualties, what war?
  - Did you find any evidence of religious affiliation or affiliation to social organizations?
  - What was the group’s favorite inscription? Why?
3. The students will present their visual record.

**Assessment:**

Have class come to conclusions regarding the information gathered. Was there a better appreciation for the people who established or lived in their community? Was there a better historical understanding of their community? Ask the students to describe how they felt entering cemetery. Did their feelings change after the cemetery visit? Discuss with the students what their favorite “find” was at the cemetery.

**Variations:**

For an older, mature group, there could be a discussion regarding the desecration of graves...it happens today: Jewish Cemeteries, even local cemeteries.

Note: Be sensitive to any student who may have experienced a recent death in his/her family.

## Other Lesson possibilities for *Jaina Standing Lady*:

### Title: Class identity through design and color.

1. Students will examine *Standing Lady* to initiate discussion of her physical characteristics in order to sharpen their observation skills and fine-tune vocabulary: terra cotta, incising, molds, huipil, mythology, backstrap loom, headdress, necropolis
2. Discuss how Maya women today weave a blouse that is village-specific: show example.
3. Have the class, as a group, design a banner that would uniquely represent their class. Have each student contribute his/her ideas and samples; explain their choice.
4. Mark bands on the banner and have each student decorate a band with fabric paint.
5. Display banner on the classroom door.

### Title: You Can Take it With You!

Discuss *Standing Lady* as a tomb figure. Fashion a clay figure for your burial! What is its significance? Use only clay and an instrument for incising the design or pattern.

### Title: Cloth as Communication

1. Discuss the information that one gathers from *Standing Lady's* clothing.
2. Discuss how the clothing of the women of the Guatemalan Highlands can identify them by village; it is village-specific
3. From magazines each student will collect pictures of people wearing different types of attire.
4. From the pictures, discuss what one can learn about a person by his/her attire:  
profession, age, attitude, interests, country.
5. Discuss: What "signals" do people give by what they wear?  
Should we judge people by what they wear? Is it a fair assessment?  
Is a school uniform a good or bad idea?

### Title: Today's Artists as Conveyors of History

1. Discuss how artists were very important figures in Maya community life. These people communicated and preserved the history and expressions of ancient Maya culture. Example: *Standing Lady*
2. Activity: Have class members search for contemporary works of art that show people and their attire. Discuss whether or not artists today communicate and preserve our history and expression. Have the class decide on the visuals that they think best express contemporary culture as they see it.
3. Activity: Try this with just advertisements from magazines. Discuss whether or not contemporary advertisement communicates our history and expression? What do the ads say about our culture?

### Follow up visits to the UMFA:

1. Discover how other cultures bury their people:  
UMFA examples: Ancient Greece, Asmat Culture, Egypt, and other Pre-Columbian cultures
2. Look for clothing from other cultures: there are examples in every gallery



## Jaguar Effigy Vessel/Incense Burner



Guatemala, Highland region, Maya culture, Late Classic to Early Post-Classic Period (600-1200)  
**Jaguar Effigy Vessel/Incense Burner**  
Earthenware and pigment  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1987.048.001  
Photograph by Elizabeth Firmage

The jaguar was a very important part of Mayan art. It held a strong mythological context, representing the hostile and destructive forces of nature.

The jaguar represents power and strength; it first appears in art around 1000 BC and remained an important symbol until the conquest. First and foremost it should be remembered that jaguar symbolism evolved over centuries of cultural development. In many pre-Columbian cultures the jaguar was equated to Tlaloc, the god of rain and fertility. One of Tlaloc's guises is that of the earth god who lives in caves and has power over the 'heart of the land.'

This charming effigy is a composite of two vessels, a round-sided bowl with a flaring collar attached to a cylindrical high pot stand that is open at the base. Attached to the bowl is a jaguar head, looking upward in an aggressive stance with a wide-open mouth and ferocious white teeth and a long protruding tongue. On each side of the head protrude the forelegs with three large white claws. Below the jaguar's neck are a simple neckband and an elaborate pectoral consisting of a twisted double band held together by two vertical bands. Knotted band pectorals are a common attribute of

all jaguar representations. Attached to this ornament are three olivella shells, painted red with blue tips. They symbolize water, as the jaguar is related to the rain gods. On the cylindrical stand are the two hind legs, also with white claws and between them is a vertical fillet that represents the tail. The vessel was probably used as an incense burner because there are traces of soot inside below the rim.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Information taken from Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian.

# Maya Art - Cultural Expression

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A lesson plan for *Jaguar Effigy Vessel/Incense Burner*  
written by Louise Nickelson

## Objectives:

Art History—Students will be able to identify characteristics of pre-Columbian art, define pre-Columbian, and identify on a map the area the Maya artworks are from.

Art Criticism—Students will be able to compare Maya artworks with artworks of another culture, identifying similarities and differences.

Aesthetics—Students will be able to discuss the aesthetic approach in which art combines practical items and cultural values.

Production—Students will demonstrate their skills in making a pinch pot, coil pot, or pinch and coil combination. They will demonstrate their ability to plan designs using sketches and to translate a 2-D sketch into a 3-D object.

## State Core Links:

This lesson covers topics in all four objectives of the visual arts state core:

Making—Students will play with art materials and begin to order them by basic art elements and principles.

Perceiving—Students will view artworks and talk about basic art elements and principles.

Expressing—Students will explore and create meaning in art.

Contextualizing—Students will find meanings in artworks through settings and other modes of learning.

The lessons can also be used or adapted to meet Social Studies Objectives:

### Social Studies 2nd Grade Objective 3

Express relationships in a variety of ways.

a. Describe traditions, music, dances, artwork, poems, rhymes, and stories that distinguish cultures.

b. Develop an acting ability to relate to characters' thoughts and feelings (e.g., needs, hopes, frustrations, fears) in stories and plays.

c. Create and perform/exhibit dances, visual art, music, and dramatic stories from a variety of cultures expressing the relationship between people and their culture.

### Social Studies 5th grade Standard 8

Students compare the cultures of Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

Art History—students will be able to identify characteristics of pre-Columbian art, define pre-Columbian, and identify on a map the area the Maya artworks are from.

## Introduction:

The Maya were a highly skilled artistic people who, during the Classic period (AD 250-900), sculpted stone, formed and painted ceramics and clay figurines, and made screen-fold bark books of drawings and glyphic writing. Maya artists even put their names on their work. These artists were highly educated and considered members of the elite. They decorated household items, ritual objects, temples, and large standing stones, called steles, with designs and carvings of their many gods, rulers, images of rituals, myths, geometric motifs, and glyphs. (civilization)

Ceramic artists used slip, a mixture of water, clay, and pigment, to decorate their pottery. The Maya had everyday clay pots for cooking and storing food as well as decorated ceramic tableware, but they also used ceramics as currency, symbols of status, and as offerings to the dead. (civilization)

One common motif in Maya art is the jaguar, which first appears in art around 1000 BC and remained an important symbol until the conquest and even after as in the *el tigre* mask used in Mexico today. Its complicated symbolism evolved over centuries of cultural development in Mesoamerica. (Brown) As the largest of the spotted cats in Central and South America, the "jaguar was worshiped and feared for its ability as a hunter. Its nocturnal prowling through the moist, lowland forests led it to be mystically associated with the night, the underworld, rain, and fertility. "(Natural History Museum)

This combination of forces gave the jaguar power over the 'heart of the land.' (Brown). But in the complex symbolic language of the area, caves and mountains also denote settlements and towns; the jaguar is a symbol of domination not only over the sacred orifices of the earth but also over their human counterparts. Thus the jaguar also has political and religious domination, (Brown) and was used by "Maya rulers as a symbol for the divine right of kings. The Jaguar God inhabited the Underworld, home of the dead. Each morning, he became the Sun God, travelling across the sky to the west, where he fell back into the Underworld. To maintain the cycle of night and day, rulers performed rituals to appease the gods, the controllers of the fate of humankind. Like the Jaguar God, Maya kings defied death by being reborn out of the dreaded Underworld, which the average human could not escape." (civilization)

"The hunter, the warrior, the ruler, and the priest wore jaguar skins in order to share the power of the jaguar. Mayan priests often had jaguar names and sat on symbolic jaguar seats, while warriors dressed in jaguar skins, believing that they took on some of the powers of the jaguar."

(Natural History Museum) "The jaguar was considered a natural or spiritual alter ego. It was thought that shamans were able to transform themselves into jaguars." (Brown)

As a result of these beliefs, the Maya made extensive use of jaguar imagery. Jaguars and jaguar gods can be found on ceramic plates, cups, effigy vessels, incense burners, and statues, and carved into stone and jade figurines and as jaguar masks used in dramas or ceremonies. The images also appear on stelae, buildings, and temples, where the worship of the jaguar culminated in the Temple of the Great Jaguar at Tikal. The pyramids at Tikal include the highest known structure built in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans.

#### Sources:

[civilization.ca/civil/maya/mmj01eng.html](http://civilization.ca/civil/maya/mmj01eng.html)

Brown, Bernadette. UMFA Pre-Columbian

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County,

<http://www.nhm.org/cats/P02/image1.htm>



Temple of the Jaguar,  
Tikal, Guatemala  
[pangaea-expeditions.com/larutamaya.html](http://pangaea-expeditions.com/larutamaya.html)

### Materials

Postcards or transparencies of Mayan art from this packet

Images of art and architecture from Mayan and other pre-Columbian cultures

Map of the world, Map of Mayan areas

### Activity

Show the class the images of the artworks in this packet. Tell the students who made the artworks and show them first, on the world map, where the Maya lived. Then show them the close-up map. Explain a little about the Mayans. Explain that their art is called pre-Columbian art because it is art that was made in the Americas—refer to the world map—before Columbus came to America. Show the class some examples of artwork from other pre-Columbian cultures such as Aztec, Olmec, Toltec, etc. Allow students to identify ways the artworks are similar, using questions to spark the discussion as needed. If possible, after a brief discussion, divide the students into small groups and give them postcards of artworks. Have the students continue the discussion in their groups.



### Use the following for assessment:

A self-assessment of their participation:

I didn't participate \_\_\_\_\_

I said a couple things \_\_\_\_\_

I made good comments \_\_\_\_\_

A map—circle the area where the Mayans lived

Pre-Columbian art is art that was made in the \_\_\_\_\_, before

\_\_\_\_\_ .



### VARIATION FOR SECONDARY OR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

Introduce Mayan art and show the images to the students. Explain what pre-Columbian art is using the information above. Then divide students into groups. Each group will research one of the other pre-Columbian cultures. Have students download or find examples of at least 6 images of art or architecture from their culture. They should write a brief introduction to the culture and present the images and information to the class.



*Quetzlcoatl, Teotihuacán, Mexico*  
Dan Wallach, used by permission  
[cs.rice.edu/~dwallach/photo/mexico99/](http://cs.rice.edu/~dwallach/photo/mexico99/)

After the presentations, proceed to the Art Criticism and Aesthetics lessons.

Assess their work using the specific criteria you gave them for their research and presentations. You can create a rubric that describes unacceptable work, acceptable work, and exceptional work. The following web sites provide examples, help, or templates to use in creating rubrics:

[http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=CustomizeTemplate&bank\\_rubric\\_id=35&section\\_id=8](http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=CustomizeTemplate&bank_rubric_id=35&section_id=8)

[http://www.teach-nology.com/web\\_tools/rubrics/](http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/)

[http://intranet.cps.k12.il.us/Assessments/Ideas\\_and\\_Rubrics/Rubric\\_Bank/rubric\\_bank.html](http://intranet.cps.k12.il.us/Assessments/Ideas_and_Rubrics/Rubric_Bank/rubric_bank.html)

Art Criticism— students will be able to compare Mayan artworks with artworks of another culture, identifying similarities and differences.

Aesthetics—students will be able to discuss the aesthetic approach in which art combines practical items and cultural values.

### Materials

Reproductions of artworks from this packet as well as a group of reproductions of art of another culture (see Resources).



*Olmec incised jade figure, Middle Preclassic, circa 900-600 B.C., 5 3/4 inches high*  
<http://www.thecityreview.com/s00s/pram.htm>



## Activity

Show the class the following artworks and ask the associated questions:

### *Jaguar Effigy Vessel*

What makes you believe the artist had or had not seen a real jaguar?

### *Bat Effigy Head*

What parts of these artworks were influenced by the things the artists saw around them?

### *Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif*

How were these artists inspired by their cultural/religious beliefs?

### *Carved Yoke*

How did the artists combine practical crafts with art?

Allow the students to comment on how the artworks express the cultural values of the Maya—what was important to them.

Then show the class artworks of another culture and have them identify ways in which those artworks demonstrate the artists' cultural values. Ask students to identify ways in which the two cultures' artworks are similar and ways they are different. If you have postcard reproductions of the artworks, divide the students into small groups. Give each group one image from each culture and ask each group to identify three ways the artworks are similar and three ways the artworks are different. You can also ask the students to speculate about why the artworks are different or similar in one way. For example, the Mayans probably used clay because there was a lot of it around while the Africans used wood because that is what they had.

Assess students learning by using a checklist to indicate participation in the discussion. You may also ask students to hold up a card to indicate their level of understanding. Use 3 cards, one with a smiley face to indicate "I understand," one with a frowny face to indicate "I need help understanding," and one with a straight mouth to indicate "I'm not sure I understand." You can then adjust your participation to clarify ideas the students don't understand or are not sure of.

## Resources

Some possible cultures to use for the Art Criticism lesson include the following:

Early Utah Folk Arts (Evening for Educators' packet from the Utah Arts Council Folk Arts Museum, February 26, 2004)

African Art (Evening for Educators' packet, African Art, UMFA, February 4, 1998)

Navajo Art <http://www.getty.edu/artsednet/resources/Navajo/>

<http://www.weta.org/productions/legacy/weaving/teachers.html>

Northwest Coast Native Art—<http://www.coastalarts.net/site/index.html>



*Spirit Mask Ashira/Bapunu, Ogowe River, Gabon, UMFA Permanent collection*

### **VARIATION FOR SECONDARY OR ADVANCED STUDENTS:**

Show the class the images of the Mayan art and then some Navajo art. Have students read the following quote from a Navajo weaver:

“Art constantly surrounds the Navajo people. We do not acknowledge it as a separate, external entity. Indeed, there is no word for “art” in the Navajo culture. It is simply part of our lives. The Navajo culture and the European-American culture define art differently. We see art in the sights and sounds of our surroundings -- in the twinkle of stars on a clear night, in the movements of flowers in the breeze, in the way the manes of horses wave as they run. We see art in the wrinkled hands of our grandparents and in the sounds of weaving.” <http://www.weta.org/productions/legacy/weaving/teachers.html>

Ask students: How might the Mayas’ art have been a way of life? How is that similar or different from artists’ lives today, in non-indigenous cultures?

Ask students to identify ways the artists have used sacred imagery in their art. Then ask them whether they believe sacred imagery should be used in contemporary art. (Questions inspired by material from [getty.edu/artsednet/resources/Navajo/](http://getty.edu/artsednet/resources/Navajo/))

**Assessment:** create a rubric with the specific criteria you gave the students for the assignment.

**Production:** Students will demonstrate their skills in making a pinch pot, coil pot, or pinch and coil combination. They will demonstrate their ability to plan designs using sketches and to translate a 2-D sketch into a 3-D object.

### **Materials:**

Pictures of other animal effigy pots (optional, see Sources)

Picture of a jaguar

Pictures of other animals from old calendars, books about animals, old magazines

Clay, pottery tools, or substitutes such as popsicle sticks, bamboo skewers, plastic dinnerware, etc.

### **Activity:**

Show the class the image of the Jaguar effigy pot. If you have not done any of the other activities in this lesson, ask the students if they know what kind of animal is shown on the pot. Then show them the picture of the jaguar. Ask the students how the sculpture on the pot is similar to the real jaguar. Then ask how the image is different from a real jaguar.

(If you have completed other activities, skip to the new information.)

Allow students to speculate about where the pot might have come from, who made it and what it



Southwest, Navajo people  
*Classic Serape-style Wearing Blanket*, 1875  
Plied cotton and saxony wool  
[umfa.utah.edu/index.php?id=MTc&media\\_id=127](http://umfa.utah.edu/index.php?id=MTc&media_id=127)

was used for. Then show the students on a map where the Mayan people lived. Give them some background on the culture and their art, using the information from the packet. Explain to the students what an effigy is—something that looks similar or stands in for something else. This pot represents a jaguar, one of the Mayan gods (include other information as appropriate). As the students to identify the physical traits of the jaguar the Mayans thought were important (teeth, claws, spots, ferocious nature, etc.).

Ask students to name some things we use today that represent ideas or real things such as images of God, Christ, Buddha, or posters of sports figures or pop stars. Ask students to think about an animal that might be important to an imaginary tribe of people. Provide students with books or pictures of animals to look through. When students have chosen an animal, they should decide what characteristics or physical qualities of the animal are important to their imaginary tribe.

Students should fold a paper in half one way and then in half the other way to create 4 “thinking spaces.” In each space, the students should make a drawing of their chosen animal, making at least one change in each drawing. Before the students choose a design, remind them to check whether their design emphasizes the important characteristics of the animal. Students should choose the method they will use to make their effigy pot.

#### **Materials:**

Clay  
canvas or denim cloth or pieces of cardboard  
rolling pins  
guide sticks (for slab rolling)  
clay tools  
small dishes for water or slip  
small pieces of sponge  
brushes, watercolor or glazes

Get an experienced ceramics person to help, if possible. You can also find instructional help in the Ceramics packet on the Springville Museum of Art’s web site at [sma.nebo.edu](http://sma.nebo.edu)

#### **Vocabulary:**

slip, score, slab, pinch, coil, bisque, green-ware, bone dry, glaze

Demonstrate/review wedging clay and forming techniques. Review or demonstrate pinch and coil methods.

Demonstrate various ways to make an animal face, legs, ears etc. - Demonstrate how to attach using slip and supporting coils.

Demonstrate painting or glazing technique.

#### **Procedures:**

Wedge clay to remove air bubbles. Make a pinch pot for the base of the pot. Students can make the pot larger by adding coils, remembering to score and slip each new layer of coil.



3rd grade student work from  
Linda Wood’s class, St. John’s Lower School,  
Houston, Texas  
[www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/linda-effigy.htm](http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/linda-effigy.htm)

Make animal head, legs, ears, or other features using pinch method. Attach all pieces by scoring and applying slip. Support attachments by adding a small coil and blending one side into the part being attached and the other into the pot. Make sure all sections of the animal are hollow or no more than 1/2" thick. Discourage students from making parts that are very thin or that stick out too much: the pieces usually break off.

Cover the pots to make sure they dry slowly. Bisque fire the pots. Use watercolor and a clear sealer on the pots, or have students glaze the pots and refire them to the appropriate temperature.

Assessment:

Help the students decide on 2-3 criteria (more for older students) for the effigy pot assignment. List the criteria on the board. Students will self-assess how their pots fit the criteria. Students will also write a short statement about the animal they chose to feature on their effigy pot. (You or an aide will need to help very young students.)

Have the students create an exhibit of the pots with the student statements. Include any other information about pre-Columbian or Mayan art generated from other activities. Invite other classes to see the exhibit and allow students to take turn being docents—explaining the exhibit and providing some background information to the viewers.



## Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif



Guatemala, possibly northern Petén region, Maya culture, Late Classic Period (600-900)  
**Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif**  
Earthenware and pigment  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1979.269  
Photograph by Elizabeth Firmage

Like their monumental art, the Maya applied arts also served religious and ritualistic functions. Although the thickness of the plate indicates it was made for actual use by the living it was later buried with the owner as is suggested by the “kill” hole drilled in the center of the plate.<sup>1</sup>

The jaguar represents power and strength; it first appears in art around 1000 BC and remained an important symbol until the conquest. First and foremost it should be remembered that jaguar symbolism evolved over centuries of cultural development. In many pre-Columbian cultures the jaguar was equated to Tlaloc, the god of rain and fertility. One of Tlaloc’s guises is that of the earth god who lives in caves and has power over the ‘heart of the land.’

The jaguar is, thus, a symbol for the power that controls the land. “But in the complex symbolic language of the area, caves and mountains also denote settlements and towns; the jaguar is a symbol of domination not only over the sacred orifices of the earth but also over their

human counterparts.”<sup>2</sup> In his guise as a jaguar, Tlaloc represents the lord of the land who lays claim to the earth, and to its political and religious domination. As a plumed serpent, his undulating feathers represent growing vegetation. These symbols could be combined as jaguar/serpent to express in symbolic shorthand certain attributes of the deity.

The jaguar was considered a natural or spiritual alter ego. It was thought that shamans were able to transform themselves into jaguars. The serpent is found in all decorative forms, especially in representations of Quetzalcoatl. “Roman Piña Chan believes that the Olmec principle god was a half-jaguar, half-serpent being. The jaguar represents the Earth Mother with the serpent representing the water, thus combining to represent life. He then argues that as the Olmec developed, this principal god underwent a metamorphosis. The Jaguar god was spilt into Celestial and Terrestrial counterparts. The Celestial was portrayed by the rattlesnake which later evolved into a bird serpent. This transformation occurred, according to Piña Chan, because the rattlesnake, a land serpent, could have been transformed to represent rain clouds on the ground; the rain being the source of fertility for their crops.”<sup>3</sup> The quetzal bird is a symbol of the ruling class and the high priest. Quetzal feathers were used in the clothing of the king and were highly valued.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian information.

<sup>2</sup>Wolf, Eric, *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup><http://weber.ucsd.edu/~anthclub/quetzalcoatl/olmecs.htm>, January 2, 2004.

<sup>4</sup>Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian information.



# Mayan Art: Historical Artifact, Ceremonial Object, or Artwork?

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A lesson plan for *Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif*  
written by Louise Nickelson

## Objectives:

Art History—Students will be able to indicate on a map of the world where the Mayans lived and will be able to identify three qualities of Maya art.

Aesthetics—Students will discuss an aesthetic puzzle and demonstrate their understanding that a ceremonial object has worth as an artwork, as an historical artifact, and as a ceremonial object of that culture by choosing a stance and defending it.

Art Criticism—Students will be able to discuss pre-Columbian representations of religious/mythological symbols, compare them with contemporary representations, and evaluate them.

Art Production—Make a clay slab plate and decorate it with a creature or symbol of the student's creation. Or, make a paper representation of a plate.

State Core: These lessons cover all four standards of the core: Making, Expressing, Perceiving, and Contextualizing

Art History—Students will be able to indicate on a map of the world where the Mayans lived and will be able to identify three qualities of Maya art. (You can increase the number qualities the students must understand for older students.) Students will understand that Maya art has value in three ways: as an artwork, as a historical artifact, and as a ceremonial object.

## Introduction:

Like their monumental art, the Maya applied arts also served religious and ritualistic functions. Although the thickness of this plate indicates it was made for actual use by the living, it was later buried with the owner, as is suggested by the “kill” hole drilled in the center of the plate. (Brown)

The plate is ornamented with a slip-painted representation of Kulkucan, the Maya supreme god. Kulkucan had many functions. In addition to being the “god of the four elements, he was also a creator god and the god of resurrection and reincarnation. He originated from Toltec myth, where he was a divine hero who taught the Toltecs laws, fishing, healing, the calendar, and agriculture. He emerged from the ocean, and disappeared in it afterwards.” (Encyclopedia)



From *Plate with Jaguar/Serpent/Bird Motif*  
Modified

“His name means ‘the feathered serpent,’ and the Aztec merged him with their Quetzalcoatl. His attributes, each representing one element, are a maize-ear (earth), a fish (water), lizard (fire), and vulture (air). He is the so-called ‘God B’.”(Encyclopedia)

Kulkucan is depicted as a combination of three animals—jaguar, serpent and bird. This representation of a jaguar’s face and fangs, a serpent body that is feathered, reveals the elemental forces (jaguar-earth, serpent-water, bird-air) in action achieving accession to spirit-fire. This teaching revealed the secret knowledge necessary to achieve Quetzalcoatthood—In this body, in this life.

Before the introduction of the Feathered Serpent, the Maya had already established a religious belief that certain gods and royal ancestors were carried down from the heavens to the earth within the vessel of a great serpent. Toltec influence into the Yucatán Peninsula had imported the image of the Feathered Serpent, which in turn was translated into the Maya languages as Kulkucan or Gukumatz. (members)

Kulkucan was in part responsible for the creation of the earth primeval. There are multiple versions of the god’s creation myth, which vary from city to city. The following is one:

### **The Maya Creation Myth**

“In the beginning only Tepeu and Gucumatz, the Feathered Serpent, existed. The two sat together thinking. Whatever they thought came into being. They thought of the earth, and it appeared. They thought of the mountains, and there they were. They thought of trees, and of sky, and of animals, and each came into existence. None of these entities could praise them though, so they shaped more advanced beings out of clay. These beings fell apart when they got wet, so Tepeu and Gucumatz made more beings out of wood. These proved unsatisfactory as well by causing trouble in the world. The gods had to send a great flood to wipe out these beings. They wanted to start over again. With the help of Parrot, Coyote, Mountain Lion and Crow the gods fashioned four more new beings. These four beings lived as they should and became the ancestors of the Quiché.

The sacred text, Popol-Vuh, relates the creation story of a great flood. The first beings were not perfect and the gods sent this destruction to them. This flood differs from other creation stories because it was not sent as a punishment, but rather as the remedy for the faulty creation.” (Ledo-Anderl)

The Feathered Serpent also became the symbol of the divinity of the state and the cult of Kulkucan is one of nobility. The impressive Temple of Kulkucan at Chichen Itza was dedicated to the cult of the feathered serpent deity. The pyramid was carefully designed so that at each equinox sunshine and shadow form the illusion of a serpent creeping down the steps. (Culturefocus) Today, tourists gather at the site to see this manifestation of the Mayan deity.

### Sources

Brown, Bernadette. UMFA Pre-Columbian

1995-2004 Encyclopedia Mythica, [www.pantheon.org/articles/k/kulkucan.html](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/k/kulkucan.html)  
[members.aol.com/maroic/serpent.htm](http://members.aol.com/maroic/serpent.htm)

Debbie Ledo-Anderl [www.uwec.edu/greider/hos/Hist/dlacreation.htm](http://www.uwec.edu/greider/hos/Hist/dlacreation.htm)  
[culturefocus.com/guatemala.htm](http://culturefocus.com/guatemala.htm)

### Materials

- reproductions of Mayan artworks from this packet
- pictures of Mayan temples (optional)
- paper and pencils

### Activity

Show the class the images of art from the packet. You may want to make transparencies of the works. If you have them, show the class pictures of Mayan temples (there are lots of pictures on the web—use Google’s image search with the key words Maya temple). Show the class on a map where the ancient Maya lived.(see map in lesson on Jaguar effigy pot)



[www.uncc.edu/latam/maya-temple.jpg](http://www.uncc.edu/latam/maya-temple.jpg)

Give the students some background about the Mayan culture. Then have students identify qualities of Mayan art and architecture. Make a list of these qualities on the board. Summarize the discussion for the students. (Keep a copy of the list of qualities for future sections of the lesson.)

### Assessment

Assess the students’ knowledge by asking them to identify, on a map, the area where the Maya lived. Then give each student (or student group) a copy of a Mayan artwork and have the student identify three of the qualities of Maya art on the artwork. If students cannot identify three qualities, have them find another classmate and have the two students work together to identify the qualities. Help the students understand that the artworks can be seen as an artwork, as an historical artifact, and as a ceremonial object.

**Art Criticism**—Students will be able to discuss pre-Columbian representations of religious/mythological symbols, compare them with contemporary representations, and evaluate them. (This is an extension of the Art History section.)

### Materials

- reproductions of artworks from this packet
- pictures of at least two Mayan temples
- pictures of at least two cathedrals
- pictures of artworks and ceremonial objects from cathedrals

Show the class the artworks from this packet and have them remember the qualities they identified in the previous section. If students can read, use a list you compiled in the last section. Then show the class the images of cathedrals artworks, and ceremonial objects. Have the students identify ways the artworks are similar and are different. Divide students into small groups and have the students decide which is better, the Maya art or the Catholic Renaissance art. The groups should identify the reasons they have for deciding which is better. (There are no right answers, the point is to have the students think about value systems as well as craftsmanship and to defend their decisions with specific reasons.)

Have the groups share their ideas with the class. If no group decided the Maya art was better, you may need to help the students understand that the Maya art is different, but also valuable for the same reasons the other art is: good craftsmanship, technique, aesthetic judgement, etc. Use

whatever vocabulary the students understand such as use of the elements and principles as well as the use within the culture. (This lesson leads naturally into the next lesson about how we value art objects.)

**Aesthetics**—Students will discuss an aesthetic puzzle and demonstrate their understanding that the Mayan plate (and other artworks) has worth as an artwork, as an historical artifact, and as a ceremonial object of that culture by choosing which is most important and defending that decision.

### Materials

reproductions of plate

Vocabulary: If they do not know them, you will need to teach students the following terms or their equivalents: *historical artifact*, *artwork*, *ceremonial object*

If you completed the Art History section of the lesson, you can remind students of the qualities they identified in that lesson and that Mayan art can be seen as an artwork, an historical artifact, or as a ceremonial object. If you did not complete the previous section, you will need to establish those three views before proceeding with the puzzle or as you explain the puzzle.

Show the class the reproduction of the plate and tell the students that on a recent *Antiques Roadshow*, a young couple brought the plate, which they had found when cleaning out the attic of an old house they had purchased. They were, of course, very excited when the expert identified the plate as being Mayan, probably from the area that is now Guatemala and of the late classic period, 600-900 A.D. They took the plate home and talked about what they should do with the plate.

During the next week the couple were contacted by three different people. The first was a woman who was a curator for the National History Museum in Guatemala, who said they very much wanted the plate for their collection of historical artifacts. The second was a man from the Baltimore Art Museum, who wanted the plate for their collection because it's such a marvelous example of ceramic art. The last person who called was a woman who said she was one of the remaining Mayan Indians in Guatemala and since the plate had religious meaning, it should be reburied by Mayans near where it was found.

Divide the students into small groups and tell them each group has to decide which person should get the plate and why. Help the groups only as necessary to weigh the different values of the plate and to specify their reasons for their choice.

When the groups have decided, give each group a few minutes to explain their choice and their reasons. Keep a tally on the board. Allow students a few minutes to discuss the puzzle: Is an object worth most as an artifact, an artwork, or a ceremonial object? Summarize, identifying that the class members have been talking about aesthetic choices—what is art.



### Assessment

Assess student participation in the class discussion by putting a check mark after each student's name as the student comments. Have groups self-assess their performance as  
Could be Better, Good, or Excellent.

**Art Production**—Students will improve and demonstrate their clay-making skills by making a clay slab plate and decorating it with a creature or symbol of the student's creation. Or, students will make a paper representation of a plate.

### Materials

reproduction of the Mayan plate from this packet  
other representations of Kulkucan

### Activity

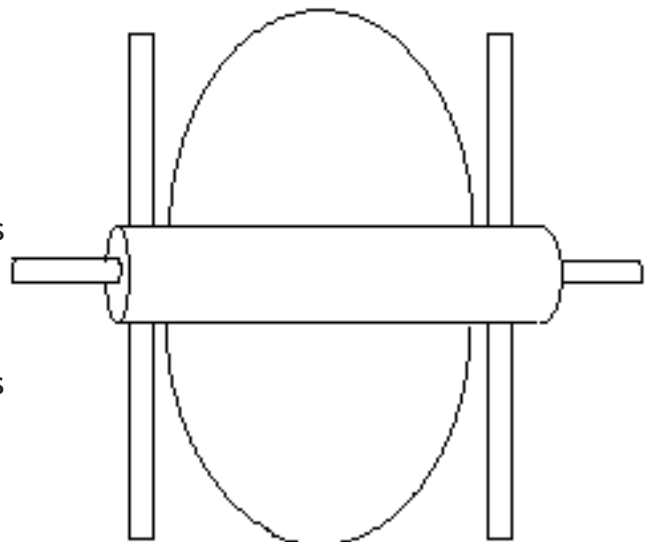
Show the class the image of the Mayan plate. Give the students background information about the Maya and their gods. Then ask students why the Mayan people decorated items like plates with representations of their gods. Explain that you will be pretending to be Mayan, but each of you will create a new god. Have pictures of various animals for the students to look at. Have them choose three animals and figure out a design that uses qualities from each of the animals. The students should make 4 rough circles on their "thinking page" and make 4 different sketches of the design, each sketch a little different. After the students have chosen a design for the center of the plate, let them create a simple repeating design to put around the edge of the plate.

Directions for making clay slab plates:

If you have purchased bags of clay, use a cutting wire and slice off 1" thick slabs (or whatever is appropriate for the size slabs the students will need or your school budget can afford) from the clay, so the students start with a shape similar to what they will use. Or, cut squares of clay. If you are using clay that has been worked with, have students knead the clay to remove all air bubbles and then slap the clay into a ball.

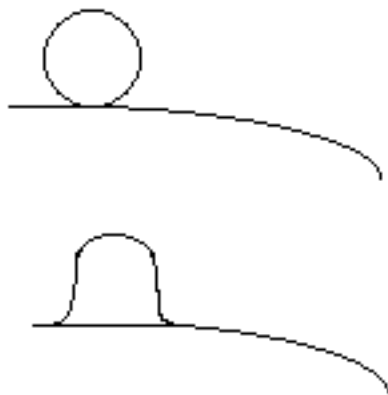
The easiest way to start making a thin slab is to pat the clay into a fat slab. Then students can continue to pat the slab thinner or can roll the clay out. Give each student a piece of heavy material such as canvas or denim to work on or a piece of cardboard. Demonstrate rolling slabs and also, if the students can read, write a version of the following directions on the board or a large sheet of paper so the students can refer to them.

Place the clay on the material between two 1/4"-1/3" high, long, thin boards. Carefully roll the clay from the center out, making the pressure even, and gradually thin the clay until it is even with the two guide boards. Keep the rolling pin on the guide boards so the clay will not get too thin, see the illustration. Handle the clay as little as possible, although you may carefully turn the clay over once. This helps equalize the pressure and stretching of the clay and produces a slab which stays flat.





Have students cut the clay slab using knives, needle tools, or bamboo skewers. They can use something round to trace around, can make a pattern using a compass, or can cut the plate to be the shape they want. When the slab has been cut into the right shape, have students use a small piece of dampened sponge or their finger to smooth the cut edge.



To add a foot rim to the plates, make a 1/2" coil of clay about 16" long and join the two ends. Form the coil into a circle, cover, and allow to harden slightly overnight. Carefully turn the leather-hard plate upside down and center the clay circle on the back. Scratch lightly around the circle, take the circle off and scratch the area the circle will cover, put a little water on the scratched area and rub until the area has a layer of slip on it. Scratch the bottom of the circle and press it onto the moist area of the plate. Using a tool such as the back of a spoon, a popsicle stick, a butter knife or sculpture tool, pull some clay from the side of the circle down onto the plate and smooth it in. Do this all around the outside and inside of the circle. Turn the plate right side up and put it down on the piece of card board. Press gently to even up the part of the

circle that touches the table. The plate now has a foot rim. Cover the plate and allow it to dry the rest of the way.

Cover the plates lightly with plastic—old shopping bags work well—and allow the plates to dry slowly. When leather hard, students can carefully put their initials in the back of the plate. When the plates are totally dry, they can be fired to cone 06. At this point they can be glazed or painted.

Before making the design on the clay plate, students should fold a piece of paper in half and then half again, so they have four spaces. Have photos of animals for the students to look at as they draw their designs. Old *National Geographics* or other nature magazines, calendars, or old books about animals can be good sources for pictures. Just take the books or magazines apart so each student or a couple of students can have a photo to look at.

In one space, the student should draw the design he or she wants to use. In each of the other spaces, the student should refine the design, making at least one change each time. Then students can choose their favorite design from the four versions.

To paint plates: Use watercolors to paint with. First, using a neutral color, use a paintbrush to "sketch" the design on the plate. If desired, paint the background of the plate a soft orange brown to mimic the color of earthenware clay. Then fill in the design, going from light colors to dark, putting in details last. Students may need to allow the plate to dry in between steps. The paint will dry fairly quickly unless the student uses too much water.

When the painted design is complete and dry, spray the plates with a matte finish sealer. Make sure you spray the plates in a well-ventilated area using old newspapers underneath to catch the spray that goes off the edges of the plates. If it is warm enough, go outside to spray.

Assessment: Help students decide on criteria for the plates. (1-3 criteria for young students, may want more for older students.) Have students self-assess their plates using the criteria. Have students create a display of the plates that were determined to best meet the criteria in some public

area of the school. Students should write a brief statement about the animal god they have created: the statement should indicate what qualities of the animals are important. You or an aide will need to help very young students. The other plates should be exhibited in the classroom.

### **Variation for Secondary:**

Use a red clay and follow the directions for making the plates or use a hump mold or have students throw the plates on the wheel. When plates are leather hard, they should be trimmed or any sharp edges smoothed out. Have students plan designs using at least 4 different sketches. When the students have chosen their designs, have them show their designs to two other students who will each critique the design, giving verbal feedback and asking for any clarification they need. Students will then make any desired changes prompted by the critique.

Students will use a combination of dark red, brown, blue or black slip and paint the design on the plates. After plates have been bisque fired, students can add details or enrich the color of the design with a little oxide mixed with water. Fire the plates again to whatever temperature your kiln will go to.

Assessment: Help students to determine criteria for the plate assignment before they begin. When the plates are finished, students and teacher should evaluate the successfulness of the project using the criteria. Students should keep the self assessment and, if possible, an image of their plate in their portfolio for a later progress assessment.

## **2. Construction paper “pottery” plates**

If you do not have access to a kiln, you can do the assignment using heavy construction paper. Follow the directions for the art history, art criticism, and aesthetics sections above. Have students fold a paper into 4 thinking spaces, make circles in each space, and make 4 different designs. After choosing their favorite design, the students should cut out a large circle of light orange construction paper and lightly indicate the design on the paper, using colored pencils, crayons (Crayola’s construction paper crayons are the best), or paint; the students can then fill in the design on the “plate.” Exhibit as above. Adapt the assessment rubric to fit the paper plates.

**VARIATION:** Instead of pretending to be Maya and creating a new god for them, have the students discuss the reasons the Mayas used the three animals that make up Kulkucan: jaguar, snake, bird. Have students identify some of the animals in the area they live in. Have students create a new god image from animals in their area. Or, have students do research about an area you’re studying in social studies and make an animal that is appropriate for that culture or place.

## Crying Baby



Mexico, Guerrero region, Xochipala culture, Olmec tradition  
(1200-400 B.C.) Pre-Classic Period (2000-100 (B.C.)  
**Crying Baby**  
Earthenware and whiteslip  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1981.039.001  
Photograph by Elizabeth Firmage

The sculpture of the Crying Baby is typical of the Olmec infant-style figures with its fat, heavy cheeks, broad flat nose, and small mouth with two clearly modeled teeth.

The Olmec culture is considered the earliest among the New World. The influence of Olmec culture on the rest of Mesoamerican cultures is thought fundamental to their development. It was the first New World civilization to demonstrate those traits (a complex religious system, large scale ceremonial centers, a system of writing and calendrical notation, and a stratified society with kings and professional specialization) that later became standard for all other cultures in the area.<sup>1</sup>

The image of the crying baby has very particular features to the Olmec style. It was characterized by the “were-jaguar” style—a cleft forehead, flame-like eyebrows and “U” shaped upper lip.<sup>2</sup> There is a mythological belief that a woman mated with a jaguar giving rise to

such an offspring, which was probably an early form of the rain god. The obesity apparent in many Olmec sculptures suggests physical abnormalities such as dwarfism.<sup>3</sup>

The Olmecs may have also had a rich cult dedicated to fertility. Although many of the sculptures seem to be babies, the loose, hanging flesh also suggests age, ‘perhaps not unlike the Christ child, where both age and infancy are portrayed.’<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup><http://www.cartage.org.lb/en/themes/Arts/sculpturePlastic/SculptureHistory/SculptureAmong/PreColumbianCollection/Olmec.htm>, December 6, 2003.

<sup>2</sup>Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian information.

<sup>3</sup>Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian information.

<sup>4</sup>Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica from Olmec to Aztec*, third edition (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2001), 33-34.

# Olmec Crying Baby - Creation of a Myth

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## A lesson plan for *Crying Baby* written by Emily Smoot

### Objectives:

1. Students will read and analyze *A Prayer to Tlaloc*.
2. Students will discuss the meaning and structure of a myth, its context for ancient history, and its relevance as a means to convey social and cultural understanding.
3. They will then create their own myth based on a childhood experience.

### State Core Links:

Grades 7 - 10 Language Arts Standards 2, 3, 10, 11.

### Materials:

- Copy of *A Prayer to Tlaloc*
- Paper and pencil

### Activity:

Have each student read the myth, or read it aloud. Initiate a discussion on why a rain God would have been important in the Pre-Columbian world.

There is a mythological belief that a woman mated with a jaguar giving rise to offspring of the “were-jaguar” style of the Crying Baby, which was probably an early form of the Mesoamerican rain god. The Olmec culture is considered the earliest among the New World. Their influence was felt in a system of writing and calendrical notation that would later become the standard for all other cultures in the area.

This information can be used to prompt a discussion on the importance of writing in creating cultural and social norms through myth. Ask them to come up with myths that pervade society today, creating their own cultural perception of the world around them.

Ask the students to take a few minutes and write down ideas or memories they have from their childhood that influenced their life. Based on their discussion of the importance of writing have them create a myth around one central event or thing that could be said to have shaped their own cultural understanding.

Ask them to share their myths, and how their myth shapes their perception.

### Assessment:

Students will be assessed according to their participation in group and class discussion. They will also be assessed on their completion of their own myth.

### Sources:

Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian information.

Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica from Olmec to Aztec*, third ed. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2001), 33-34.

Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

# A Prayer to Tlaloc

Translated from the Nahuatl by Thelma Sullivan. Originally published in "A Prayer to Tlaloc," translated by Thelma D. Sullivan, in *Estudios de Cultura Nahuatl* 5 (1965):41-55. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

O Lord, O Lord, O Provider, O Lord of Verdure,  
Lord of Tlalocan, Lord of the Sweet-scented Marigold, Lord of Copal!  
The gods, Our Lords, the Providers,  
the Lords of the Rubber, the Lords of the Sweet-Scented Marigold,  
the Lords of the Copal,  
heaven sealed themselves in a coffer, they have locked themselves  
in a box. They have hidden the jade and turquoise and  
precious jewels of life,  
they have carried off their sister, Chicomecoatl, the fruits of the earth,  
and the Crimson Goddess, the chile.

Oh, the fruits of the earth lie panting;  
the sister of the gods, the sustenances of life,  
feebly drags herself along,  
she is covered with dust, she is covered with cobwebs,  
she is utterly worn and weary.

And behold, the people, the subjects, are perishing!  
Their eyelids are puffy, their mouths dry as straw,  
their bones are desiccated, and they are twisted and gaunt,  
their lips are thin, their necks pale and scrawny.

And the children, the little ones-  
those who barely walk, those who crawl,  
those still on the ground making little piles of earth and broken  
bits of pottery,  
and the infants lashed to their boards and slats  
all of them are hollow-eyed.

Everyone knows anguish and affliction,  
everyone is gazing upon torment;  
no one has been overlooked.

All living things are suffering.  
The troupial and the roseate spoonbill drag themselves along,  
they topple over and lie prostrate on their backs,  
weakly opening and closing their beaks.  
And the animals: the dogs of the Lord, of the All and the  
Everywhere are reeling;  
they take refuge among us, vainly they lick the earth.  
Man and beast alike are crazed for want of water,  
they die for want of water,  
they are perishing, they are wasting away, they are vanishing!



The breast of our mother and father, Lord of the Earth, is dry;  
no longer can she nourish, no longer can she feed,  
no longer shall she suckle what sprouts, what comes forth,  
what is the very life, of the people, their food and their sustenance.  
Oh, the sustenances of life are no more, they have vanished;  
the gods, the Providers, have carried them off,  
they have hidden them away in Tlalocan;  
they have sealed in a coffer, they have locked in a box,  
their verdure and freshness-  
the cuphea and fleabane, the purselane and fig-marigold-  
all that grows and puts forth,  
all that bears and yields,  
all that sprouts and bursts into bloom,  
all vegetation that issues from you  
and is your flesh, your germination and renewal.

It is the jade, the armlet, the turquoise-  
the most precious, the only precious thing there is;  
it is the sustenance, the substance, the life of the world,  
whereby those who are alive, live  
and talk and rejoice and laugh.

Oh, the fruits of the earth, the green and growing things have gone,  
they have hidden themselves away!

O Lord, O Lord, Lord of Tlalocan, O Provider!  
What does your heart will?  
By chance, have you let this fall from your hand?  
Is it to be thus? Is this all? Is this the end?  
Are the people, the multitude, to die out, to vanish from the earth?  
Is the city to be left empty and desolate?  
Is this all? Is it to be thus?  
Was it so ordained Above and in the Region of the Dead?  
Was it so decreed for us? Was it so determined?

But all the little ones suffer-  
those who barely walk, those who crawl, those on the ground still,  
and the infants lashed to their boards and slats,  
who are sensible of nothing-  
give them, at least something to eat,  
at least provide them with something,  
for as yet they do not reason.

If we have vexed the Above and the Region of the Dead,  
if our foulness and corruption rose up,  
if it wafted to the Above, to the heavens,  
then, perhaps, this is all; perhaps, this is the end.  
Perhaps, at this very moment darkness shall come  
and all shall perish, all shall disappear from the earth.

What can we say? What is the use? To whom can we appeal?  
It has been ordained.

At least let the common people have fullness and abundance;  
let them not know total dissolution.  
Their hearts and bodies are in torment,  
day and night their hearts burn, their hearts are on fire!  
A monstrous serpent is within them  
slavering and panting and shrieking;  
it is terrifying how it burns, how it shrieks, how it howls!

Perhaps now is coming true, now is coming to pass,  
what the men and women of old knew, what they handed down:  
that the heavens over us shall sunder,  
that the demons of the air shall descend  
and come to destroy the earth and devour the people,  
that darkness shall prevail, that nothing be left on earth.  
Our grandmothers and grandfathers knew it,  
they handed it down, it was their tradition  
that it would come to pass, that it would come to be.

And now to the ends of the earth, to the outermost bounds of the earth,  
the land is devastated.  
It is all over now, it is the end;  
the earth's seeds have withered,  
like old men and women they have shriveled,  
and nothing has food, no one shall give food and drink to another.

O, Our Lord, let it not go on like this,  
let there be fullness and abundance for all!  
Or, let pestilence seize the people in its grip,  
let the Lord of the Region of the Dead do his work, take up his duties.  
The, perhaps, Chicomecoatl and Cinteotl shall sustain them,  
shall succor them a little;  
perhaps, into their mouths she shall put a drop of corn gruel, a  
scrap of food, as provisions for their journey.  
Or let the Sun, the Eagle Ascendant, the Precious Child, the Valiant One,  
the Brave Warrior, the Everlastingly Resplendent One, do his work.

Then the people, and the Eagle and Jaguar Knights shall rejoice,  
for in the middle, in the center, of the battlefield they shall be charred,  
and their hair shall scatter, their bones whiten, their skulls split open.  
And they shall know the House of the Sun,  
where the sun is amused, where his praises are sung,  
where the nectar of the sundry sweet and fragrant flowers is sipped,  
where the Eagle and Jaguar Knights,  
the brave and valiant who die in battle, are glorified.

And the little child, the tot,  
still a chick, still a mite, not sensible of anything,

as jade, as turquoise, he shall go to heaven, the House of the Sun;  
a perfect jade, a perfect turquoise, a smooth and lustrous turquoise,  
is the heart he shall offer the sun.

And your sister Chicomecoatl shall sustain him,  
the sister of the gods, the Providers, shall enter his belly,  
and thus he shall be provided for his journey;  
she shall lift him to that far-off place.  
For she alone is our flesh and bones,  
she alone is our staff and support,  
she alone is our strength and fortitude; she is man's entire recompense.

O Lord, O Lord,  
the people, the subjects- the led, the guided, the governed-  
now behold, now feel, now are filled to bursting  
with the searing pain of affliction.  
Their flesh and bones are stricken by want and privation,  
they are worn, spent, and in torment;  
indeed, the pain reaches to the heart of them.  
Not only once, or merely twice  
do they behold, do they suffer death!  
And the animals, also.

O Lord, O King,  
Lord of the Verdure, Lord of Rubber, Lord of the Sweet-Scented Marigold!  
May it be your will,  
may you, at least, cast a sidelong glance at the people.  
They are going, they are perishing, they are vanishing,  
they are breaking and crumbling,  
they are disappearing from the earth,  
the suckling infants are wizened and dying,  
the little ones that crawl are wasting away!

May it be your will, O, Our Lord,  
may you grant that the gods, the Providers,  
the Lords of the Sweet-Scented Marigold and the Lords of Copal do their work,  
that they see to their tasks on earth.  
May bounty and good fortune be unleashed,  
may the sweet-scented marigold rattles shake,  
may the rattle boards of the mist clatter,  
may the gods don their rubber sandals!  
Oh, with a sprinkle, with a few drops of dew,  
may you succor, may you aid, Tlaltecuitli, Lord of the Earth,  
who feeds and nourishes man!  
And may you comfort the anguished fruits of the earth,  
beloved child, sister of the gods,  
who feebly drags herself through the rows,  
who is wilting and withering in the rows!

Let the people be blessed with fullness and abundance,  
let them behold, let them enjoy, the jade and the turquoise-the precious vegetation  
the flesh of Our Lords, the Providers, the Gods of Rain,  
who bring, who shower down, the riches that are theirs alone.  
And let the plants and animals be blessed with fullness and abundance,  
let the troupial and the roseate spoonbill sing,  
let them flutter their wings, let them sip the sweet nectar.

Oh, let now the Gods of Rain loose their wrath and indignation,  
for the people are enfeebled  
and they shall frighten them, they shall strike terror into them.  
Let them not lash themselves into a fury,  
but let the only take, let them only strike the one who is theirs,  
who was born, who came into the world, marked for Tlalocan,  
who is their property, their possession.  
Let them not deceived the people  
that inhabit the forests and open plains,  
that dwell in the wild, untilled fields.  
Neither let them do this;  
let them not blight the trees, the magueys, the prickly pears, and all that grows,  
for they are the root and the life of the people,  
the sustenance of the poor and hapless,  
those living in misery and want, the destitute,  
who have nothing to eat in the morning, nothing in the evening,  
who go about empty, their stomachs rumbling.

O Lord, Beloved Lord, O Provider!  
May it be in your heart to grant, to give, to bring comfort to the earth  
and all that lives from it, all that grows on it.  
And you who inhabit the four quarters of the universe,  
you the Lords of Verdure, you the Providers,  
you the Lords of the Mountain Heights, you the Lords of the Cavernous Depths,  
I call out, I cry out to you:  
come, bring yourselves here,  
comfort the people, slake the thirst of the earth;  
the earth and the animals, the leaves and stalks  
are watching and waiting and crying out.  
O gods, Our Lords, make haste!

# Pre-columbian Art

Utah Museum of Fine Arts

Evening for Educators

March 10, 2004, 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

## Bat Effigy Head



Mexico, Central Veracruz region, Maya culture, Early Classic Period (300-600)  
**Bat Effigy Head**  
Earthenware  
Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum  
Museum # 1987.048.002  
Photograph by Elizabeth Firmage

Bats have always played a role in the religions of the peoples of Mesoamerica. The bat-god appears prominently in the art and iconography of the ancient lowland Maya. Bats were believed to have special relations to the underworld where the bat has super-natural power and is considered a bringer of rain.<sup>1</sup>

In the myth of the Hero Twins, the ruler of the Bats is the god Camazotz. In Mayan mythology a dying man had to pass through the "bat house" on his way to the depths of the earth. There he would meet the Death Bat, Camazotz, a "dismembering animal." "The remarkable feature of bat-god images is that many of them carry...a stylized motif--based upon a Zapotec hieroglyph--which is thought to be a symbol modeled upon the 'eyebrow' (or superocular) scale of a Mexican variety of rattlesnake." (Mundkur, 1983).<sup>2</sup>

The vampire bat is a reality in the tropical areas of the Americas and perhaps that is the

compelling reason for the prominent role of bats in the art of the Maya. These bats, belonging to the Desmodonitae family, live solely on the blood of vertebrate animals and often had a great deal of significance as it was equated with life and the life force. This had a great religious importance in Mesoamerica when blood sacrifice, in many forms, was one of the major elements in pre-Hispanic life.

<sup>1</sup>Bernadette Brown, UMFA Pre-Columbian notes.

<sup>2</sup><http://www.unm.edu/~reality/Deeds/bat-p.htm>, January 4, 2004.



# Papier Maché Animal Head

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## A lesson plan for *Bat Effigy Head* written by Tiya Karaus

### Objectives:

Students will create an animal effigy head out of papier maché.

Students will be able to explain what an effigy is and how it was used in Maya culture.

### State core links:

Standard 3

Students will create meaning in sculpture.

### Objective 1

Create content in sculpture.

- Identify subject matter, metaphor, themes, symbols, and content in sculpture.
- Create sculpture that effectively communicates subject matter, metaphor, themes, symbols, or individually conceived content.
- Create divergent, novel, or individually inspired applications of sculpture or art elements and principles that express content.

### Materials:

scratch paper

pencils

newspaper

masking tape

wallpaper paste or flour and water mixture

paper or plastic bowls

buckets

paint brushes

tempera paints

sand paper

shellac

Optional: wire or paper tubes

**Initiation:** For the Maya, art was created to serve a purpose and convey meaning. Although the art is quite striking in its composition, design, and appearance, it was primarily intended as a way to communicate information to the viewer. *Ask students what information the bat effigy head might have conveyed to a person looking at this sculpture.* Ask for a definition of the word effigy. (as defined by Webster's dictionary: 1. A crude figure or dummy representing a hated person or group. 2. A likeness or image, especially of a person).

*Ask students what words or images they associate with bats.* The bat had a special place in Maya mythology and religious beliefs. For the Maya, bats were animals of the underworld, Xibalba, or "Place of Fright". Upon death, a person entered Xibalba, which was either a place of peace or suffering depending on how one had lived his or her life. The inhabitants of Xibalba were often portrayed as disease ridden creatures 'with distended bellies and foul breath, the Xibalbans emit-

ted streams of excrement and flatulence, are frequently shown wearing necklaces of puked-out eyeballs.’ (from page 82 *The Maya : Life, Myth, and Art* by Timothy Laughton) Caves were believed to be entrances to Xibalba, and this is where the dead were buried and special rituals were performed. As cave dwelling creatures were believed to possess supernatural powers and the bringers of rain, bats were both feared and revered.

Popular characters in Maya myths were the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, sons of the maize god, Hun Hunahpu. Their father was an avid ball player, who angered the lords of Xibalba by playing very noisily above their heads. For this offense he was decapitated. Hunahpu and Xbalanque were themselves very good ball players and very noisy like their father. They came to the attention of the Xibalbans and were commanded to travel to the underworld to perform a series of tests.

On the first night the twins were given a burning torch and a lit cigar. The Xibalbans challenged the twins to maintain the items in the state they were given to them until the next morning. Cleverly, the twins replaced the torch flame with red macaw feathers. Then they put out the cigar and used fireflies to make it appear lit.

Hunahpu and Xbalanque met the challenges over the next several nights of the houses of knives, jaguar, extreme cold, and fire.\* Finally, they were sent to spend the night in the house of Camazota, the Death Bat. **At this point in the tale, ask students to predict what happens next. Predictions can be given orally or recorded in a journal.**

The twins were able to use their powers to hide themselves in their blow pipes. As the night wore on Xbalanque asked his brother if it was safe to come out. Hunahpu stuck his head out to check for Camazotz. This was a mistake, as Camazotz suddenly swooped down and snatched off his head. The Xibalbans then forced Xbalanque to play the ball game with them, while they used his brother’s head as the ball. However, Xbalanque was able to distract his opponents long enough to substitute the ball and reattach his brother’s head.

Having learned more about the place of bats in Maya culture, return to the idea of effigy. Where might this sculpture have been placed and for what purposes? There are no incorrect answers to this question. In fact, these are the very same questions art historians and archeologist are often trying to answer.

Ask students to think of their least favorite animal, one that terrifies or has symbolic meaning for them. They will be constructing a paper mache model of this animal’s head. Keep in mind that this should be neither a flattering or precise representation of the animal. It is more important to convey feelings about the animal to the viewer.

\*The complete tale of the Hero Twins is recounted in the *Popol Vuh*

### **Project:**

1. It is helpful to begin by having students made a rough sketch of the animal head they wish to construct.

2. Each student will begin by placing a bowl upside down in front of them; this will form the base of the head and ensure that it can stand upright. Using crumpled newspaper and masking tape form the shape of the head around and on top of the bowl. (Wire and cardboard tubes can also be used to form the shape of the head.)

3. Cut or tear newspaper into strips, approximately 1 inch wide. (This step can be done ahead to save time.)
4. Mix paste in buckets to the consistency of cream. If making flour mixture use 2 cups of water for every cup of flour. (This step can be done ahead to save time.)
5. Place a strip of paper in the paste until it is saturated. Remove the strip from the bucket and wipe off excess paste by pulling the strip between the fingers.
6. Lay the strip on the animal head frame and smooth it down with fingers. Continue to cover the frame.
7. Let dry over night.
8. Add between 3 to 6 layers, allowing the heads to dry overnight.
9. Sandpaper the surface until smooth, if desired.
10. Use paint to decorate. It is recommend to spray with a clear plastic or paint with shellac the completed animal heads for permanence.

Helpful papier maché hints: Wear old clothes or smocks for this project. Work over newspaper. Throw leftover paste in the garbage, not down the drain. Wipe excess paste off hands with paper towels before washing them.

**Assessment:** see attached rubric

# Animal Effigy Head Rubric

## Neat Appearance

5 points The head is very neat in appearance.	4 points	3 points The head is pretty neat.	2 points	1 point The head is not neat in appearance.
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## Complete

5 points The head is painted and varnished	4 points	3 points The head is painted but not varnished	2 points	1 point The head is neither painted nor varnished
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## Conveys Meaning

5 points Meaning is easily understood	4 points	3 points Meaning is less clear	2 points	1 point Meaning is not understood
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15 points

## **Sources**

Books on the Maya:

*The Maya : Life, Myth, and Art* by Timothy Laughton

*Daily life in Maya Civilization* by Robert J. Sharer

*A Study of Maya Art* by Herbert J. Spinden

*The Mayas of the Classical Period* by A. Arellano Hernandez

*Popol Vuh : the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* translated by Dennis Tedlock

## **Maya related websites:**

Hero Twin Myth: <http://www.uwec.edu/greider/Indigenous/Meso-America/ballgame/myth.htm>

## **Variations**

K-3rd grade lesson - Maya Monster Mask

Objective: Students will create a monster mask using the colors (yellow, green, red, blue) that are characteristic of Maya art.

## **Materials:**

paper plates

construction paper (yellow, green, red, blue)

crayons, paint, or markers

scissors

glue

glitter or other decorative items

tape

tongue depressors or ply wood stick

## **Initiation:**

After showing a picture of the bat effigy head ask students how it made them feel. Did they like the picture? Explain that in Maya culture, the bat was a frightening creature, which lived both on earth and in the underworld. Bats were believed to have supernatural powers, they could bring rain for instance. The Maya were afraid of bats and did not want to upset them. Ask students what they're afraid of.

Read *There's a Nightmare in my Closet* by Mercer Mayer

## **Project:**

1. Pass out paper plates, one per student.

2. Demonstrate features, such as nose, curls, bumps, that may be added to the mask.

Nose: Fold a piece of construction paper. With the fold as the center line, draw half of a nose shape. Cut out. The nose can be attached to the mask so that it protrudes from the mask.

Bump: Cut a circle out of paper, and then make a cut into the center of the circle. Spread glue long one edge of the cut and overlap it with the other edge.

Curl: Cut a skinny strip of paper. Wrap it tightly around a pen or pencil to curl it.

3. Make paper and decorating materials available to students.

4. When mask is complete, attach tongue depressor at base of mask as a handle.



## Alternative lesson for 5th -12th grades- Soft Stone Carving

**Objective:** Students will create an animal effigy head by carving the figure out of soft stone.

**Materials:**

spoon  
stick  
paint brush  
nail  
milk carton (one per student)  
plaster of Paris  
vermiculite (available at garden stores, ground rather than flaky works better)  
1/4 cup measuring cup  
buckets and water  
newspaper  
plastic bags

**Initiation:** see Papier mache initiation

**Project:**

1. On a surface covered with news paper, measure 3/4 cup vermiculite and 1/2 cup plaster into a bucket. Add about 1/2 cup water and stir with stick, until it reaches consistency of thick gravy.
2. Pour plaster into milk carton. It will turn hard in about fifteen minutes and be ready to carve in half an hour.
3. Next, peel away the milk carton. Use spoon to shape and carve the animal head.
4. Detail can be added by using a nail as a sculpting tool.
5. If needed, sculpture will remain soft and workable for up to two days if wrapped in a plastic bag.
6. When finished allow sculpture to dry for two weeks. Then paint and varnish for shine and protection.

\*Variation lessons adapted from Art Fun! by Kim Solga, Kathy Savage-Hubbard and Rose Speicher

**Extension(s)**

Social Studies:

Compare Maya culture and society with other ancient peoples throughout the world.

Construct models of Maya temples.

Language Arts:

Write a Maya myth about the Hero Twins.

Mathematics:

Explore Maya counting system and calendar.

## Carved Yoke



Guatemala, Cotzumalhuapa region, Maya culture, Early classic Period (300-600)

**Carved Yoke**

Mottled stone with traces of cinnabar

Purchased with funds from Friends of the Art Museum

Museum # 1979.180

Photograph by Elizabeth Firmage

The carved yoke is representational of a very important piece of equipment used in the ancient ball-games of Mesoamerica. Games have been a part of human culture for thousands of years. The story of the first team sports ever played with a rubber ball begins about 1500 B.C. This occurs neither in Europe nor in Asia but in the New World on the Gulf Coast of Mexico.<sup>1</sup> In Mexico, which was the heartland of the ancient ball-game tradition, well over 600 stone ballcourts have been found and many more undoubtedly exist still covered over by jungle or modern towns. Archaeological evidence indicates that games were played wherever rubber, used for the balls, was available or could be obtained through the trade.

The game, played usually in a rectangular court with sloping walls, was played with a solid rubber ball—each player with the objective of getting the ball through two rings at either side of the field. The game could be compared to modern soccer, with the players moving the ball up and down the field without using their hands. The ball could be hit with the knees, stomach, elbows, hips, and legs.<sup>2</sup> During the playing of the Mesoamerican ballgame, athletes wore special equipment to protect them from injury and to help deflect and hit the ball.

It is believed that the stone yokes were not actually worn during the game, but were used in pre-game rituals by the elite and the priests.<sup>3</sup> They represented protective belts worn around the players' waists, usually made of leather or basketry. Yokes, like the one in the UMFA collection, were cut from diorite, basalt, or other fine hard stone.<sup>4</sup> While much of our information on ballcourts comes from the accounts of European observers, there is a variety of Mesoamerican artifacts that have been used to interpret the significance of the ballgame and its accoutrements. Ceramic figurines recovered from sites serve as models for what a ballplayer might have looked like and the role he might have played, and demonstrate to a certain degree how ballgame gear might have been worn. These carvings and sculptures also provide some insight into modes of play, outfitting of players, and the religious concepts associated with the game.<sup>5</sup>

The ballgame carried both religious and political significance. The game symbolized the divine struggle between light and darkness, summer and winter, life and death.<sup>6</sup> Because of its connection with the Gods, the playing of the game could be used in a ceremonial, religious function on holy days or to commemorate special events within the community.

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Jane S. Day, Denver Museum of Natural History [http://linux1.tlc.north.denver.k12.co.us/~gmoreno/gmoreno/Mesoamerican\\_Ballgame.html](http://linux1.tlc.north.denver.k12.co.us/~gmoreno/gmoreno/Mesoamerican_Ballgame.html)

<sup>2</sup>UMFA Pre-Columbian notes

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/ex048\\_06g.html](http://www.humanities-interactive.org/splendors/ex048_06g.html)

<sup>4</sup>UMFA Pre-Columbian notes

<sup>5</sup><http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A830431>

<sup>6</sup>Ferdinand Anton and Frederick J. Dockstader, *Pre-Columbian Art and Later Indian Tribal Arts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams INC.), 118.

# Maya Animal Belt

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## A lesson plan for *Carved Yoke* written by Tiya Karaus

### Objective:

Students will construct an animal belt in the theme of the yoke worn during the Maya ballgames.

### State core links

#### Standard 2

The student will analyze, reflect on, and apply the structures of art.

#### Objective 1

Analyze and reflect on works of art by their elements and principles.

Compare/contrast ways in which artists have used elements such as line, shape, color, value, and texture in both significant 2-D and 3-D works of art.

Hypothesize ways artists choose to use certain elements or principles more abundantly in their works than others.

#### Objective 2

Create works of art using the elements and principles.

Modify the value of colors in artwork to create intentional effects.

Create the illusion of depth in works of art.

### Materials

Construction paper

Pipe cleaners

Stapler/glue/tape

Pencil/marker/paint

Scissors

### Activity

#### Initiation:

Students can be asked to research the Maya ball-game prior to the art lesson if time permits. A brief description follows, along with the museums' description of the Study of Carved Yoke.

Questions to begin discussion of the piece:

What is this? What do you think it was used for? How do you think it was made and from what materials?

For the peoples of Mesoamerica, including the Maya, athletics had a social and religious function. The ballgame in particular was extremely popular and important to these ancient peoples. The I-shaped courts in which the games were played were often in the center of the city. From the ruins of the courts, as well as works of art, archeologist and art historians have worked to learn as much as possible about this ancient ball-game.

The exact rules of the ball-game are not known, however the eye-witness accounts of European explorers used in conjunction with the art and architecture of the time give us general understanding of the game. Two teams, in Maya ritual games most often 2 players per side, would face off. The goal was to put a ball through a stone hoop without the use of the players' hands or feet. Because the hoop was just slightly larger than the ball, the first team to do this was the winner.

As with sports today, special equipment and ritual developed around the ball-game, one of these pieces was the yoke. Yokes were believed to be worn like belts, however their exact purpose is still the subject of debate. Yokes carved out of stone were probably only worn for ceremonial purposes before the game began. Wooden yokes were worn as protection around the waist during the ball-game. It is also possible that yokes were given to captives while playing the ball-game to make it more difficult for them, thus ensuring victory for the other side.

### **Project:**

Students will construct their own ceremonial Maya yoke.

1. Begin by having students brainstorm some of their favorite animals. Next to the animal, list attributes of the animal that, if given to a person, would help them in the ball-game. For example: Rabbit; hopping, agility, quickness. Students should then choose one of the animals for their belt design.

2. Make the belt by gluing, stapling or taping 4-inch wide strips of construction paper to fit around students' waists.

3. To this belt, attach pipe cleaners to the top and bottom of the belt. This piece can be set aside, as it will form the inside of the belt.

4. Make a second belt the same length or slightly longer than the first.

5. This belt should be decorated using markers or paint.

Looking at the Maya calendar (following this lesson plan) can give students ideas about common Maya shapes and designs.

Students can also use shading and cross-hatching to give the illusion of carving. (Examples follow lesson plan)

6. At both ends of the belt, the student's chosen animal should be portrayed. This can be done by cutting the end of the belt to form the shape of the animal or by constructing the animal (or animal head) out of a separate paper and attaching it to the belt.

7. Finally, lay the two pieces of the belt together sandwiching the pipe cleaners between them and secure them with staples, tape, or glue.

**Assessment:** Rubric follows

### **Extension**

Physical Education:

In small groups, students can brainstorm a movement or exercise that is representative of each of their animals. Groups can then do each of their exercises for one minute as a warm-up to gym time.

Students can also run relay races based on the movement of their animals. For example, hop down the length of the gym and crab walk back.

Of course animal belts can be worn to a student or teacher-developed variation of the ball game.

# Animal Effigy Head Rubric

## Completion

5 points Belt is complete	4 points	3points Belt is mostly complete	2 points	1 point Belt is incomplete
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## Appearance:

5 points Attention was given to detail and craftsmanship of belt	4 points	3points Some attention was given to detail and craftsmanship of belt	2 points	1 point Little attention was given to detail and craftsmanship of belt
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## Design:

5 points Maya design was incorporated into belt	4 points	3points Some Maya design was incorporated into belt	2 points	1 point Little Maya design was incorporated into belt
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## Meaning:

5 points Student gives clear explanation of the animal and traits of the animal on the belt	4 points	3points Student gives a somewhat clear explanation of the animal and traits of the animal on the belt	2 points	1 point Student gives unclear explanation of the animal and traits of the animal on the belt
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## Sources

Books on the Maya

*The Maya : Life, Myth, and Art* by Timothy Laughton

*Daily life in Maya Civilization* by Robert J. Sharer

*A Study of Maya Art* by Herbert J. Spinden

*The Mayas of the Classical Period* by A. Arellano Hernandez

## Ball Game Websites:

The Ball Game <http://members.aol.com/cabrakan/ball.htm>

Mayan Kids <http://www.mayankids.com/mmkpeople/mkballgame.htm>

The Ball Game <http://www.pacaritambo.com/culture.html>

Mundo Maya Online <http://www.mayadiscovery.com/ing/notes/default.htm>



## Maya Calendar -Symbols

From *The Maya: Life, Myth, and Art* by Timothy Laughton



Imix



Ik



Akbal



Kan



Chicchan



Cimi



Manik



Lamat



Muluc



Oc



Chuen



Eb



Ben



Ix



Men



Cib



Caban



Etz'nab



Cauac



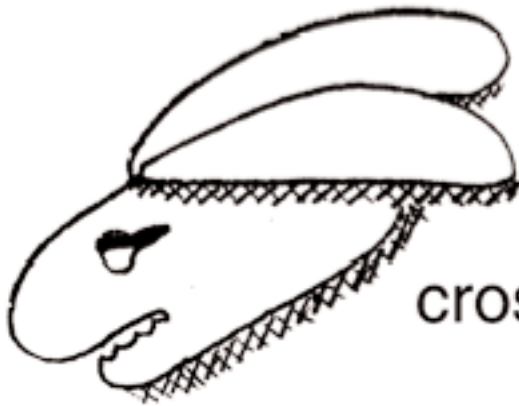
Ahau



Each day of the 260-day calendar was represented by a combination of one of the twenty day-signs (shown here in red), and a number from one through thirteen. The first day would be 1 *Imix*, the second 2 *Ik*, and so on. On the fourteenth day, seven signs remain, but the numbers have run out—at this point, therefore, the numbers revert to one, making 1 *Ix*. When the count returns to *Imix* for the second time, it will be paired with the number eight. It takes 260 days before the number one and the sign *Imix* come together again, beginning the cycle once more. Shown in blue are the eighteen month-signs, and the sign for the short “unlucky” month of *Uayeb*.



shading



cross-hatch