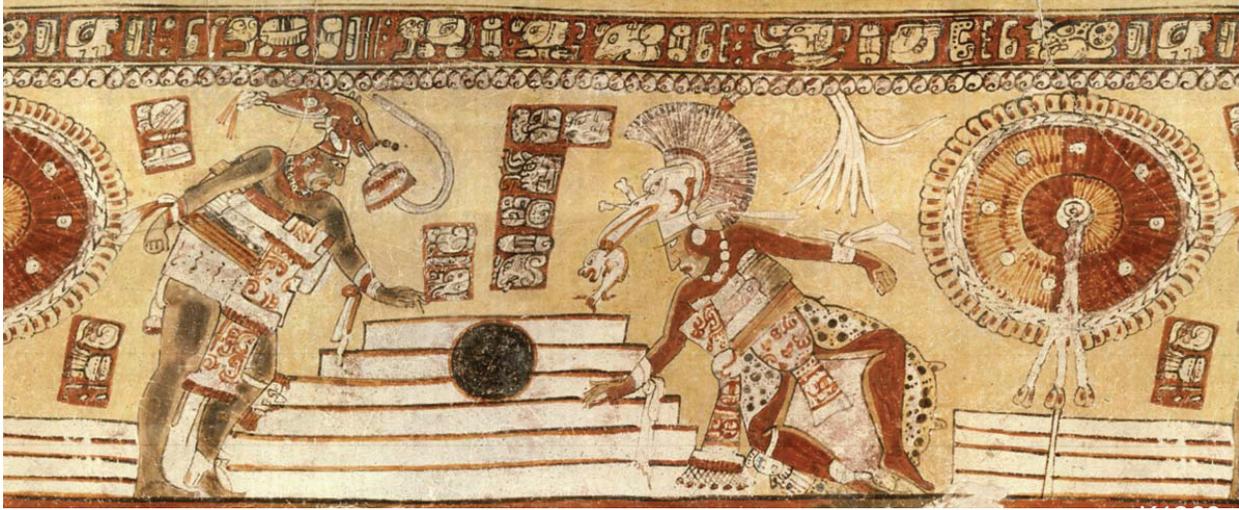


MAYA MYTHOLOGY

THE HERO TWINS & THE POPUL VUH

SOCIAL STUDIES, GRADES: 5–8



“Many moons ago, at the start of creation, two upstarts from Middleworld were summoned to Xibalba to play ball against the Death Lords. Their names were Hunahpu and Xbalanke, the Hero Twins. Before the ballgame could begin, the twins were tested in other ways: by deadly trials of darkness, cold, jaguars, bats, knives, and fire. The twins somehow survived . . . and by unfair means went on to win the game. Long have we tasted the bitterness of that defeat. Now, at long last, our day of vengeance is here.”

The Jaguar Stones, Book Three: The River of No Return, page 236

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

Why were myths important to Maya society?

Sub Questions:

- What do myths explain?
- How do myths relate to a society’s world view?
- How are Maya myths similar to, or different from our own?

MATERIALS/RESOURCES:

- Paper, pencils and other art materials.
- Access to research materials
- Selected passages from the Popul Vuh

OBJECTIVES:

The students will know:

- Common myth of the ancient Maya and modern Americans.
- The role of myths in Maya society and American society.
- The importance of creating myths within a culture.

The students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast ancient and modern myths.
- Analyze myths and determine the core values of the culture that created them.

RATIONALE:

Myths and legends are not simply stories, but a representative of the society that creates them. The ancient Maya had a detailed and complex mythological system which still survives as a written account – the Popul Vuh. The stories in the Popul Vuh have allowed archaeologists a glimpse of the Maya ways of thinking, and provided insight into their society as a whole.

KEY VOCABULARY:

Myth: An old story that attempts to explain origins of natural phenomena and / or human behavior.

Creation Story: Similar to a myth, it is a story focused on how the Earth or world began; these stories vary by culture and typically reflect the world view of the people and their natural surroundings, animals and other objects associated with their region.

Legend: A traditional story popularly regarded as historical, but not necessarily authenticated.

Tall Tale: An improbable (unusual, incredible or fanciful) story.

Popul Vuh: The sacred book of the Quiché Maya people outlining their creation story, cosmogony, religion, mythology, migratory traditions, and history.

Hero Twins: Twin brothers Hunahpu and Xbalanke whose story is told in the Popul Vuh. They are challenged to play a ballgame by the Lords of Death. The twins outwit their opponents and take their places in the heavens as the sun and moon.

Xibalba: Quiche Maya name for the underworld, meaning “Well of Fear”.

Lords of Death: In Maya mythology the underworld is ruled by the twelve Lords of Death: the most powerful being Hun-Kame (One Death) and Vukub-Kame (Seven Death). The remaining ten Lords of Death are demons responsible for different forms of human suffering, disease and death. They work in pairs and are: Xiquiripat (Scab Stripper) and Kuchumaquik (Blood Gatherer), who sicken people’s blood; Ahalpuh (Demon of Pus) and Ahalgana (Demon of Jaundice), who cause people’s bodies to swell up; Chamiaabak (Bone Scepter) and Chamiaholom (Skull Scepter), who turn dead bodies into skeletons; Ahalmes (Demon of Filth) and Ahaltokob (Demon of Woe), who hide in the unclean areas of people houses and stab them to death; and Xik (Wing) and Patan (Packstrap), who cause people to die coughing up blood while out walking on the road.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT DO MYTHS SAY ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO CREATE THEM?**Procedure:**

1. As a class, create a list of American myths (students may recognize these better if described as “Tall Tales”), such as Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, the Legend of Sleepy Hollow, George Washington and the Cherry Tree, etc..
2. Have the class break up into small groups and assign each group one of the American myths. Ask each to discuss their myth and determine what the myths attempt to explain and/or what lessons they teach. What values does it promote (or what vices does it discourage?) How does the story reflect American society as a whole?
3. Have each group present their myth and their conclusions to the class.

Expansion:

1. As a class create a wide list of current cultural heroes in America (this could be sport superstars, celebrities, astronauts, entrepreneurs, technology gurus, etc.). Identify traits that our current heroes have. What does this say about the attributes we value? Could today’s heroes find their place in the myths our generation leaves to future ages? If America was discovered by archeologists hundreds of years from now, and the only surviving texts were of its myths, what would the archeologists think of our society?
2. Have the students pick a contemporary person they admire and write a myth that future generations might tell about them. Students should explain what their story teaches and why it is relevant.

ACTIVITY 2: THE MAYA CREATION MYTH

1. Read the story of the Hero Twins from the Popul Vuh (Maya creation story). As a class: discuss what natural phenomena the myth explains; identify what values it embodies and talk about the role of myths in Maya culture. What assumptions do we make about the Maya based on their stories?
2. Compare and contrast the values promoted by the story of the Hero Twins with American myths - or Tall Tales. Are there any similar stories in American culture?
3. The ancient Maya illustrated themes from the story of the Hero Twins in murals, sculpture, pottery and costumes. Review Maya art in books and on the internet and have the students create one of the following:
 - Wall mural or poster showing the Hero Twins journey to the underworld.
 - Clay figure of one of the characters in the story.
 - Clay drinking vessel decorated with a scene from the Popul Vuh.
 - Headdress or costume of one of the Lords of Death

Expansion:

- **Design a Game:** have the students create a board game based on the adventures of the Hunahpu and Xbalanke in Xibalba. Students should list the details they wish to include in the game, write a rule book and design and produce the necessary accessories: board, cards, dice, spinners, etc. Invite your students to exchange their games and provide feedback to each other on the ease of use and playability of their creations.

- **Myth creation:** have the students write and illustrate their own myths. These can be recorded in a Maya codex style book, as a story board, or in a comic book. The myths could explain a natural phenomenon, or provide a moral lesson. Some students may want to think of an emotion (love, envy, fear or jealousy) and write an adventure using that emotion as the theme. After the myths have been written, invite your students to present their myths to the class.
- **Advertising:** Today celebrity testimonials are often featured in advertising. Ask your students to create their own ad campaign (for a real or imaginary product) that the Hero Twins or a Lord of Death would endorse.
- **Family Tree:** Create a "family tree" for Hunahpu or Xbalanke based on the information in the Popul Vuh. Family trees can be illustrated with pictures and include a short description of each individual's role and importance in the character's life.

ASSESSMENT:

Students should be assessed both on their participation in class discussion, as well as their creation and presentation of their own myth. Artifacts will include their own personal myth.

RESOURCES:

The story of the Hero Twins (short narrative):

<http://www.jaguarstones.co.uk/lessons/HeroTwins2.pdf>

Hero Twins animated video: produced by the Arts Lab - University of New Mexico.

<https://vimeo.com/7068725>

The Illustrated Popul Vuh: a photographic essay by Justin Kerr (64 page pdf, 6.9 MB)

www.mayavase.com/PopolVuh.pdf

USEFUL LINKS:

The Popul Vuh (287 pages, 1 MB) The Sacred Book of the Quiché Maya People, translation and commentary by Allen J. Christenson www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PopolVuh.pdf

Award winning ballgame website for students includes a video reenactment of the Mesoamerican Ballgame. <http://mesoballgame.org/ballgame/>

Video of Ulama (the version of the Mesoamerican Ballgame still being played in Sinaloa, Mexico)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rReFhUtZzYc>

BOOKS:

The Hero Twins: Against the Lords of Death: A Mayan Myth, Graphic Universe
By Dan Jolly & David Witt

Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of The Dawn of Life and The Glories of Gods and Kings
Touchstone, Translated by Dennis Tedlock