

# MIDDLEWORLD

## DISCUSSION & TEACHING GUIDE LANGUAGE ARTS, GRADES: 5–9

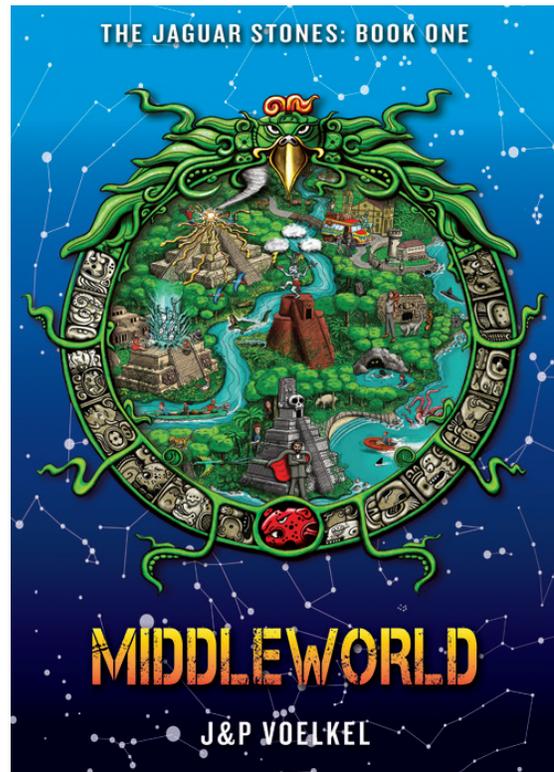
*This lesson plan was created with the assistance of award winning author and former middle school teacher Kate Messner.*

“Max was speechless. So many questions were going through his mind. He stood there with his mouth open, until one question formed itself into words.”

*The Jaguar Stones, Book One: Middleworld, page 121*

### 1. CHAPTER BY CHAPTER DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Preface:** What do you already know about ancient Maya culture? How does Lord 6-Dog’s story in the Preface match or conflict with your prior knowledge?
- Chapter 1:** Why do you think Max is suspicious about the ticket to San Xavier, even though it’s a place he’s wanted to go? If you were Max, would you get on the plane?
- Chapter 2:** Based on what you know about Oscar so far, do you trust him? Why or why not?
- Chapter 3:** How well has Max’s video game experiences prepared him for the real world of Latin America? Does he seem brave so far? How do you think you would have reacted to the situations he’s faced?
- Chapter 4:** Do you think Max is right to be worried about his parents? What evidence have you seen or heard that things might not be all right?
- Chapter 5:** If you were Max, what conclusions would you draw about what you found in the underground rooms?
- Chapter 6:** Why do you think Max’s father kept so many secrets about his past and the family’s history? If you were Max, how might learning those secrets change your view of your dad?
- Chapter 7:** What’s your theory about the monkeys? Do you think Max did the right thing by following them?
- Chapter 8:** How does Lola challenge what Max thought he knew about the Maya? How is she different from what he’d imagined or learned from video games?
- Chapter 9:** When Lola says “Life is hard in the rainforest. Everything is fighting for survival,” what does she mean? Can you think of examples, other than the tree roots?



- Chapter 10:** How do you think Max has changed since he went into the forest? Do his attitudes toward the Maya and the forest seem different than when he first arrives?
- Chapter 11:** How do you think Max's attitude toward Lola has changed since he first met her when he woke up in the tree?
- Chapter 12:** When Max gets to the village, he remembers Zia from Boston. Why do you think he's wondering about her, and how might she be connected to what's happening to him now?
- Chapter 13:** Why do you think Eusebio chooses to go ashore and use the natural world to explain rainforest life to Max? How do the orchid, trumpet tree, poisonwood, gumbo limbo, and strangler fig help him make his point? Can you think of examples of these kinds of relationships in your world?
- Chapter 14:** If you were Max, what would you think of Hermanjilio's revelation about his parents?
- Chapter 15:** In this chapter, Lola says, "Some people say that all archaeology is theft." What do you think she means by this? Do you think that's true?
- Chapter 16:** Why do you think Hermanjilio is so willing to follow the visions from his dream? How does the Maya view of dreams differ from ours?
- Chapter 17:** Max says he's realized that there's "a thin line...between real and not real" in the jungle. What do you think he means? Of the experiences he's had so far, what would be hardest for you to believe was real?
- Chapter 18:** When Lord 6-Dog understands that he must inhabit the body of a howler monkey, he has a strange feeling "that this moment was meant to happen." How does this chapter connect with the book's preface?
- Chapter 19:** A lot has changed since Lord 6-Dog and Lady Coco were last in Middleworld. What do they notice is different, and how do the two react to the changes differently?
- Chapter 20:** When Lady Coco says, "When your future's been decided by the gods, you don't question it," Lola challenges her to think differently. How might these different belief systems affect the way people (or ancient spirits!) act?
- Chapter 21:** Max is delighted to get the job of guarding the camp at the end of Chapter 21. Do you think it will work out the way he expects? Make some predictions about what might happen. If you were there, which job would you want?
- Chapter 22:** Max is warned, "They will use your fears against you." Based on his experiences in Chapter 22, what are Max's greatest fears? Based on Max's experiences, can you guess what might have happened to Lola? If you'd been there, what fears might Ah Pukuh have chosen to use against you?
- Chapter 23:** Is Uncle Ted a good guy or a bad guy? What evidence can you find in this chapter to support both of those arguments?
- Chapter 24:** Why do you think Hermanjilio did what he did at the end of this chapter?
- Chapter 25:** If you were Max, how would you have handled the Death Lords' offer? Do you think he did the right thing?
- Chapter 26:** Why do you think Landa had taken all of those photographs of Lola? What clues can you find in this last chapter to help you predict what might happen in the next Jaguar Stones book?

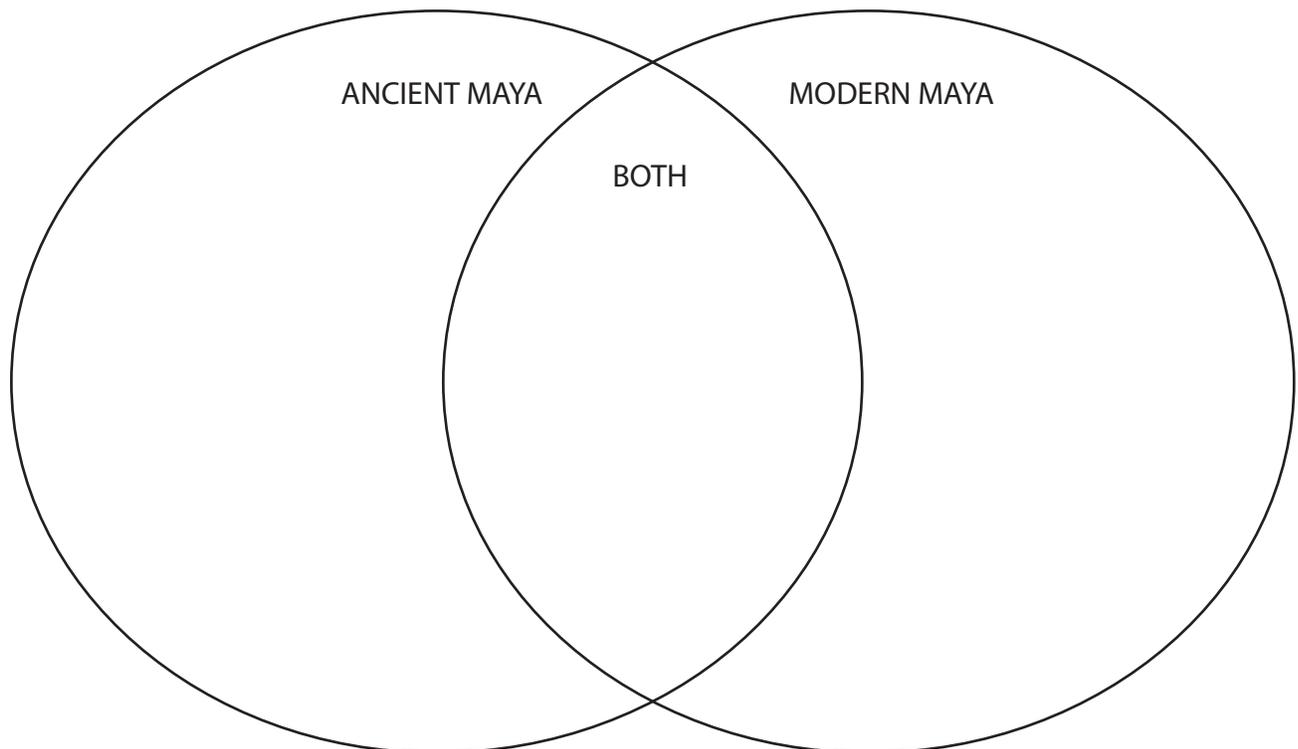
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**2. ANCIENT VS MODERN MAYA**

**Then and Now:**

Based on the research details included in MIDDLEWORLD, how are the ancient Maya similar to modern Maya like Lola and Lucky Jim? How are they different, and what's changed over the years? Hint: Check Chapter 19 to find details about what Lord 6-Dog and Lady Coco find different from their world.

Use the Venn diagram below to help organize your ideas and examples from the text.



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**COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

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### 3. CHARACTER CHANGES

How do you think Max's experiences in MIDDLEWORLD changed him? How are his beliefs and values different at the end of the book? Use the graphic organizer below to brainstorm and gather evidence from the text to support your ideas before you write.

**At the beginning of the book, Max was:**

List character traits that describe Max at the beginning of the book. Hint: a character trait describes what a person is like on the inside (selfish, brave, smart, etc.) rather than on the outside (tall, blue eyes, etc.)

**At the end of the book, Max is:**

List character traits that describe Max closer to the end of the book.

**Evidence from the text:**

Specific things Max does or says in the early chapters that prove he possesses this trait. (Include page numbers, too, so it's easy to find details later!)

**Evidence from the text:**

Specific things Max does or says in later chapters that prove he possesses this trait. (Include page numbers, too, so it's easy to find details later!)

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### COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.5.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.1 - 7.1 – 8.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.3 Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

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**4. HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

Read the online article about Friar Diego de Landa, one of the real-life historical figures mentioned in MIDDLEWORLD: PBS - When Worlds Collide: The Untold Story of the Americas after Columbus. [http://www.fusd1.org/cms/lib03/AZ01001113/Centricity/Domain/907/essays\\_newworldreligion.pdf](http://www.fusd1.org/cms/lib03/AZ01001113/Centricity/Domain/907/essays_newworldreligion.pdf)

In Chapter 2 of MIDDLEWORLD, Oscar tells Max, "Diego de Landa was the curse of the Maya. He tortured us, he burned our books, he told the world we were savages." Based on the PBS article, is this a fair characterization of Landa? Why or why not? Use details from the PBS feature to support your opinion.

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**USEFUL LINKS:**

Watch the excellent PBS documentary - When Worlds Collide: The Untold Story of the Americas after Columbus. (Friar Diego de Landa is mentioned around minute 55.) <https://vimeo.com/118318029>

Diego de Landa - Hero or Villain - an essay that outlines the controversy surrounding the Friar. <https://www.chapala.com/chapala/ojo2007/diego.html>

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**COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9 Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.