

meeting the maya



Tuesday

LO: To find out how the Mayans worshipped their gods.

Success Criteria

- I know that the Maya had many gods.
- I understand some of the reasons why the Maya had so many gods.

The Gods

The Ancient Maya had many, many gods (over 150!), only a few of which are mentioned by the same name in different sources.

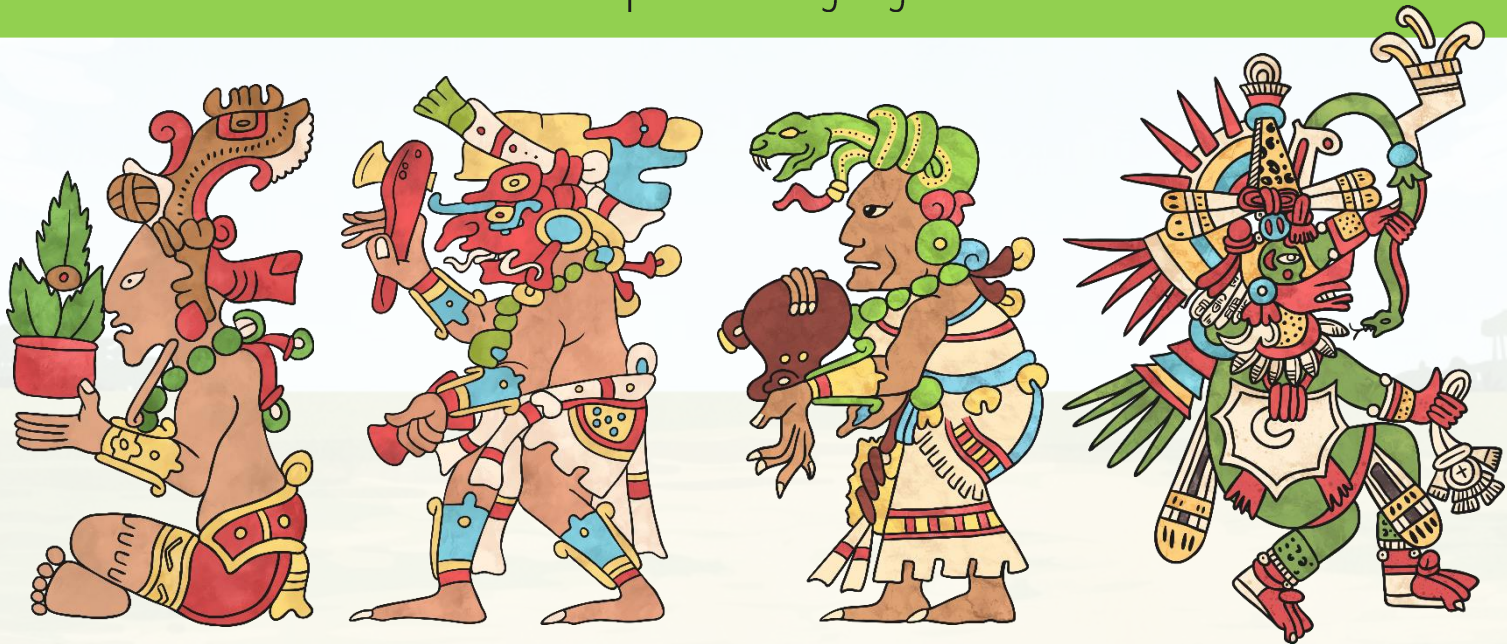
Many of them had overlapping roles and names.

Some had human form, some took the form of an animal, others were a phenomena of nature.

A Central Belief System

Religion was an integral part of the ancient Maya culture, intertwined with all other aspects of society.

The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that they could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods to demonstrate their respect and loyalty.



Religious Rituals

The Maya people performed many different religious rituals. These rituals were often performed during festivals or special ceremonies and they were a way of appealing to the gods.

Can you match up these rituals to their purpose? Discuss your ideas with your partner and be ready to give feedback to the rest of the class.

Blood letting.



To represent a battle between the gods.

Playing a ball game.



To nourish the gods.

Priests wearing masks and costumes.



To scare away demons.

Blood Letting

Stone carvings show rulers and nobles giving blood sacrifices.

The Maya believed that the gods gave their own blood to create humans, so on special occasions the rulers would return the favour by offering their blood to the gods.

This lintel shows Shield Jaguar, the warrior king of Yaxchilan, standing over his wife, Lady Xook, holding an enormous flaming torch. Lady Xook is pulling a thorn-studded rope through her tongue in an act of blood letting to honour the gods.

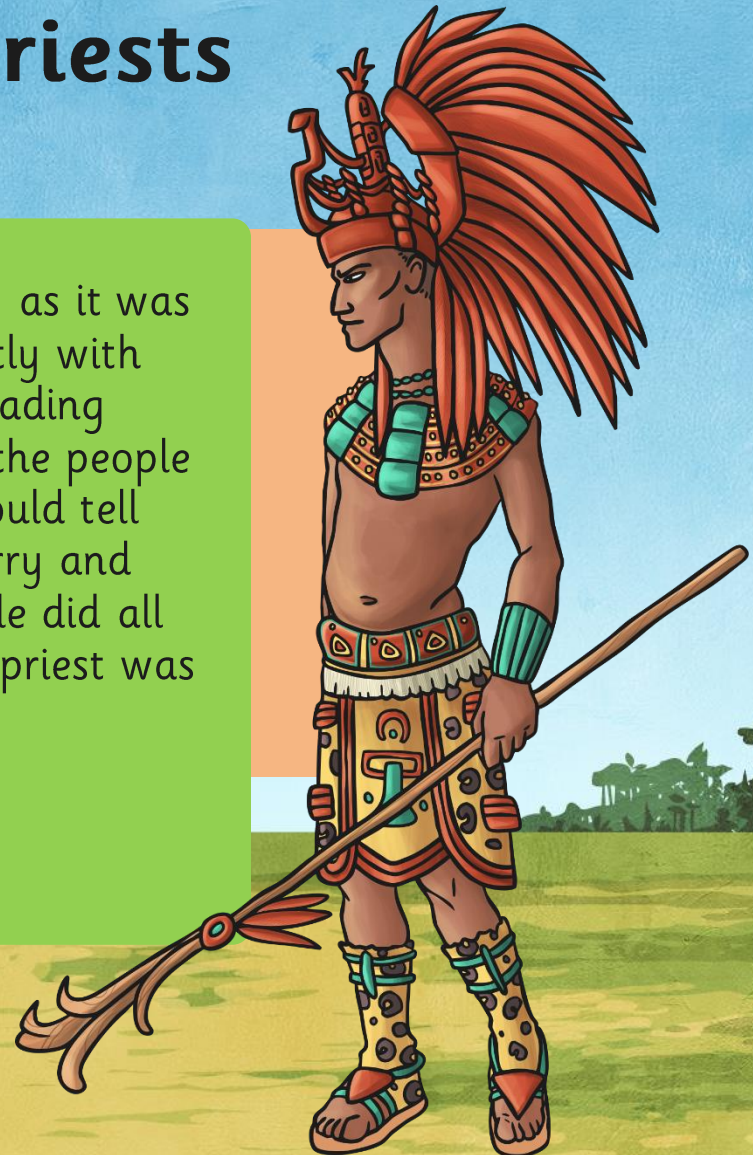
Why do you think the Maya people thought the gods needed their blood?



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Maya Priests

Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. The priests were responsible for leading rituals of worship and sacrifice, and telling the people what the gods wanted them to do. They would tell the people when to plant crops, who to marry and what sacrifices they should make. The people did all these things because they believed that the priest was speaking the wishes of the gods.

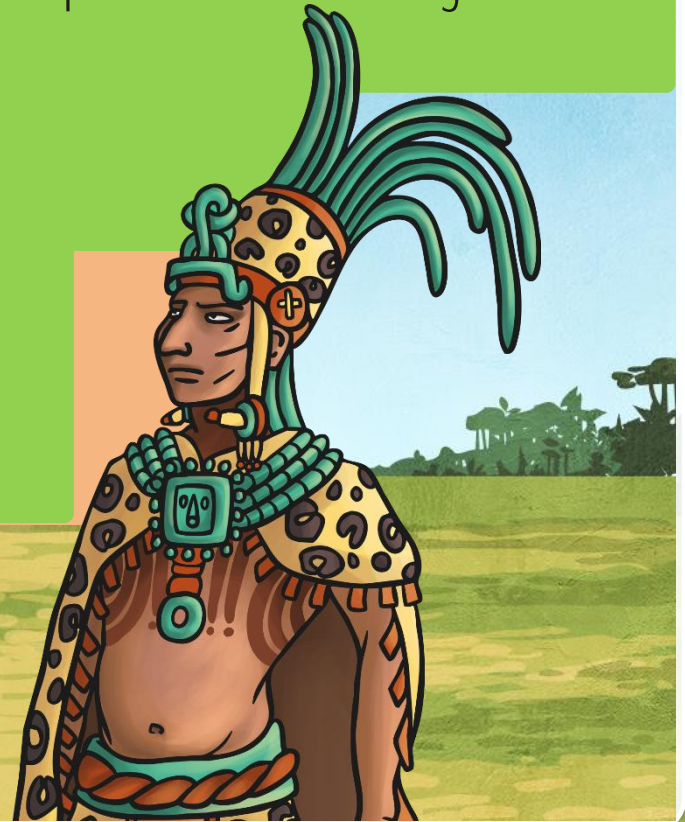


Festivals

During festivals, the priests would dance, sing, bang drums and make lots of noise on the steps of the temples while wearing brightly coloured clothing and headdresses containing the feathers of exotic birds. This ritual dance was thought to scare away demons and demonstrate the priest's power and authority to the gods.

Questions

1. Would you like to have been a Maya priest? Why/why not?
2. Do you think people ever refused to do what the priest said? What do you think happened to them if they did not follow orders?



The Maya World

The Maya people believed that the earth, which they called the Middleworld, was large and flat and resting on the back of a creature (like a turtle or crocodile).

On the Middleworld grew a tree whose branches reached up into the heavens (the Uppeworld) and whose roots grew down into Xibalba (the Underworld) which was guarded by gods of death who looked like jaguars.

The Maya believed that after they died, their souls would travel through a series of caves and tunnels to Xibalba (The Underworld - which means 'place of fear') but the rulers and noblemen believed there was a chance of them getting to the Uppeworld.

Questions

1. Why do you think the Maya believed most people went to the Underworld after they died?
2. Why do you think the gods of death are depicted like jaguars?



Maya Gods

The Maya people worshipped a number of different gods, many of whom had overlapping roles and names. Some had human form, some took the form of an animal and some were a phenomena of nature.

Historians have discovered a lot about the Maya gods from carvings and codices (Maya books).



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Itzamna

One of the creator gods.

Inventor of writing.

Patron of learning.

Portrayed in human form as an old man with no teeth and a large nose.



Kukulcan

Supreme god.

God of the four elements with the following items associated with each one:

- maize-ear (earth)
- a fish (water)
- lizard (fire)
- vulture (air)

One of the creator gods.

God of resurrection and reincarnation .

His name means 'feathered serpent'.



Ix Chel

Wife of Itzamnaaj.

Goddess of childbirth, healing,
weaving and the moon.

Portrayed in human form wearing a
headdress of snakes entangled in her
hair, and toes and fingers that
looked like jaguar claws.

Capable of causing floods and
destruction.

The mother of many other gods.



Hun Ixim- Maize God

From his head sprouted an ear of maize.

Was important because the diet of the Maya was 80% maize and they relied on the harvest being successful.

Also important because humans were created from maize dough by the gods.



Chac - Rain God

Brought the rain needed to make
crops grow.

Created storms, thunder and
lightning.

Caused wars and human sacrifice

Portrayed as a human with a curling
snout and reptile fangs.



Kinich Ahau - Sun God

Travelled across the sky during the day.

Sunk below the earth and entered the underworld every night, where he became a jaguar god.



Ah Puch

Death god.

Portrayed as a human with a skeletal nose, jaw and spine and a body covered in hideous spots.



Human Sacrifice

One of the main purposes for fighting battles was to take captives that could then be sacrificed.

According to a writer in the 1500s, the Maya would paint the body of the victim blue, lay him on a stone platform at the top of a temple, and four men would hold him by his arms and legs.

The executioner would rip out his heart with his hand.

There is plenty of evidence of these practises at Chichen Itza.



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Victims could be thrown into the 'Well of Sacrifice'
(but not all that often).

Stone carvings of jaguars and eagles eating hearts of victims.



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The Wall of Skulls



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God Fact Files

Using the information you have learnt, your challenge is to create a fact file about Maya gods.

We have provided a template for you to use.

Make sure your information is clear and accurate.



The next two slides
provide discussion points
if there is time.



Something to think about.....

Many cultures and religions believe in an afterlife, somewhere you go after you die.

The ancient Maya believed their souls went to a 'place of fear'.

Only the rulers and nobles believed there was a chance of them getting to the Upperworld.

Why do you think this was?

How do the beliefs of the ancient Maya compare with different religious beliefs today?

Can you find any similarities?

What do you think about their understanding of the world?

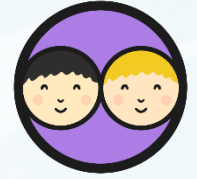
Why might they have thought this?

Why do you think the ancient Maya had so many different gods?

Where does a lot of the evidence for what we know today come from? How open are these sources to interpretation?

Would you like to be alive in the 1st millennium and living with the ancient Maya? What would be the pros and cons?

Maya Gods and Religion Quiz



What have you learnt about Maya gods and religion? Can you correctly answer these 5 questions?

1. Why did the Maya perform blood letting rituals?
2. Who was the supreme god?
3. Who guarded the Underworld?
4. Name 3 priestly jobs.
5. Who could go to the Upperworld after they did?

Let's discuss the answers. How many did you get right?

Can you think of 3 of your own Maya gods and religion quiz?

