

## **Maya Curriculum Unit**

### **Antoinette Byam, Brooklyn New School**

**Subject:** Social Studies

**Grade Level:** Grades 5–8

#### **Synopsis:**

The lessons in this unit utilize photos of the Maya today and those of the Classic Maya. There are also lessons that make use of class visits to museums to observe Maya artifacts. In instances where this is not possible, use photos from the given Web sites. The study also makes use of present-day maps to determine the resources of the area in which the Maya live.

Photos and artifacts will be observed to determine the types of materials that are used in artwork, clothing and food. Observation of these objects are the basis for developing inferences about the effects of resources on lifestyle.

The skills emphasized throughout the study are: observing, inferring and comparing and contrasting. Activity Sheets are included with the unit; however, if making multiple copies is problematic, the students can complete the assignments in notebooks after copying it from a chart or overhead.

*Note: Aspects of this curriculum were taken from curriculum that I wrote for The Brooklyn Museum of Art ([www.brooklynexpedition.org](http://www.brooklynexpedition.org)) in 2002.*

#### **Essential Questions:**

- How might the resources of an area influence the lifestyle of the people in that area?
- What can we learn about a culture by looking at how they use their resources?

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- Are resources meant to last forever?
- Should having a lot of resources allow you to use more?
- Does it matter how we use our resources?
- Are natural resources essential (to quality of life)?

**Overarching Value:**

Material resources consciously or unconsciously determine the materials people use in their daily lives. They can influence the dress, food and art of people. The care and attention that is given to these resources differ throughout cultures. If there is an abundance of a resource it might be taken for granted; resources that are scarce may be treated with reverence. Resources may change over time, so it is possible that as resources change so do art and other aspects of life. A comparison of how the Maya today are influenced by the classic Maya is the focus of this study. The similarity and differences in the resources that are and were used is meant to encourage students to note how available resources influence society (especially art and culture). A look at the changing use of resources in this area also provides students with an opportunity to examine their own use of resources. The study culminates by having students look at a classic artifact to determine what resources were available at that time and then attempt to recreate a similar item with materials that are readily available at present.

**New York State Learning Standards Addressed:****Art***Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art*

Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

*Standard 4: Understanding the Cultural Contributions of the Arts*

Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

**English Language Arts***Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding*

Students will listen, speak, read, and write for information and understanding. As listeners and readers, students will collect data, facts, and ideas; discover relationships, concepts, and generalizations; and use knowledge generated from oral, written, and electronically produced texts. As speakers and writers, they will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language to acquire, interpret, apply, and transmit information.

*Standard 3: Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation*

Students will listen, speak, read, and write for critical analysis and evaluation. As listeners and readers, students will analyze experiences, ideas, information, and issues presented by others using a variety of established criteria. As speakers and writers, they will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language to present, from a variety of perspectives, their opinions and judgments on experiences, ideas, information, and issues.

*Standard 4: Language for Social Interaction*

Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction. Students will use oral and written language that follows the accepted conventions of the English language for effective social communication with a wide variety of people. As readers and listeners, they will use the social communications of others to enrich their understanding of people and their views.

Math, Science and Technology

*Standard 1: Analysis, Inquiry, and Design*

Students will use mathematical analysis, scientific inquiry, and engineering design, as appropriate, to pose questions, seek answers, and develop solutions.

*Standard 2: Information Systems*

Students will access, generate, process, and transfer information using appropriate technologies.

*Standard 5: Technology*

Students will apply technological knowledge and skills to design, construct, use, and evaluate products and systems to satisfy human and environmental needs.

Social Studies

*Standard 2: World History*

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

*Standard 3: Geography*

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in

which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth's surface.

**Sources:**

U.S. Geological Survey Website, International Mineral Maps:

<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/maps/>

Brooklyn Expedition, Latin America site:

<http://www.brooklynexpedition.org/latin/Default.htm>

History Link 101 (scroll to Ancient Maya section):

<http://www.historylink101.com/>

Harvey, Stephanie. (1998) Nonfiction Matters: reading, writing, and research in grades 3–8. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

## LESSON 1

This lesson focuses on how to distinguish an observation from an inference. It helps students to understand that an observation is only what you see and an inference is what you might imply from what you see. It is a good way to have your students become familiar with a skill that they will be using throughout this study.

### Teacher Preparation:

Penny or any other coin for each student. Coins from Mexico would work well, but are not essential.

### Student Materials:

Notebook, pencil

### Procedure:

Begin the lesson by giving each student a penny and asking them to look at the "heads" side. Ask them to describe what they see or feel (e.g., there's an imprint of someone's head on it, there is writing on it, it is copper-colored, etc.). You can continue creating this list together or the students can work on their own, once you think they understand what to do. Students should draw a line down the center of their notebooks to create columns, allowing them to record their observations and, later, their inferences, as follows:

Observations	Inferences

Discuss the observations and note them on the chart. Choose one of the observations and use this as a point from which to make an inference. For example, if a student has noted that there is a head on the coin, we might question to whom the head belongs and might infer that it is the head of an important person in this culture. Continue with others until the students are ready to try some on their own. When you're satisfied that students understand how to develop inferences, have the students make an imprint of their coins with their observations and inferences. A visible posting will allow them to refer to the skills used here as they work with artifacts.

Observing and inferring takes some time to understand. Students will have more opportunities throughout this study. You can also look for other opportunities to strengthen their skills.

## **LESSON 2**

The use of a climate map here allows students to become familiar with the areas where the Maya live.

### **Teacher Preparation:**

Climate maps from an atlas, students can work in groups to share atlases. If atlases are not available, take some time to look at the History 101 site (<http://www.historylink101.com/>) and use the climate maps of the countries where the Maya lived.

### **Student Materials:**

Notebook to record observations; pencil or pen

### **Procedure:**

Pass out maps to groups of students. Make a list of the countries where the Maya live: Mexico (Yucatan region), Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador. Ask students to locate these areas. Then ask students to use the climate map to provide information about temperature and climate. They record this information in their notebooks or, if you have decided to make copies of maps, they can record information right on the map. After recording, students can use the atlas or the History 101 site to hypothesize about what types of products grow in the climate. This may be an appropriate time to introduce the terms lowland and highland, as students will be noting the range of climates in these areas. (Lowland areas such as the Yucatan are at sea level, highland areas such as Chiapas and Guatemala are mountainous regions.)

For some students, it may be useful to have them create their own color code for the regions on their maps.

## LESSON 3

This lesson provides students with an introductory glimpse of the Maya today. Students are allowed the opportunity to build on their observation and inference skills used in the previous lesson.

### **Teacher Preparation:**

Have photo that you will use to start the lesson. The photo of the woman working with clay has been provided as an option [attached here]; there are many other photos that will work as well.

### **Student Materials:**

Photos of the modern Maya [available for download from this Web site, or use photos of your choice—there should be at least three photos for each group]; notebook; pencil

### **Procedure:**

With the whole class, observe the photo of the woman working with clay. Ask the class to describe what they see. Encourage students to use the observation skills shown in the previous lesson. Make note of their observations on a large chart. Make sure they are noting not only what the woman is doing, but also her surroundings: the land, the houses, what she is wearing.

When it is clear that students know how to continue on their own, move to inferences. Elicit inferences about what the clothing might tell us about the climate: What might the materials being used tell about the area? What might the colors that are worn tell us?

Now allow students to go off to do this in their groups with the photos of the modern Maya (at least 3 photos per group). Keep encouraging students to pay attention to the methods used to develop thoughts during the whole group discussion.

After completing this assignment groups post their assigned photos and their observations and inferences so that they can be shared with others.



## LESSON 4

In this lesson the students investigate the definition of a resource and go on a search for natural resources of Mesoamerica. The U.S. Geological Survey Web site will be the source for getting information about mineral resources in the selected countries of North and Central America. The students will later compare the information gathered here with what they found in Lesson 2.

### **Teacher Preparation:**

Before the lesson, prepare photos of natural resources and maps from U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Web site:

<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/maps/>

You can download the maps you need if there are not enough classroom computers. You should also download one map to be used for an overhead for a group lesson. The Young Oxford Book of Archaeology is also a good source for photos for this lesson. You will need an overhead projector or chart paper and copies of Activity Sheets 1 and 1A [attached here].

### **Student Materials:**

Notebook and pencil; access to USGS Web site (<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/maps/>) or a copy of the downloaded maps of the countries where the Maya live; Activity Sheets 1 and 1A

### **Procedure:**

Have students gather to look at photographs of resources such as water, oil and salt. You might begin the discussion by finding out if anyone knows what it means for a country to have a supply of these materials. If not, introduce the term "resource" as something we use when there is a natural supply of a material in an area. This may also be an opportune time to talk about the natural resources in your own area.

Let the students know that they will be conducting a search for natural mineral resources of Mesoamerica. They will use the maps and the mineral key list to complete the assignment. The key list on this Web site is quite extensive, it might be a good idea to copy the ones you need onto a chart and have students use this to decode what they find on the maps.

Students may need a few sessions to complete this assignment, depending on how many countries you choose for your focus.

After students have completed the assignment, make a list of their findings. You can have groups report and eliminate the repetitions as they report. Again, charts or overheads should be kept, as the information is needed for future studies. Review the student answers for Activity 1A. You might choose to have groups meet and share their answers and then have them report on their discussion.

ACTIVITY SHEET 1:

Use your maps to complete the chart below. Use the key to help you decode the minerals. Answer the questions after completing the chart.

<u>Resources</u>	<u>Area found</u>	<u>Possible Uses</u>

## ACTIVITY SHEET 1A - Questions

1. Which resources are found in abundance?
2. Which resources are scarce?
3. Which resources were found inland?
4. Which were found on the coast?
5. What might you infer about what types of artifacts come from the inland areas?
6. What might you infer about what types of artifacts come from the coast?

## Lesson 5

After investigating resources on the maps, students now begin to find out how these resources are used daily.

### **Student Materials:**

Photos used in lesson 3

### **Procedure:**

Pose the question: how might the resource map help to determine the materials that are used by the Maya? The information found in this lesson can be used by the students to create categories for the lifestyles of the Maya today. Let students know that museum curators often categorize material to help people get information about cultures. As a class, we will be doing the same to help us get a better idea of how people live.

Hold up the photo (from Lesson 3) of the potter, and ask: what resource might this tell us about? Students may respond by saying land (source of the clay) or art (produced by the clay). The class has to decide where it best fits. You can now either come up with categories of types of resources and then ask the students to put the photos into these categories or have the students create categories as a group and then assign photos to groups and have them put in the category where they best fit. The categories should consist of: minerals, art/design food, land resources.

The display that is created should be one that will be used throughout the study.

## LESSON 6

### Classic Maya

#### Teacher Preparation:

If there is a museum in your area with Maya artifacts, do a pre-visit so you can guide your class through. If not, the following Web sites are among those that have photos of classic Maya artifacts:

<http://www.historylink101.com/>

<http://www.brooklynexpedition.org/latin/Default.htm>

#### Student Materials:

Activity Sheet 2 [attached here]

#### Procedure:

Pose the questions to the class to begin discussion:

- Can a culture's present resources tell us about their past?
- How might the photos in our exhibit give a glimpse of the Maya's past?

The class should be encouraged to think about how what we see of the Maya today might inform us about their past. Allow time for small group discussion. You could even give this question as a "thinking" homework assignment so students can be prepared to talk sensibly. Ideally this lesson should begin at a museum that displays the art of the classic Maya; if this is not available, photos from the Web sites can be used.

Begin at the display case and focus on one item or use one photo. Use this to encourage students to note any similarities between this and the modern items previously viewed. Students might note the materials, the designs, the color, etc. After these observations, ask about differences, if it has not already come up.

ACTIVITY SHEET 2: Classic Maya Artifacts

Object	Material used	Possible use
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		

## LESSON 7

Give students photos of two objects from different time periods and have them create a Venn diagram to compare the materials that are used.

After the comparison ask students to give possible reasons why the materials may have changed or remained the same.

## LESSON 8

Culminating assignment. The lesson requires students to use the information from the previous lessons to begin researching an artifact from the Classic Maya period.

Time should be given in class for students to conduct their research. Nonfiction Matters by Stephanie Harvey is a good source for teaching research methods.

In this culminating assignment, tell students that they will be presenting an aspect of Maya culture to their peers. Ask them to choose an object that was used during the Classic period and tell the story of how this artifact may have been used. You can model how this work might be carried out by taking a photo from the classic period (e.g., a pot with glyphs). As you display the photo of the pot, you might tell students that this is the object you have chosen to learn about. As a group you can create questions that would help you learn more about this pot. The questions might be as follows:

Who might have made this pot?

Why are these colors used to make it?

How might it have been made?

What might it have been used for?

As students begin to learn to develop questions, help them to understand that it is useful to develop questions that do not elicit a yes or no response.

After students have done their research you may want to have them create a modern version of their object. They could think about what resources they would use to replicate their chosen artifact. A museum

of the modern artifacts can be displayed along with a photo of the classic object.

*Alternate culminating project*

(At our school we begin the Maya study with this project, but it might also work at the end of the study.)

Just as we learned about the Maya from what was left behind, what does what we throw away say about us? Students can investigate the garbage in your school community to try to answer this question.

Students spend a week collecting and sorting samples of garbage in their school. Armed with rubber gloves and plastic bags students take a daily sample from the garbage cans in the school. After recording what they find students then note what it might tell them (e.g., an empty coffee container may not only provide information about the taste of the inhabitants of a room, but might also imply that this is a culture that takes their food to go, hence they may be quite busy). To record their observations and thoughts, students can set up their notebooks as they did for the coin activity.

This can also lead students to create a garbage art project (see photo of the garbage can made with recycled bottles) or to develop ways to waste less.

## **Suggested Readings for the Study of the Present-day and Classic Maya**

Carroll, Cynthia. (2005) Where Did the Maya Go? Auckland, NZ: Shortland Publications.

Castañeda, Omar S. (1993) Abuela's Weave. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Crandel, Rachel. (2002) Hands of the Maya. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Eboch, Chris. (1999) The Well of Sacrifice. New York: Houghton Mifflin. (This is a great read aloud to learn about life during the classic period)

Garcia, Guy. (1995) Spirit of the Maya. New York: Walker & Co.

Gerson, Mary-Joan & Golembe, Carla. (1995) People of the Corn. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Greene, Jacqueline D. (1992) The Maya. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc.

Perritano, John. (2006) The Maya in the Past and Present. Washington, DC: National Geographic School Publishing.

Wisniewski, David. (1991) Rain Player. New York: Clarion Books.