

Mayan Gods and Religion

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.

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 bloodletting to honour the gods.



Answer these questions in your home learning books:

1. Why do you think the Maya people thought the gods needed their blood?
2. Can you think of any other civilisations that did this, or can you think of any stories about making sacrifices for gods?

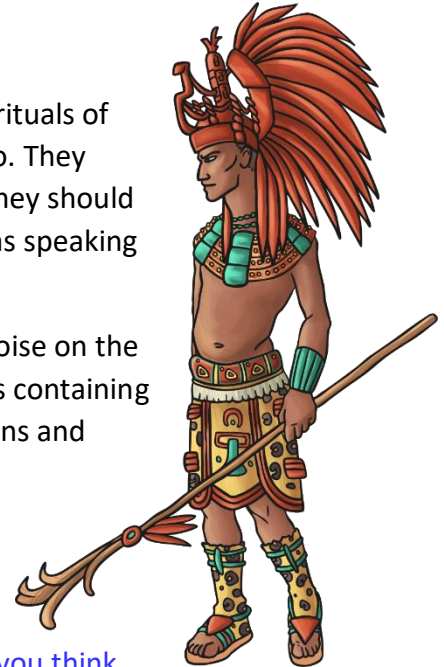
Mayan priests

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.

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.

Answer these questions in your home learning books:

1. Would you like to have been a Mayan 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?



Mayan Afterlife

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 Upperworld) 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 (which means ‘place of fear’) but the rulers and noblemen believed there was a chance of them getting to the Upperworld.



Answer these questions in your home learning books:

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?

Mayan 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 Mayan gods from carvings and codices (Mayan books).

Task:

Using the information on the next page, create your own Mayan god in the style of a Top Trump card.

Use the instructions and template below:

1. Come up with a name for, and draw an image of, your Mayan god

2. Write a description

- Describe your god’s appearance.
- What does your god wear?
- What are its key features/ attributes?
- Why is your god important?

3. Add the god’s qualities

- E.g. Strength
- Intelligence

Name		
Picture	Qualities	Score
Description		

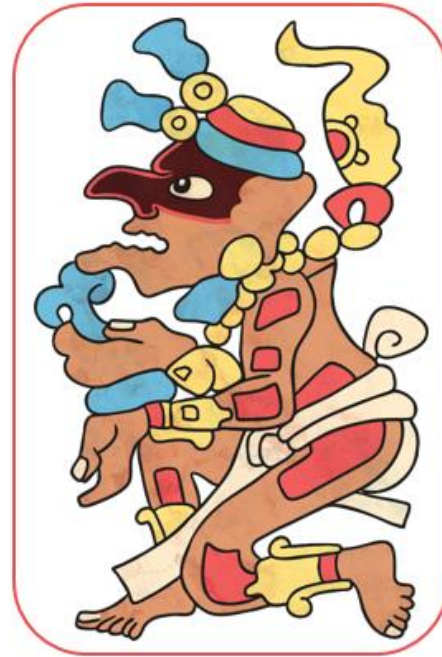
Itzamna

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

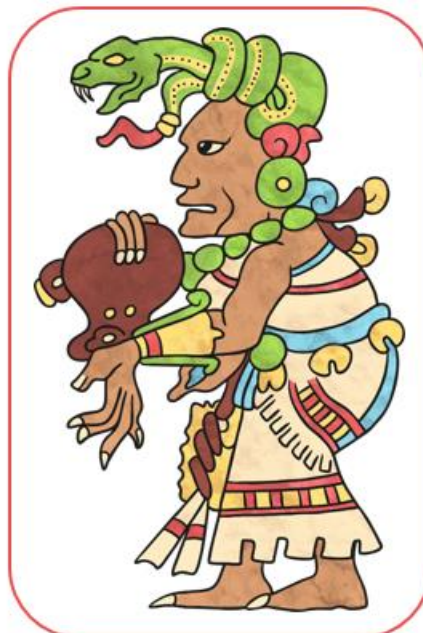
Wife of Itzamnaaj.

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.



Ah Puch

Death god.

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

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.

