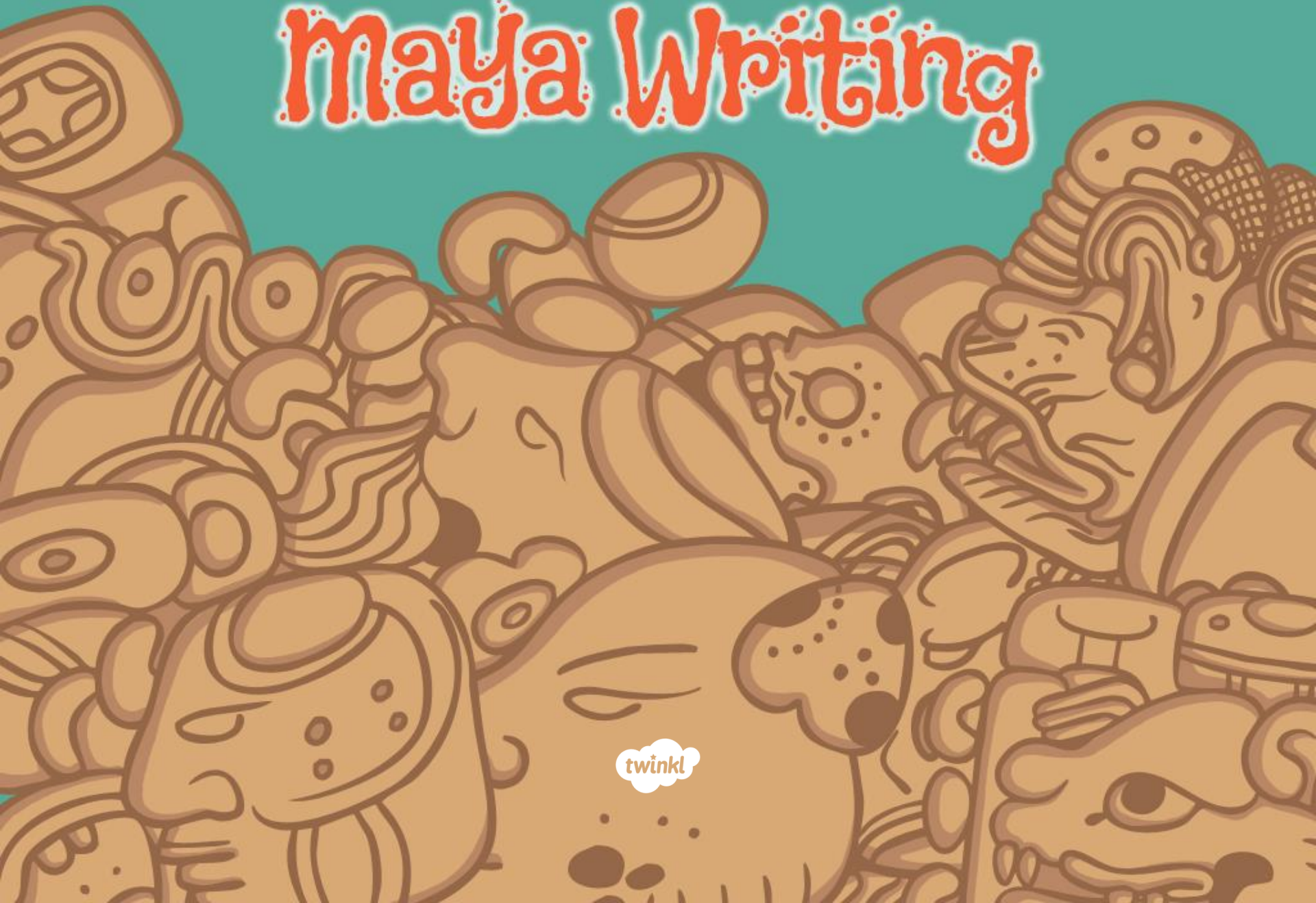


Maya Writing



LO: to explain what the Maya writing system consists of, how words are constructed and what codices are.

Success Criteria

- I can identify key facts about the Maya writing system.
- I can answer questions about the Maya writing system and codices.
- I can construct Maya words using syllabograms and logograms.

Maya Writing



What do you know about Maya writing?

Discuss these questions with your partner. Be ready to feedback your ideas to the rest of the class.

1. What does Maya writing look like?
2. Where have you seen examples of Maya writing in your learning about the Maya so far?
3. What do you think the Maya may have written about? Why?
4. What would you like to find out about Maya writing?





What are these pictures showing?

Why do you think these artefacts are important archaeological discoveries?



These artefacts are important because they all show examples of Mayan writing. It is from Mayan writing that historians have managed to learn about the Mayan people who lived hundreds of years ago.

Maya Writing Fact Hunt



Can you work with a partner to find and read all the Maya Writing Fact Cards?
Use the information on the fact cards to help you complete the Maya Writing Fact Hunt Activity Sheet.

Writing Fact Hunt

Use the facts to help you complete the information about Maya writing?

These people knew the whole Mayan language...	Maya books are called...
The different types of glyphs used in Maya writing are...	Maya hieroglyphs have been found...
... are...	Maya books were made of...
	My own amazing Maya writing fact...

twinkl.co.uk

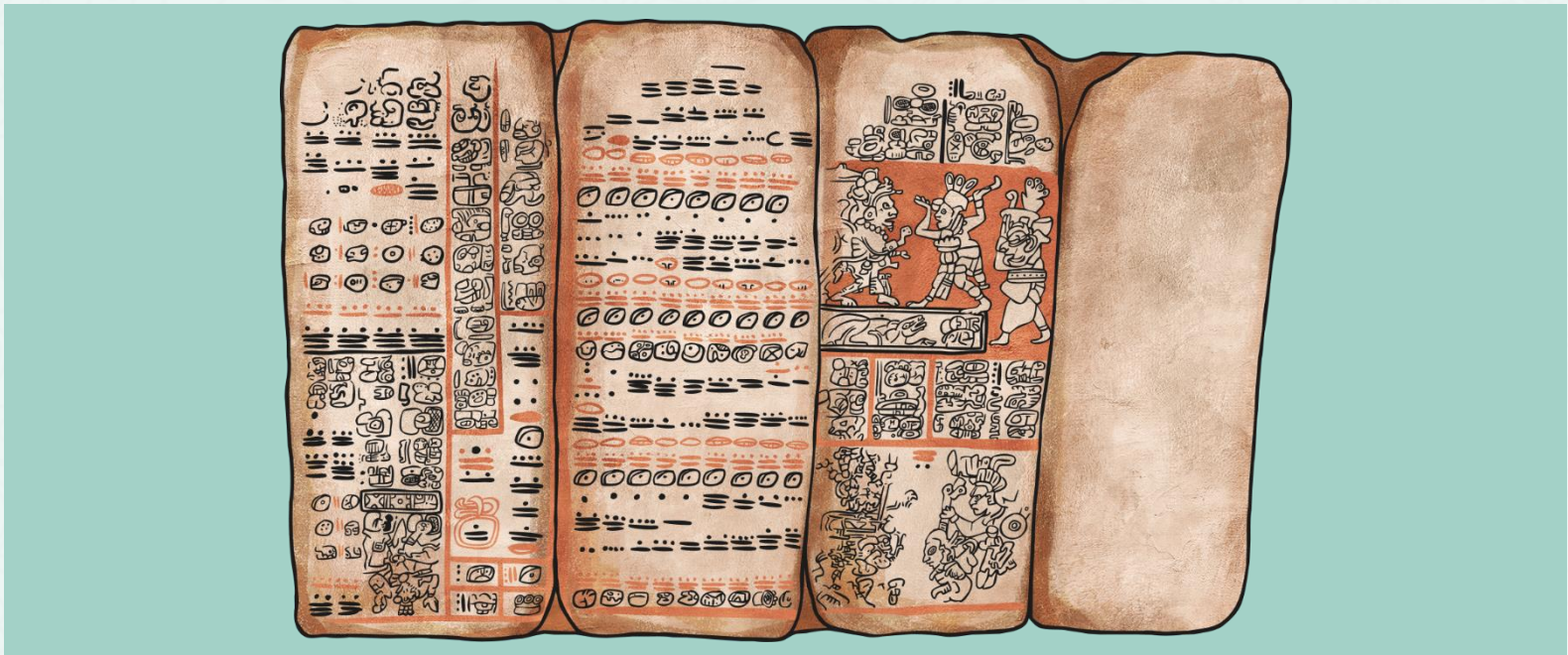
History | UKS2 | The Maya Civilisation | Maya Writing | Lesson 5

Codices

The Maya people wrote books made of the bark from fig trees. One book is called a codex and the plural is codices.

The codices were written by professional scribes and contained information about astronomy, gods, war and history.

Rather than having separate pages, the codices unfolded like a concertina.

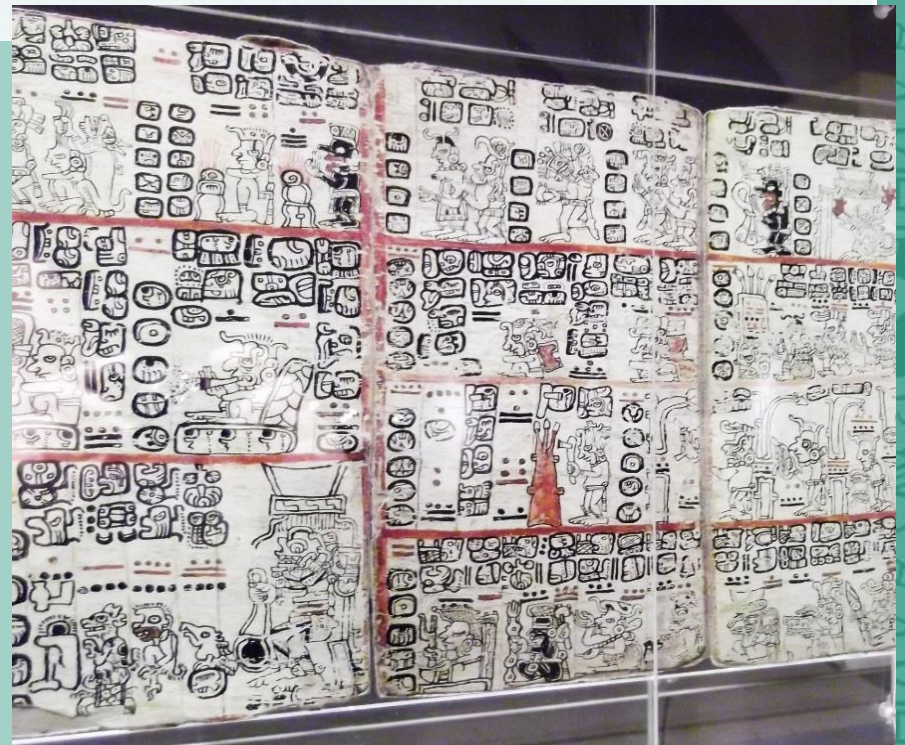


The Last Codices

When the Spanish arrived and set to conquer the Maya, the Spanish priests burned as many Maya codices (books) as they could find. The Spanish, who were Christian, considered them to be the work of the devil. Only three genuine Maya codices remain and they were discovered 'hidden' in Europe. These codices are named after the places they are kept.

- **The Dresden Codex:** part of the Royal Library collection in Dresden, Germany.
- **The Madrid Codex:** Housed in the Madrid Archaeological Museum, Spain.
- **The Paris Codex:** Housed in the National Library of Paris, France.

A fourth codex was discovered in the 1960s, but historians cannot decide if it is real. It is called the Grolier codex.



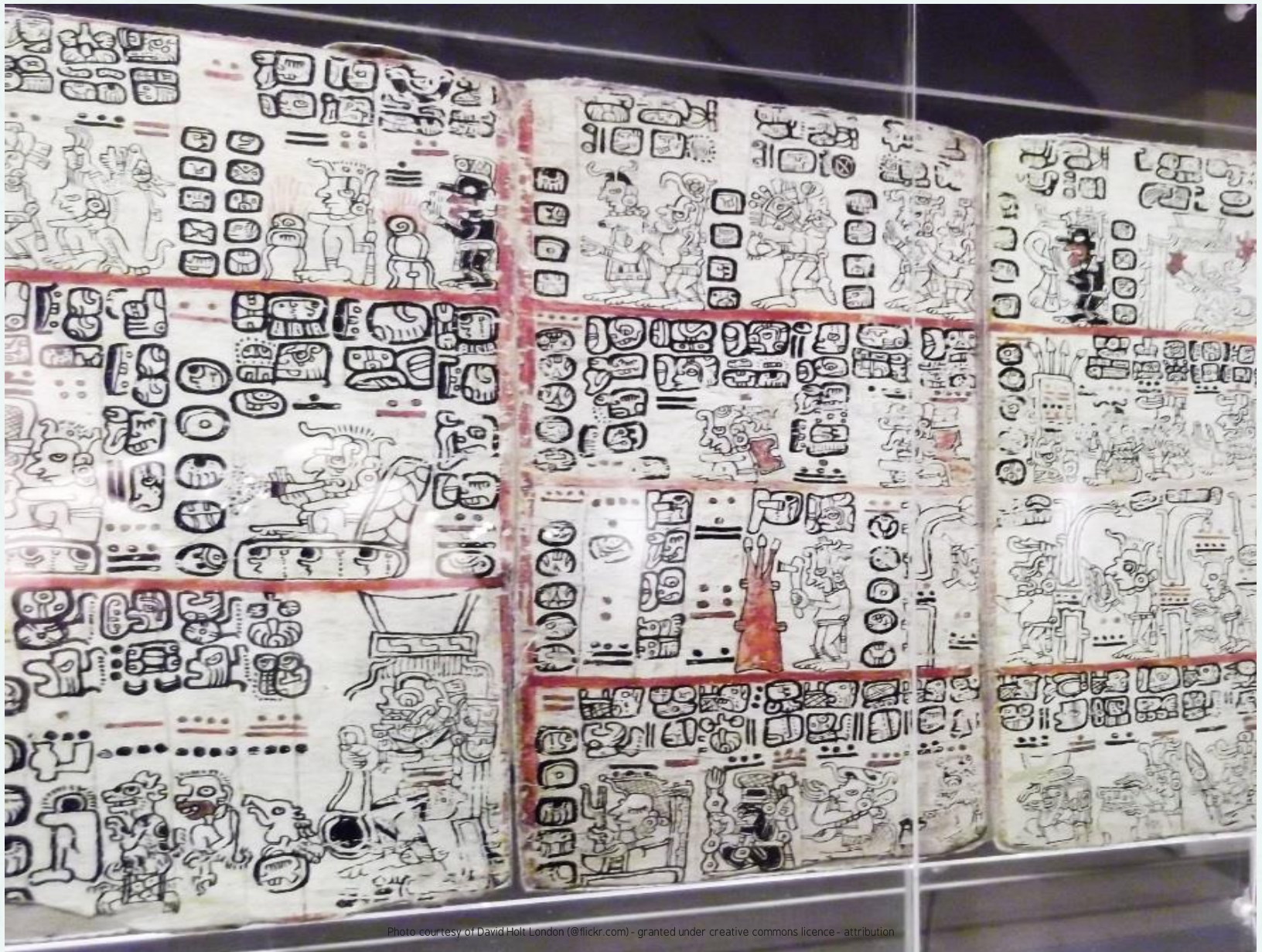


Photo courtesy of David Holt London (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

The 'Dresden' codex now held at Chichen Itza.



Maya codices are folding books from the Maya civilization, written in Maya hieroglyphic script. The folding books are the products of professional scribes. The Maya developed paper (which they called 'huun') around the 5th century, it was more durable and a better writing surface than European papyrus.



A copy of the 'Madrid' codex showing how the Maya folded their books.

Maya Writing Comprehension




Read the information on your activity sheet carefully. Use the information and your own knowledge to answer the comprehension questions.

Maya Writing

The Maya were one of the few ancient civilisations to have independently developed a highly complex writing system. The earliest examples of Maya writing were found in San Marcos, Guatemala, and date to as far back as 300 BC.

The Maya people used a hieroglyphic writing system. Hieroglyphic writing consisted of signs or symbols called hieroglyphs or glyphs for short. The glyphs in Maya writing were either logographic (where a symbol represents a word) or syllabic (where a symbol represents a unit of sound). The Maya often had several syllables in a sign, so the same sign could mean very different things in different contexts. Maya writing was written on palm-leaf tablets and then was left to rot, so the signs in a signifying position (see box).




Fortunately, Spanish records on Maya writing were very useful in helping us to understand their writing system. In 1565 a guide to some of the glyphs which became known as Landolt's Catechism. However, it wasn't until the 1920s that a Russian linguist called Yuri Vassierovitch Corroch suggested that at least part of the Maya writing system was phonetic. This proved to be a massive breakthrough in understanding Maya writing. However, even today there are a number of glyphs that scholars are still unable to decipher.

Codices

Codices were Maya books written by priests and scholars. They contained information about history, astronomy, religion and gods. However, only two known copies have survived to date. In 1562, a Catholic priest called Diego de Landa ordered the main majority of a number of Maya codices, on the belief that they were the work of the devil. The Spanish also burned hundreds of other documents as well.

The Madrid Codex

The Madrid Codex is the largest of the surviving codices remaining. It is written on both sides and contains information about religious history and rituals. The codex was found in two separate halves in Spain in the 17th century and is a handwritten copy of the document in a display for visitors. A very faint copy of the document is on display for visitors. A very faint copy of the document is on display for visitors.



The Paris Codex

The Paris Codex was found in a private collection in Paris in the 19th century. It contains information about the Maya ceremonial cycle (calendar) and is the only one of its kind. It is now in the National Library of Paris, France.

The Dresden Codex

The Dresden Codex was the first of the surviving codices to be discovered. It contains information about the Maya calendar and is the only one of its kind. It is now in the Dresden State Library, Germany.

The Grolier Codex

The Grolier Codex was the first of the surviving codices to be discovered. It contains information about the Maya calendar and is the only one of its kind. It is now in the Grolier Club, New York City.

Maya Writing Comprehension Questions

- Where were the earliest examples of Maya writing found?
- What is the difference between a logogram and a syllabogram?
- Why do you think the Maya people often used different syllabograms to represent the same sound?
- How do you read Maya writing?
- Who was Diego de Landa and why did he order a mass burning of Maya books?
- How did Diego de Landa help people to understand Maya writing?
- Where do Maya Codices get their names from?
- What is the longer codex and which is the most complex?
- What can the codices help us to learn about the Maya's religion?
- Who was Diego de Landa and why did he order a mass burning of Maya books?
- Which codex do you think sounds the most interesting? Why?

Extension: How can you think of three of your own questions to ask a friend? Make sure you know the answers too!

Maya Hieroglyphs



Maya hieroglyphic writing can be made up of syllabograms (representing sounds) or logograms (representing whole words).

Logograms often resemble the thing that they represent, so it is easy for us to see what they mean, but others are more tricky.

Look closely at these logograms. Can you match them to their meanings?



to grab fire to scatter jaguar



chan
'sky'



winik
'person'



witz
'mountain'



k'in
'sun'



b'alam
'jaguar'



k'ak'
'fire'

More Maya hieroglyphs. Can you see how the picture may represent the word?



bak
'bone'



way
'spirit'



juun
'book'



ja'
'water'



ajaw
'lord'



muyal
'cloud'



ix
'woman'



ch'am
'to grab'



k'uk'
'quetzal'



chan
'snake'



ch'ul
'holy'



chok
'to scatter'



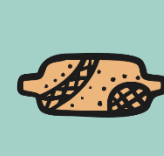
jaab
'year'



yax
'blue/green'



pakal
'shield'



tok
'flint'



naj
'house'



k'al
'twenty'

Syllabograms

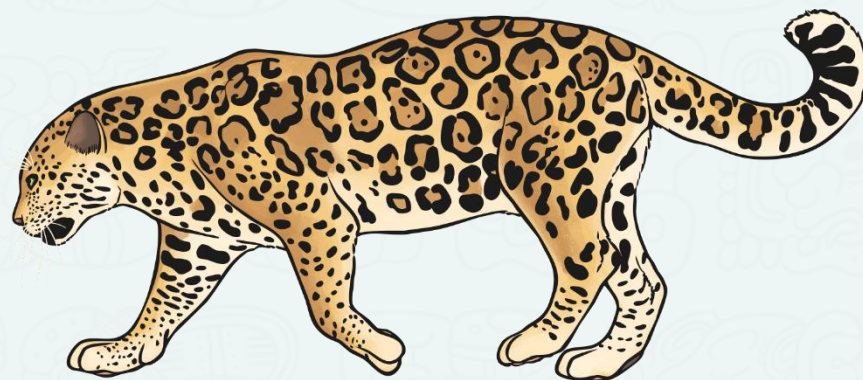


About 150 syllabograms were used in the Maya script and syllables were often represented by more than one glyph. This meant that different people could spell the same words differently depending on which syllabograms they chose to use.

For example, the Maya word for jaguar is b'alam which can be split into three syllables b'a – la – am, with the final 'a' silent.

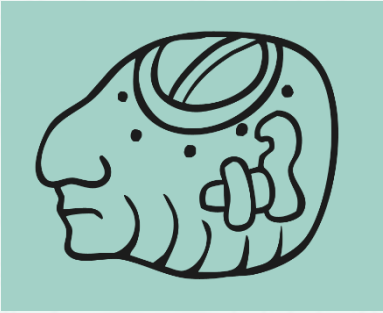
Have a look at the syllabograms for the syllables in b'alam. How many different ways of spelling the word can you find?

Remember there is a logogram for the word jaguar too!



Jaguar – b’alam

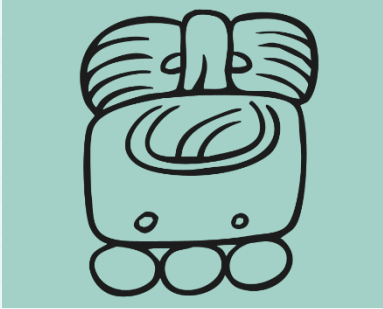
ba



la



am



+

+

=

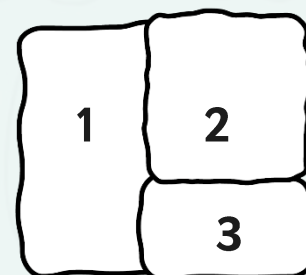
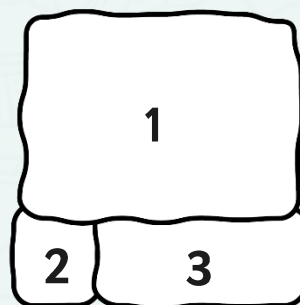
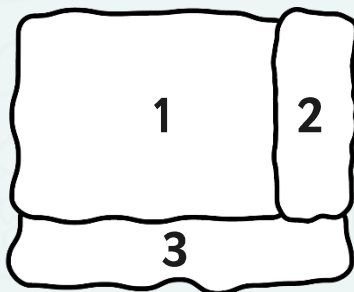
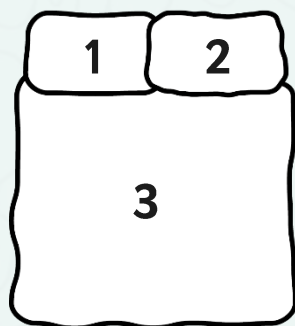
Creating a Glyph Block



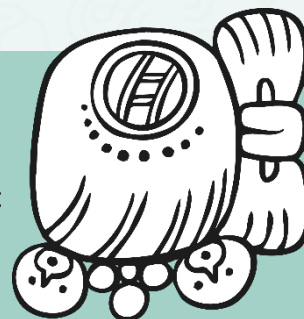
Now you have three syllabograms to write b'alam, you need to combine them into one glyph block.

Maya glyphs were roughly read top to bottom and left to right.

For example:



So the word b'alam could look like this:



The codices that remain today tell us a lot about the Mayans, but especially about their astrological knowledge. They used codices to write down their observations of the Sun, stars and Moon. From this, we know that the Mayans had their own calendar that was very important to them.



This photo shows a stone carving of a Mayan calendar.

BACK

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NEXT

Did you know that the Mayan Long Count calendar said the world would end on 21st December 2012?

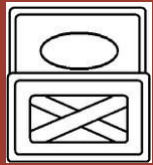


The Mayans had three separate calendars. One of these was for the solar year and had a cycle of 365 days. Another had a cycle of 260 days, with twenty periods of thirteen days. The final calendar is the 'Long Count' calendar. This was used to track longer periods of time and each cycle lasted 2,880,000 days. The Mayans believed that the universe was destroyed and then created again at the end of each cycle.

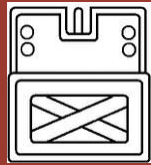
Each month in the solar calendar, called the Haab, had its own name and own glyph.



Pop



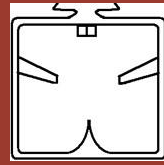
Wo



Sip



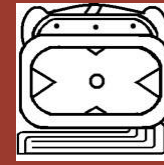
Sotz



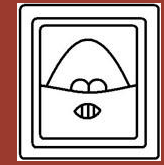
Sek



Xul



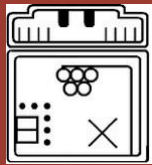
Yaxkin



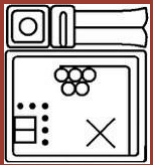
Mol



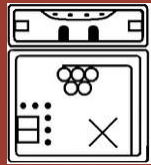
Chen



Yax



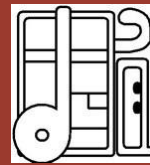
Sak



Keh



Mak



Kankin



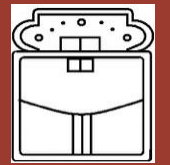
Muan



Pax



Kayab



Kumku



Uayeb

One of the months, Uayeb, is only five days long to make up the five extra days. These days were thought to be very unlucky so people avoided doing anything risky during this month!

Task:

Firstly, choose 4 Logograms to draw, write down their meaning and write a short description about why the picture may represent the word, for example:



**ch' am
to grab**

The image looks like the picture of a human hand reaching out to take hold of something.

Finally, create your own logogram for a word of your choice and write an explanation about why your picture represents your word.

Aim



- I can explain what the Maya writing system consists of, how words are constructed and what codices are.

Success Criteria

- I can identify key facts about the Maya writing system.
- I can answer questions about the Maya writing system and codices.
- I can construct Maya words using syllabograms and logograms.

