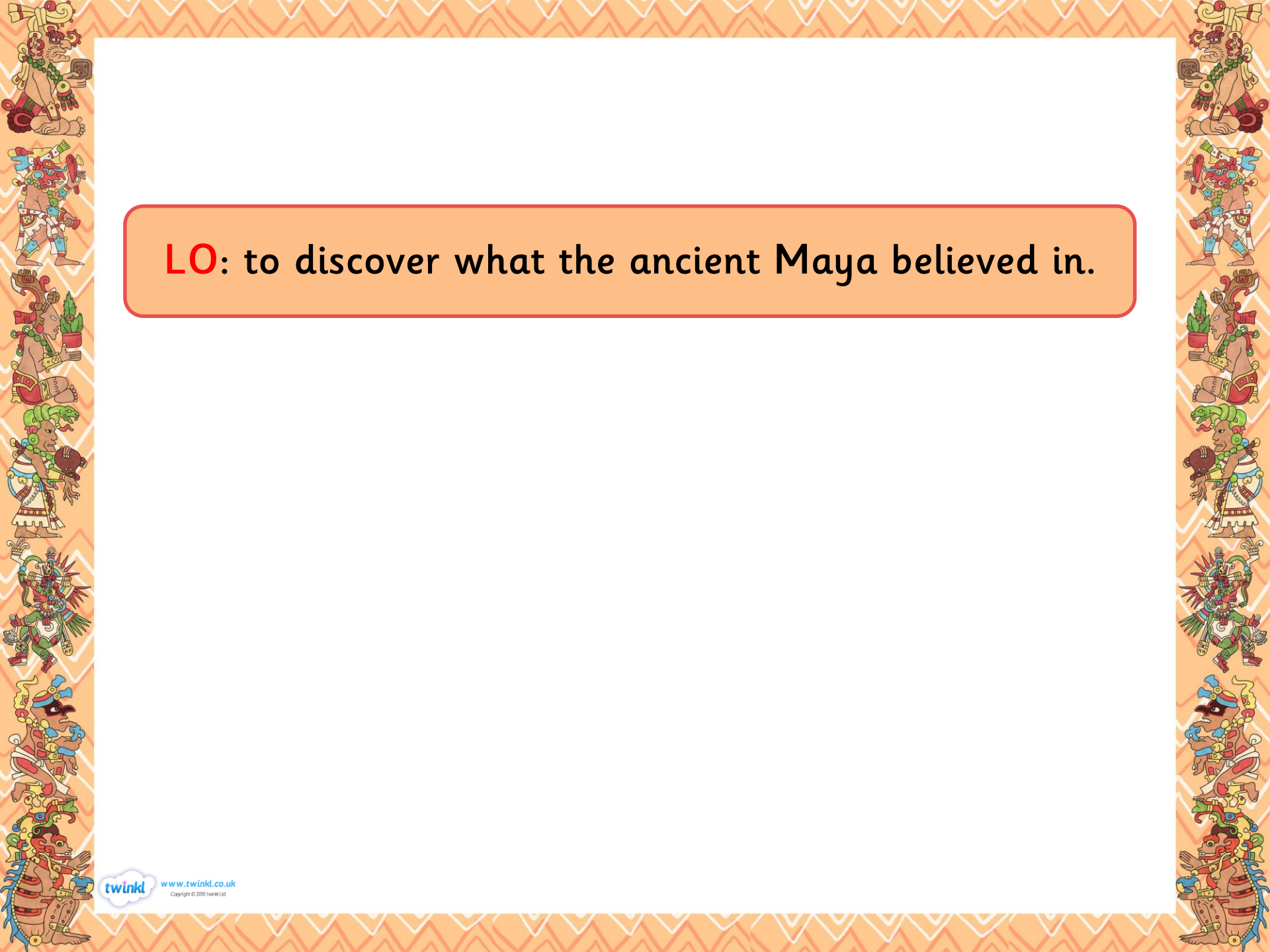


The Maya Civilisation

Gods, Religion and Beliefs



A decorative border surrounds the page, featuring a repeating pattern of colorful illustrations of various Maya deities. The gods are depicted in traditional attire, including headdresses, jewelry, and carrying symbolic objects. The background of the border is a repeating geometric pattern of orange and white zig-zags.

LO: to discover what the ancient Maya believed in.

Creation According the Ancient Maya

Can you remember how the people who wrote the Bible believed the World was created?

The Maya believed the gods made animals, but the animals didn't speak to them.

The gods tried to make humans out of clay but they were limp, and melted in the rains.

Next they made humans out of wood but the rains drowned them.

Eventually they made humans from zucan (maize dough) and this was a success.

The Universe According to the Ancient Maya

What do we know about our world and the universe it is in?

The Maya believed the earth (Middleworld) is square and flat.

The earth rests on the back of a huge creature (like a turtle or crocodile)

A giant tree grows at the centre of the earth (Middleworld), its roots reach down to the underworld and its branches reach to the Upperworld.

The four compass directions are all linked with a colour:

North = WHITE - associated with ancestors who have died

East = RED - where the sun rises

South = YELLOW - the right hand of the sun

West = BLACK - death and the underworld

The Underworld

The underworld was called Xibalba, which means 'place of fear'.

It was reached through caves and tunnels.

Maya gods of death, who looked like jaguars, lived in the underworld.

The Maya believed that when they died their souls travelled to the underworld.



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.

Did they worship gods?

The Maya had over 150 gods. They were mainly gods of nature. Many sacrifices of crops, animals, blood, and even humans (usually prisoners, or men who lost the ball game) were offered to the gods to bring good fortune.

The most important god was the sun god. He went down to the underworld at sunset and became a jaguar god.

The maize god was highly respected as the Maya believed he had the power to control whether crops grew or not.



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'.



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.



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.



Religious Rituals

What is a ritual ?

The ancient Maya would perform rituals to gain favour with the gods.

Public festivals related to special dates on the Maya calendar or occasions to plead for a healthy harvest, the health of a ruler, or to win a war.

Before a ritual or festival, people would go without certain food or pierce their tongues, lips, cheeks or ears to offer a sacrifice of human blood.

The festivals were colourful and noisy with processions, banners, drums and trumpets.

Blood Letting

One ancient Maya ritual is blood letting. 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.

Other stone carvings that have been discovered show kings and nobles giving blood sacrifices. They gave some of their blood to keep the gods happy, if they didn't they had a lot to lose! The gods could keep them in power, help defeat their enemies and let them into the Upperworld when they died.



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Human Sacrifice

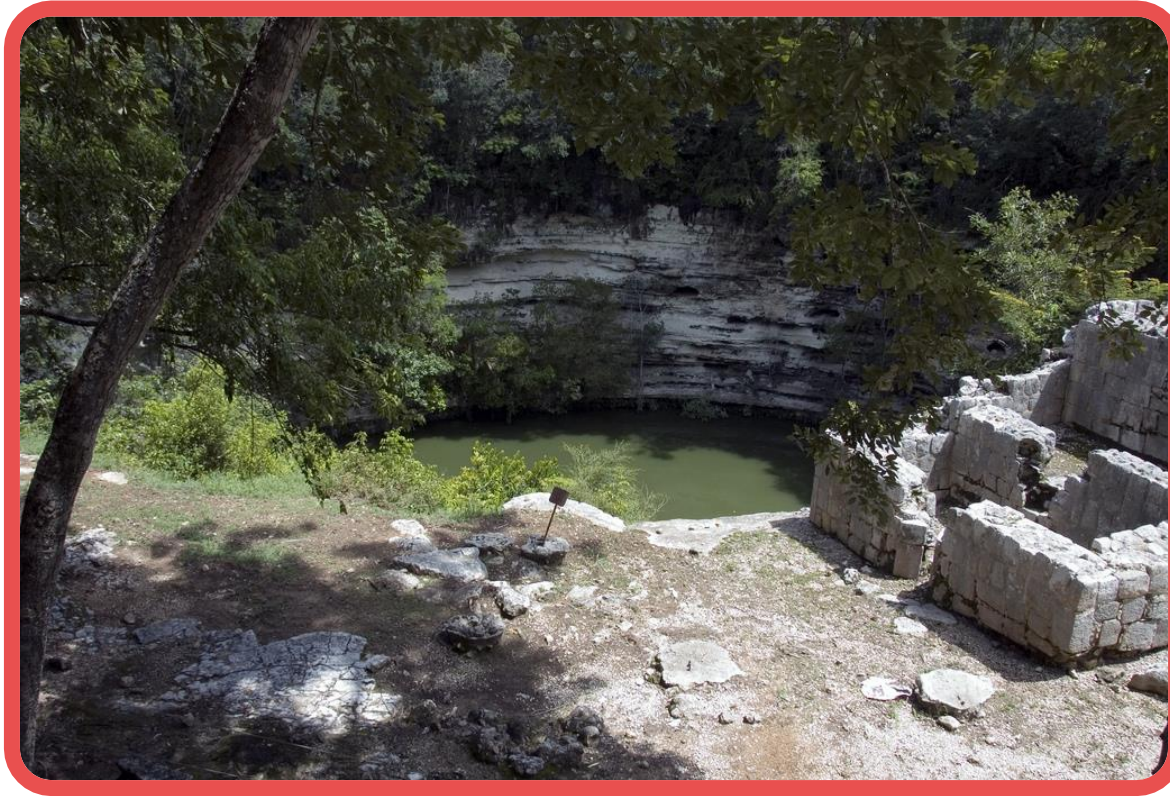
One of the main purposes for fighting battles was to take captives that could then be sacrificed.

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

The executioner would cut between the victim's ribs and rip out their heart with his hand. The heart would be placed, still beating, on a plate and given to a priest.

Then the priest would smear blood from the heart on the faces of stone idols and statues of the gods.

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



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This is the 'Well of Sacrifice' where victims and the remains of sacrifices were thrown into.

Stone carvings of jaguars and eagles eating hearts of victims show human sacrifice was a regular ritual.

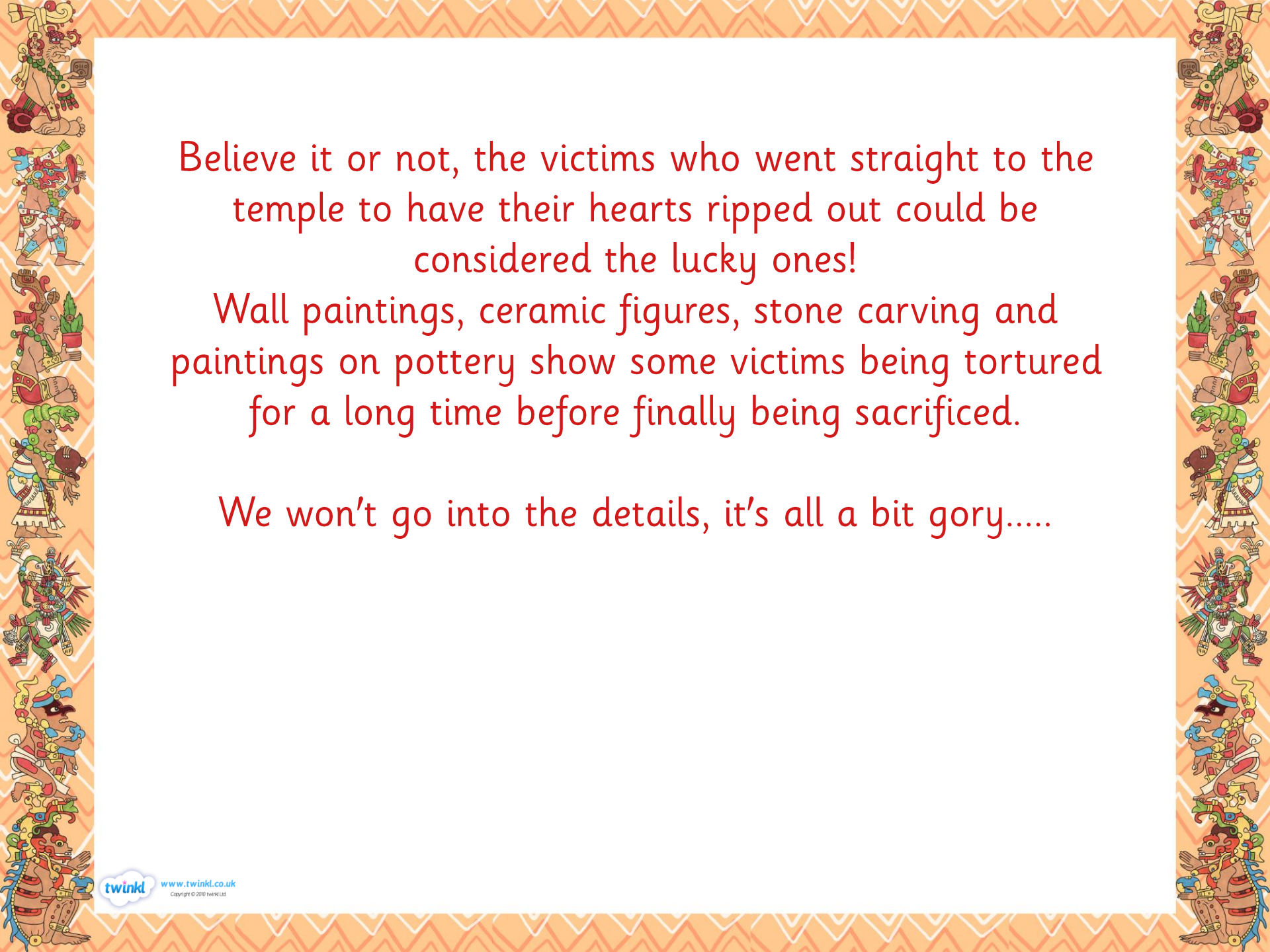


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The Wall of Skulls



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A decorative border surrounds the central text area, featuring a repeating pattern of colorful, stylized Aztec and Mayan figures. These figures are depicted in various poses, some holding objects, and are set against a background of orange and white geometric patterns.

Believe it or not, the victims who went straight to the temple to have their hearts ripped out could be considered the lucky ones!

Wall paintings, ceramic figures, stone carving and paintings on pottery show some victims being tortured for a long time before finally being sacrificed.

We won't go into the details, it's all a bit gory.....

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?
Could these interpretations be challenged?

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

Design your own god!

Before you draw consider:

What would this god be responsible for? (eg: making fire, earthquakes, nature changing the Seasons).

What qualities, characteristics and attributes would they have? (e.g. something they carry)

What sacrifices have to be made to this god?

Finally, what is their name and what does their name mean?

Write down your ideas then draw you god!

Extension:

What myth might this god be at the centre of?

