

# The Maya

## Learning Objective:

To find out about Mayan religion and beliefs.

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What do you know  
about Mayan  
religion already?



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Religion was very important to the Maya and it affected everything people did. They believed in lots of different nature gods who ruled people's lives and decisions, such as the gods of maize, the Sun and fire.



This is a stone carving of Kinich Ahau, the Sun god.



[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kinich\\_Ahau\\_sculpture.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kinich_Ahau_sculpture.JPG)

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There are many, many Mayan gods. When researchers first started studying the Maya, they labelled the gods using the alphabet, such as God A, God B, God C, etc.



Why do you think they did this?

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Before Mayan hieroglyphics had been translated, no one knew what the names of the gods were so they labelled them with the letters of the alphabet to identify each one. Once the hieroglyphics had been translated, they were able to name the gods as they were called by the Maya.

This is a statue of God L, later identified as Chaac, the god of rain.



God D, or Itzamna was the god of agriculture and education.

Mayan lives revolved around religion. They had many special ceremonies and rituals to honour the gods and ask for blessings. People gave gifts to the gods, such as flowers, maize or gold, to show their thanks and to keep the gods happy.

Religious ceremonies took place in the temples of the cities. Offerings were thrown into holy water holes called cenotes.



As well as gifts, the Maya believed that they had to offer blood sacrifices to the gods. They believed that if they didn't, the Sun wouldn't rise and the world would end.

Blood sacrifices could be given in many ways. Rulers, for example, would pull spiky ropes through their tongues to draw blood, or fingernails would be pulled from slaves or captives.

This picture shows King Shield Jaguar holding a torch while his wife draws a barbed cord through her tongue.



[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British\\_museum173.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_museum173.jpg)



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This pot shows someone being sacrificed in a religious ceremony. He is having his heart pulled out.



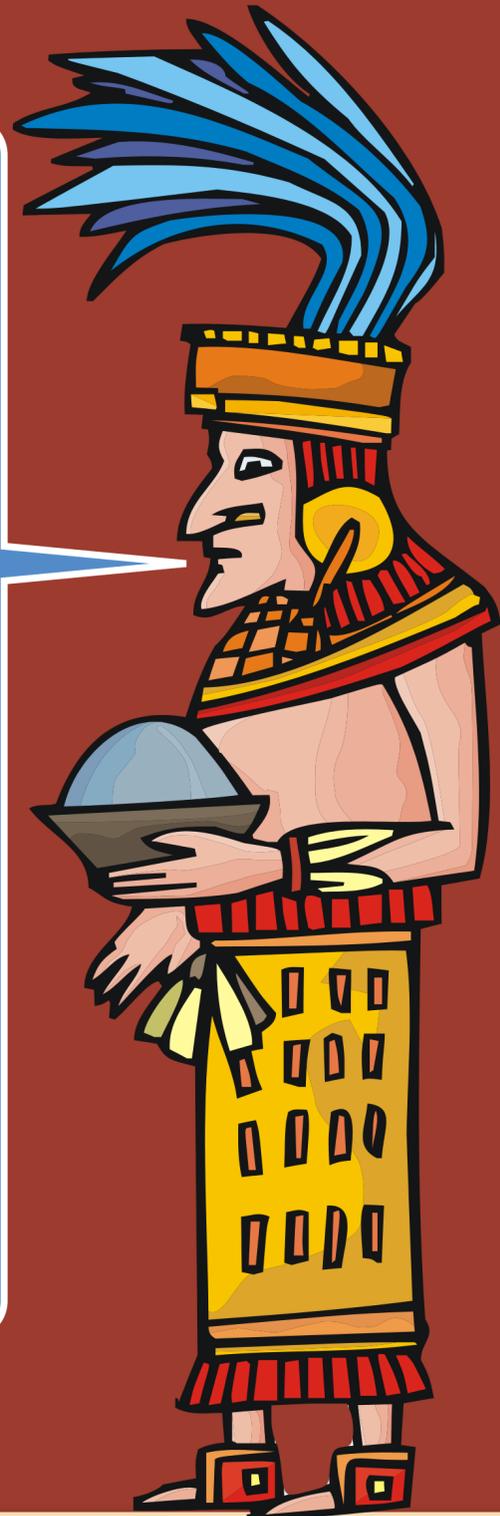
Another way to offer blood to the gods was to sacrifice humans and animals. Men, women and children could all be sacrificed. Human sacrifices were often slaves or captives from other city states.

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Other than those sacrificed, the only other people who went straight to paradise were women who died in childbirth, those who died in battle and those who died playing a religious ball game called Pok-a-Tok.



The Maya believed in an afterlife. They believed that there was a heaven and an underworld. People who were sacrificed to the gods went straight to heaven to live with the gods instead of going to the underworld. Everyone else, including rulers, had to journey through the underworld (which was a dark and scary place) to get to heaven. There were lots of terrifying gods here and rivers of blood. Not everyone completed this journey.

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Let's think back...



What have we found out about the religious beliefs of the Maya?

What could we find out more about?

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