The Americas ‖ The Fall of the Mayan Civilization (Three 45-minute sessions in three consecutive days)

## Goals & Objectives

**Goals**

* Students will know that there are many theories as to why the Mayan civilization fell.
* Students will understand that when it comes to theories about a particular historical event that it is crucial to take into consideration writers perspectives.
* Students will learn to analyze different documents by contrasting and comparing, and by evaluating key information.
* Students will learn to support argument using evidence from different sources.
* Students will write an argumentative essay.

**Objective**

* After analyzing different articles about possible reasons why the Mayan civilization disappeared, students will support their argument by taking place on a Four Corners Debate. Students will debate their position about a possible reason why the Maya Empire disappeared by using evidence from the articles.

## California State Content Standards

7.7 Students compare and contrast the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the Meso-American and Andean civilizations.

1. Study the locations, landforms, and climates of Mexico, Central America, and South America and their effects on Mayan, Aztec, and Incan economies, trade, and development of urban societies.

## Common Core Literacy Standards

**Common Core** **Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-8**

* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

**Common Core Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-8**

* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1b Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1.c Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2b Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2c Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.5 With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
* CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources **(primary and secondary),** using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

## Driving Historical Question

* What really happened to the Mayan civilization?
* What or who was responsible for the fall of one of the greatest ancient American civilizations?
* Was it reduction in rainfall coupled with a rapid rate of deforestation? Or was it just an extreme drought? Did they do it to themselves by over-clearing fields in efforts to grow more corn? What role did climate change play?
* Was it constant warfare between the Mayan and neighboring civilizations? Or did the power of its once successful rulers weaken?

### Lesson Introduction (Anticipatory Set/Hook/Accessing Prior Knowledge) ‖ **Time: 5- 7 min.**

**Second Day**

I will begin the lesson by reviewing what the students already know about the Mayans from previous lessons. At this point, students know that the Mayans were one of the most successful and powerful civilization of Mesoamerica. They already know that the Maya created a civilization of city-states and thrived in Mesoamerica’s rain forest. And the students also know that the Mayans developed a society and culture based on their religion. But what they may not know is that the civilization disappeared and that there are many theories that attempt to explain the reason why. With that said, I will start by helping students recall previous knowledge through a brief discussion. I will ask questions about the Mayan civilization that students will write down. I will ask a few students to read their answer to the class.

Next, I will reveal the lesson topic. My expectation is that a lot of the students won’t know about the topic. Consequently, I will ask students what they know about the fall of the Mayan empire, which will start a brief class discussion. After the discussion, I will play a short, but interesting, video, [“***The Mayans disappeared what was the cause?”***](https://youtu.be/y26PI7ClAJY)After the video, I will ask a couple of students to share with the class something they learned in the video. The class introduction will allow the students to activate previous knowledge, as well as to get an idea about today’s topic.

**Third Day**

First, I will restate the learning objective and ask students to identify specific steps that we have taken that will help them achieve the learning objective. I will explain to the students what we will do today and how it will help them demonstrate that they achieved the objective. Next, I will review what we covered in yesterday’s lesson to activate previous knowledge. Then, I will have a few students share something they learned yesterday. As the students share what they have learned, I will be able to assess their progress. I will clarify ideas and concepts, and I will review in more details concepts and ideas that students do not understand.

### Vocabulary (Content Language Development) ‖ **Time: 45 min.**

**First Day**

I will dedicate a whole class period to teach the vocabulary. The Common Core State Standards for vocabulary development suggest that students must develop proficiency with subject specific as well as other types of academic vocabulary. Therefore, to better help English Learners (ELs)—and all students in general—learn vocabulary, I will teach content vocabulary, which is subject specific terms, and general vocabulary that the students will use across curriculum. I will provide the students with the list of words. Using the overhead projector, I will ask students to identify the words they do not know from the list instead of teaching the whole list. Consequently, I will explain the word’s definition by writing short, meaningful, and understandable sentences using the words. I will demonstrate in the overhead projector so the students write what I write in the provided worksheet. When appropriate, and depending on my knowledge about English usage and structure, I will teach syntax (the word order or the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence) and pragmatics (how we use language in social, academic, and formal contexts). Throughout this activity, I will demonstrate using the overhead projector, and the students will follow.

**Content Vocabulary:**

* Ruins
* Warfare
* Pre-Columbian
* Militarism
* Siege
* Royalty
* Elite
* Over-farming
* Civilization
* Ancient
* Peninsula
* Yucatan
* Voyages

**General Vocabulary:**

* Numbered
* Prolonged
* Scarce
* Divine
* Hypothesis
* Fundamentalist
* Archeologist
* Replenish
* Deforestation
* Exacerbated

### Content Delivery (Method of Instruction) ‖ **Time: About 5 min. per article**

**Second Day**

**Introducing the learning objective (about 2 min.)**

After the class introduction, I will introduce the objective to the students. I will explain to the students why learn about this topic and how it will help them make connections with what they already know about the Mayan civilization. I will explain what will be expected of them to achieve the learning objective (class activities).

**Method of instruction**

We will analyze four different articles. Each article introduces a different theory about the fall of the Mayan civilization. Due to limited time, I will read all four articles (about 5 min. per article). I will model and demonstrate in the overhead projector as I annotate when reading the first article so that students can see how it is done. As I read, I will think aloud. Students will follow by circling unknown words, underlining key concepts and ideas, and taking notes (students are familiar with this process from previous lessons). Students know what to do; their job is to look for evidence that support the author’s argument. This will keep the students engaged. After I finish reading each article, in groups of four, students look for the meaning of words in a dictionary and work on the [**Document Analysis Sheet**](https://onedrive.live.com/redir?page=view&resid=169A004DC8EA14F!5236&authkey=!AOsWR7W3_utRxPM)(about 5 min. per article). The document analysis helps students organize and evaluate information. Using their notes, students write a summary of the event, look for a quote from the article that will serve as the evidence to support the author’s argument. And finally, students write four reasons in their own words explaining how the evidence supports the author’s argument.

We repeat this process for each article: I read the article and students follow by taking notes in their copy of the article. Then, in groups, students analyze the article using the document analysis sheet.

**Note**: due to limited time, it is possible that we might only get to analyze two or three articles. In that case, we will do the article(s) left the next day.

**Third Day (Student Directed Learning) – 20 min.**

(If we did not finish all the articles the day before, the first thing we will do after the class introduction is to analyze the last article).

Once all articles are analyzed, students will be able to change their position, if so they desire. At this point, we are good to start the debate.

There will be posters in four different areas in the classroom that state the four different positions/theories—reduction in rainfall coupled with a rapid rate of deforestation; the Mayan did it to themselves by over-clearing fields in efforts to grow more corn; constant warfare between the Mayan and neighboring civilizations; and lack of strong leadership. Students will choose their position and move to the area that houses their position.

Students will prepare their opening argument in their groups. The group will assign one person to state their position and explain why they think their reason is the true reason why the Mayan civilization disappeared. Students will use their document analysis and notes to defend their position. After the opening argument, students are allowed to change positions if they were persuaded by another group’s opening argument. However, they are allowed to switch positions only once.

Next, students are ready to start the debate. Each group will get an opportunity to defend their position and support their argument by using evidence from the document analysis sheet and their notes.

Each group will have the opportunity to challenge another group’s theory. The challenged group gets the opportunity to launch a counterattack. This process is repeated a couple of times between groups, allowing different students to express their opinion.

Students are constantly reminded that if they want to defend their position or contradict another group’s argument that they must do so using evidence from the articles. There will not be a winner group. The goal of the activity is to teach the students how to analyze different perspectives and how to use evidence to support arguments.

After the debate, students will write a four short paragraphs essay explaining each theory supported by evidence (20 min.). Students will submit one essay per group. In their essay, students will demonstrate what they learned. Students will demonstrate their ability to evaluate important information and support it with evidence.

### Student Engagement (Critical Thinking & Student Activities) ‖ **Time: 5 min.**

**Second Day**

Students read and annotate articles. Then, in groups, students analyze the article using the document analysis sheet. Students summarize the article in 2 to 3 sentences. They discuss and agree on a quote, or evidence, that they think helps support the author’s argument. Next, students analyze the article based on the evidence they agreed upon and explain in their own words the reasons why the evidence support the argument. By analyzing the articles in groups, students interact with each other—which encourages learning—think critically, communicate, and discuss different ideas and opinions in order to come up with a conclusion.

**Third Day**

Students will participate in a four corner debate (15 – 20 min.). Students will present their argument supported by evidence from the articles. They will challenge other groups’ argument. Students will listen, consider, and evaluate peers’ different opinions and ideas.

After the debate, students go back to their original groups and type a four paragraphs essay on the Chromebook (one essay per group) in which they explain each theory using evidence from the articles (20 min.). Students will use appropriate transition words and format.

### Lesson Closure ‖ **Time: 5 min.**

**Second Day**

I will review concepts and main ideas from the articles that we analyzed today. I give a sticky note to the students to write their name on it. I explain that they will post their name on the board by the door as they exit the classroom under the theory (reason) that they believe was the real cause of the fall of the Mayan civilization. I explain to the students that this will be their position in tomorrow’s debate, so they need to choose wisely. After reading and analyzing the articles, students should have an idea about what theory they think was the cause of the fall of the civilization.

**Note**: if we did not read all four articles today, students will have the opportunity to change positions after we read the last(s) article.

**Third Day**

After the students submit their essay, I will quickly review our three-day lesson’s goals and main ideas. I will remind students of high level thinking skills that they learned throughout the lesson. I will make sure to let them know how, when, and why to use these important skills. I will restate the importance of evidence when examining different perspectives and ideas. And lastly, I will remind the students to study for their vocabulary quiz.

### Assessments (Formative & Summative)

**Formative assessments**

During the three days, I will informally assess students’ progress toward the learning objective by observing and listening to their opinions and ideas during class discussions, as well as during group work. I will re-explain and clarify concepts, if needed.

We give the students weekly vocabulary quizzes, so the students will get quizzed on vocabulary. I collect and grade the quizzes. The vocabulary quiz is an effective method that lets me assess whether the students learned the vocabulary or not. The next day, I review vocabulary and sort of reteach those words that the majority of students seem not to understand.

**Summative Assessments**

During the debate, students will verbally demonstrate what they learned. I will be able to assess whether students achieved the objective, depending on their answers during the debate and if they are able to use evidence from the articles to support their argument.

In group, students will type an argumentative essay using the Chromebooks and will submit to me. Using their notes and document analysis, they will use evidence directly from the articles supporting and explaining each possible reason for the fall of the Mayan Civilization (one short paragraph per reason/article). However, each student will submit all four annotated articles and document analysis sheets, which will be part of the summative assessment. This way, I will be able to assess student’s work individually.

### Accommodations for English Learners, Striving Readers and Students with Special Needs

* The strategy I used to teach vocabulary is supposed to help particularly English Learners. According to Echevarria et al., “it is important to help these students make connections between what they know about the structure of their home language and what they are learning bout English” (*Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners,* 2014, pg. 70).
* I will use repetitive language, especially vocabulary words that I want students to learn.
* Also, I have reworded the articles that students will analyze to make them more apt to their level of knowledge. It is important to note here that in no way I changed the articles as to underestimate the students’ abilities. What I did is to try to make them more 7th grade appropriate, but still be able to challenge the students so they are helped to develop high level thinking skills.
* I will have students work in groups to help each other. The groups, as always, are diverse in student’s abilities, as well as in gender and ethnicity. In each group, there are students who will be able to help those who require more help during activities. This should help ELs and striving readers.
* As mentioned above, one of the reasons I decided to read the articles and have the students follow was because of limited time. However, reading the text aloud will help ELs learn vocabulary and how words are pronounced. Also, as I read, I will apply mentally model (for example, thinking aloud) to make thinking transparent to students.
* I will use verbal scaffolding, which helps ELs and striving readers alike. For example, I will use prompting, questioning, and elaboration to facilitate students’ movement to higher levels of language proficiency, comprehension and thinking.
* Another verbal scaffolding that work perfectly are paraphrasing and reinforcing contextual definitions throughout the reading.

### Resources (Books, Websites, Handouts, Materials)

* Spielvogel, J.J., and The National Geographic Society. (2006). *Discovering Our Past: Medieval and Early Modern Times.* Ohio: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
* Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., and Short, D. 2014. *Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners: The SIOP Model.* New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
* [**Document Analysis Sheet**](https://onedrive.live.com/redir?page=view&resid=169A004DC8EA14F!5236&authkey=!AOsWR7W3_utRxPM)
* [**Four Articles**](https://onedrive.live.com/redir?page=view&resid=169A004DC8EA14F!5234&authkey=!AJ1myqCh_wdqPAg)