

The Americas

TEACHER'S GUIDE



This mural from Bonampak, Mexico, shows ancient Maya life in the 8th century. Reconstruction by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby via Yale University; used under the doctrine of fair use.

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UNIT INFORMATION

The Americas

Unit Throughlines

How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

EU 1. Geographic features can create both opportunities and challenges for the people who live in a given region. The development of megacities requires populations to develop ways to grow sustainably, responsibly, and inclusively.

EU 2. Natural resources can be used by societies to innovate, address challenges, and enhance daily life.

EU 3. A city's design and features can reveal the values and beliefs of the people who created it. It can also reflect the exchange of ideas between societies through trade systems.

EU 4. Creation myths can reveal how people in a society viewed themselves and the world around them. A society's rituals often reflect its core values and beliefs.

EU 5. Migration and cultural exchange shape societies over time. A society's legacy and impact can endure over centuries.

Learning Progression

Human Geography and Regional Geographical Systems of the Americas | 5 Lessons

What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

- L 1. Investigate the people and places of Latin America by engaging with multimedia sources and identifying key aspects of diversity.
- L 2. Draw on geographic concepts to explain how people in different Latin American regions have faced environmental challenges and created opportunities by adapting to and using natural resources over time.
- L 3. Explain how physical geography and natural resources influence human activity in different Latin American regions through collaborative map annotations.
- L 4. Analyze the human geography of Latin American cities by identifying key urban challenges and innovations to explain how people are working to create healthier, more equitable communities.
- L 5. Use various sources to explain the challenges and opportunities that geography creates for people in different regions of the Americas.

The Americas' Earliest Complex Societies | 4 Lessons

How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

- L 6. Analyze how the Caral-Supe civilization innovated with natural resources to solve problems and create a cooperative way of life.
- L 7. Evaluate the credibility of various sources to learn about the ancient Olmec people through the identification of a source's creator and the presence of facts and opinions.
- L 8. Identify how the Olmec used natural resources like rubber to solve problems or enhance daily life.
- L 9. Explain how the Olmec and Caral-Supe used natural resources like rubber to solve problems or enhance daily life.

Key Practice Standards

PS 3. Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.

PS 5. Determine the credibility of sources using distinctions among fact and opinion as well as information regarding maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.

PS 7. Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced, and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems

Key Literacy Standards

SLCA.6-8.5. Integrate multimedia components and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

WCA.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.

WCA.6-8.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

WCA.6-8.8. When conducting research, gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and

Mesoamerican Societies: The Teotihuacan | 5 Lessons

How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

- L 10. Locate major Mesoamerican civilizations in time and place, exploring how Teotihuacan's geography and architecture reflect cultural values.
- L 11. Research how the features of the ancient city of Teotihuacan reveal its people's values and beliefs.
- L 12. Evaluate how features of Mesoamerican cities reflected cultural beliefs and values by analyzing visuals and video evidence from Teotihuacan.
- L 13. Analyze Teotihuacan's influence through trade and cultural exchange using information from a text.
- L 14. Evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources to explain how Mesoamerican societies shaped their buildings and cities to reflect cultural values.

Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya | 7 Lessons

How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

- L 15. Identify major features of past and present Maya society using an interactive website in order to engage in inquiry about Maya beliefs and values.
- L 16. Generate and evaluate questions about Maya beliefs and practices using visual and textual sources to make inferences about how rituals reflected their values and responses to challenges.
- L 17. Analyze a Maya creation myth to identify connections between mythology, nature, geography, and spiritual values.
- L 18. Analyze how and why the ancient Maya observed celestial phenomena by explaining the cultural significance of skywatching in Maya society.
- L 19. Use sources to identify how the Maya ball game reflected and reinforced Maya values and beliefs.
- L 20. Analyze ancient murals to determine important aspects of Maya culture and experiences.
- L 21. Synthesize knowledge about how Maya rituals and practices reflected their beliefs and values.

Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean | 5 Lessons

How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

- L 22. Analyze cultural artifacts from the ancient Caribbean to make inferences about how geography and migration shaped Taíno daily life and culture.
- L 23. Analyze how migration and geography shaped Taíno culture by examining language, artifacts, and daily life practices using primary and secondary sources.

conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

- L 24. Analyze how elements of Taíno culture have survived and continue to shape identity and traditions in the Caribbean today.
- L 25. Synthesize information about how migration and geography shaped the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean.
- L 26. Use the Know and Wonder and Inquiry Charts to identify important takeaway learnings from each cluster of the unit.

Summative Assessment | 2 Days

In Unit 4, students explored how ancient American cities were designed with intention, reflecting the beliefs, rituals, values, and environmental knowledge of their people. Astronomy, ecology, and daily life were deeply connected in these urban centers, which also served as places of competition and collaboration among neighboring communities.

For the Summative Assessment, students will apply their learning by creating an illustrated codex about a city of their choice from the ancient Americas. Their work will answer this Unit 4 Essential Question:

How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

This codex will serve as a culminating artifact that integrates research, interpretation, and reflection. Students will:

- Identify and analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources to gather meaningful information about their chosen city
- Evaluate the reliability of sources, considering when and where they were created, who made them, and whether they present facts or opinions
- Explain a challenge or problem the city or its people faced, and describe how they addressed it, highlighting human agency in responding to civic, environmental, or regional concerns

This project reinforces not only historical understanding but also civic learning. It builds on students' previous work from earlier units, such as their study of community and belonging in Unit 2 and their research skills and engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals in Unit 3. By communicating their findings to classmates and contributing to a collective learning celebration, students are engaging in civic practice that echoes the meaning of citizenship in ancient cities and today.

Investigating History

Grade 6, Unit 4

The Americas



How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

Framing the Unit

With the turn of the sixth grade curriculum to the middle and southern parts of the Americas, this final unit offers students a chance to rekindle and build upon earlier social studies learning. As fourth graders, they studied North America, including Mexico, whose ancient history is highlighted in this unit. They may also have encountered Indigenous northern cultures such as the Ancestral Puebloans or Mississippians, who shared some common practices and many trade connections with Indigenous peoples to the south. Indeed, the length and breadth of early networks of exchange stitch the continents together and link the fourth and sixth grade curricula in ways that teachers can turn to advantage.

Similarly, this sixth grade social studies unit launches a study of the ancient Americas that will prove foundational for students' study of major empires like the Inca and Aztec in high school world history classes. This curriculum focuses students' attention on particular cultures of early Mesoamerica, such as the Olmec, Teotihuacanos, and the Maya, while acknowledging the advances of Andean civilizations such as Caral-Supe (Norte Chico) and Caribbean cultures such as the Taíno. Students investigate practices of trade and economy, technology, ritual, diplomacy, and leadership for these societies. The unit highlights the intertwining of daily life and sacred belief within these cultures. And it guides students to think comparatively as they assess the similar and different features of ancient American societies and those of other world regions they have studied this year.

The cities of the early Americas are an important thread for Unit 4. Large and in some cases closely planned cities were a special feature of life on this continent. In the Summative Assessment, students select a city of the ancient Americas to research. Students reflect on how that city mirrored its people's priorities and beliefs; they also apply a lens of civically engaged thinking to their own modern city or town of residence, considering how these places might be improved to align with important values and concerns of our own time. Lastly, this project rounds out the unit's thematic work on Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which is threaded throughout Unit 4.

Unit Overview

Note on terminology: No single term captures the region studied in this unit. While Mexico today is regarded as part of North America, the early civilizations of Mexico are considered part of Mesoamerica, one of several regions of focus in the unit. The term “Latin America” describes the whole region for the geographic and contemporary topics included here but is anachronistic for the early cultures. (The term “America” is anachronistic, too, yet indispensable.)

Prepare to teach this unit by exploring the [Background Brief: The Americas](#), which was designed to help you build content knowledge through a variety of resources. The brief also highlights current perspectives and research—along with potential misconceptions and any debates you should know about—so you can present this unit with confidence.

Enduring Understandings

1. Geographic features can create both opportunities and challenges for the people who live in a given region. The development of megacities requires populations to develop ways to grow sustainably, responsibly, and inclusively.
2. Natural resources can be used by societies to innovate, address challenges, and enhance daily life.
3. A city’s design and features can reveal the values and beliefs of the people who created it. It can also reflect the exchange of ideas between societies through trade systems.
4. Creation myths can reveal how people in a society viewed themselves and the world around them. A society’s rituals often reflect its core values and beliefs.
5. Migration and cultural exchange shape societies over time. A society’s legacy and impact can endure over centuries.

Connections to Current Events and Issues

Connections to today’s world and students’ lives are built into this unit. Other contemporary connections could be added or developed for various topics of study within this unit, and we encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to connect students’ learning to contemporary local, national, and global developments that may arise as you teach this unit. Some ideas for linking this unit to current events and issues include:

Connections to today’s world and students’ lives are built into this unit as opportunities allow, but contemporary connections could be added or developed for various topics of study. Ideas for linking this unit to current events and issues include:

- Introduce ongoing challenges for Indigenous communities, and their work and others’ work to resolve them. Throughout the Americas, Indigenous communities grapple with the legacies of violent and oppressive settler colonialism, as well as legal and racial discrimination. Some of the issues that Indigenous peoples of the Americas face today include discrimination, poverty, securing land rights, chronic diseases caused by environmental pollution and mining, struggles for sovereignty, and the preservation of languages and culture. To stay up to date on Indigenous issues and efforts, sites such as [Cultural Survival](#) or local organizations such as [International Mayan League](#) may be

helpful; for an overview (teacher background), see the World Bank's [Indigenous Latin America in the 21st Century](#).

- Share recent news from Latin America's megacities as part of the focus on them, for instance, these resources on [easing gridlock in São Paulo](#) or [digital transformation in Mexico City](#).
- When teaching about trade networks in the Americas, lead a discussion of “nearshoring,” the growing movement among businesses to develop regional rather than long-distance trade networks. Since COVID-19 disrupted supply chains to Asia, Mexico in particular (already the US's second largest trading partner) has attracted a huge amount of international investment; your class can delve into the environmental, shipping speed, and cultural factors at play and discuss the question of whether nearshoring will revive the intra-regional trade networks first developed in the ancient world.

Vocabulary (in order of appearance)

Tier 3 Vocabulary		
the Olmec Mesoamerica egalitarian	pantheism cultural practices astronomy	tribute
Priority Tier 2 Vocabulary		
Latin America	sacrifice	legacy

Lesson Clusters

Cluster 1: Human Geography and Regional Geographical Systems of the Americas (Lessons 1-5)

What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

Focus Standards: 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.2, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.1, 6.T5b.2, 6.T5b.3, PS 3, PS 7, WCA.6-8.1b, WCA.6-8.7

This geography cluster focuses on the people and places of Latin America, introducing students to the region's diverse inhabitants, where they chose to build their communities, and the physical and human geography of three specific regions of Latin America: Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Students will explore the

Unit Overview

many facets of Latin American geography through videos, texts, and maps. They will also become familiar with the geographical features of the three regions through research and mapping.

Cluster 2: The Americas' Earliest Complex Societies (Lessons 6-9)**How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?**

Focus Standards: 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, PS 5, PS 7, WCA.6-8.7

In this cluster, students will investigate some of the earliest American lifeways and societies that archaeologists have begun to reconstruct in Mexico and South America. The Caral-Supe (or Norte Chico) civilization of Peru and the Olmec civilization of Mexico are two of the earth's complex societies that historians consider "cradles of civilization" because they arose independently of any others. Students will examine these through the lens of ancient world innovation, considering how they utilized natural resources to develop unique practices of daily life.

Note: If your class has been adding to a comparative timeline across the 6th grade year (digital or physical), it is highly recommended that you add the civilizations of Caral-Supe and the Olmec to your chronology.

Cluster 3: Mesoamerican Societies: The Teotihuacan (Lessons 10-14)**How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?**

Focus Standards: 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, PS 3, PS 5, SLCA.6-8.5, WCA.6-8.7

This lesson cluster introduces students to one of the major complex societies of Mesoamerica: the Teotihuacan. In the lessons, students delve into ways in which the design and features of cities—a focus of study in this unit—provide windows into the beliefs and values of their inhabitants, including their cosmological vision.

Cluster 4: Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya (Lessons 15-21)**How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?**

Focus Standards: 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, PS 3, PS 7, SLCA.6-8.5, WCA.6-8.1b, WCA.6-8.8

This cluster focuses on the Maya. These lessons introduce students to Maya city-states, rulership, ritual traditions, a creation myth, systems of knowledge, and trade. It also offers opportunities to draw comparisons with other ancient societies they have studied.

Note: To learn more about the Maya today, see the video [The Maya People](#) (NMAI).

Cluster 5: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean (Lessons 22-26)

How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

Focus Standards: 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5a.4, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, PS 3, PS 5, PS 7

This brief cluster, built around the Supporting Question above, centers the culture and history of the Taíno—the region’s predominant Indigenous group—that settled in the Caribbean more than 2,000 years ago. By the 1st millennium CE, historians describe the ancient Caribbean as a bustling highway of movement and exchange, where skillful mariners connected island societies to one another and to other peoples and cultures of the Americas, including the Maya. An important element of this cluster is the culturally affirming recognition that Indigenous people have endured, and that knowing their history matters to them as it matters to all people.

Summative Assessment: The Americas (Lessons 27-28)

Focus Standards: 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, PS 3, PS 5, PS 7

In Unit 4, students explored how ancient American cities were designed with intention, reflecting the beliefs, rituals, values, and environmental knowledge of their people. Astronomy, ecology, and daily life were deeply connected in these urban centers, which also served as places of competition and collaboration among neighboring communities.

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This codex will serve as a culminating artifact that integrates research, interpretation, and reflection. Students will:

- Identify and analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources to gather meaningful information about their chosen city
- Evaluate the reliability of sources, considering when and where they were created, who made them, and whether they present facts or opinions
- Explain a challenge or problem the city or its people faced, and describe how they addressed it, highlighting human agency in responding to civic, environmental, or regional concerns

This project reinforces not only historical understanding but also civic learning. It builds on students’ previous work from earlier units, such as their study of community and belonging in Unit 2 and their research skills and engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals in Unit 3. By communicating their findings to classmates and contributing to a collective learning celebration, students are engaging in civic practice that echoes the meaning of citizenship in ancient cities and today.

Unit Focus Standards

Content Standards

- **6.T5a.1:** On a physical map of the world, use cardinal directions, map scales, key/legend, and title to locate Central America, the Caribbean Sea. On a map of the region, identify important physical features of the region (e.g. Gulf of Mexico, Yucatan Peninsula, the Panama Canal).
- **6.T5a.2:** Demonstrate knowledge of political geography by locating the current countries and major cities of Central America and the Caribbean Islands on a political map; use knowledge of maps to complement information gained from text about a country or region.
- **6.T5a.3:** Explain how absolute and relative locations, climate, major physical characteristics and natural resources influenced settlement, population size, and the economies of regions and countries in Central America and the Caribbean Islands.
- **6.T5a.4:** Describe the culture and way of life of the indigenous populations of the region (e.g., Carib [Antilles and South America], Taino [Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico], Lenca [Honduras], Miskito [Nicaragua], Huatares and Chorotegas [Costa Rica], Lokono, also known as Arawak [Trinidad and Tobago]).
- **6.T5b.1:** On a physical map of the world, use cardinal directions, map scales, key/legend, and title to locate South America and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. On a map of South America, locate important physical features of the region (e.g. Isthmus of Panama, Andes Mountains, Cape Horn, Amazon River, and the southern, northern, eastern, and western regions of South America). Use other kinds of maps (e.g., landform, population, climate) to determine important characteristics of this region.
- **6.T5b.2:** On a political map of the region, demonstrate map reading skills to distinguish countries, capitals, and other cities and to describe their absolute location (using latitude and longitude coordinates) and relative location (relationship to other countries, cities, or bodies of water); use knowledge of maps to complement information gained from text about a city, country or region.
- **6.T5b.3:** Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries in South America.
- **6.T5c.1:** Research and report on one of the major ancient societies that existed in Central America (Maya, Teotihuacán, and other civilizations such as the Olmec, Toltec, and Zapotec), or one of the major pre-Columbian Andean civilizations (Chavín, Moche, Nazca), their locations, and their cultural characteristics.

Practice Standards

- **PS 3:** Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.
- **PS 5:** Determine the credibility of sources using distinctions among fact and opinion as well as information regarding maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.

- **PS 7:** Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced, and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems

Literacy Standards

- **SLCA.6-8.5:** Integrate multimedia components and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.
- **WCA.6-8.1:** Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
 - **WCA.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.
- **WCA.6-8.7:** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- **WCA.6-8.8:** When conducting research, gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, 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.



Grade 6, Unit 4: The Americas

Vocabulary List

Human Geography and Regional Geographical Systems of the Americas (Lessons 1-5)

Lesson	Word	Definition
2	Latin America (n.)	areas of the American continents where most people speak languages that come from Latin (Spanish, Portuguese, or French), including Mexico, most of Central and South America, and many Caribbean islands
4	inclusive (adj.)	considering all people in your decisions or actions
4	sustainable (adj.)	using resources wisely so they are available in the future

The Americas' Earliest Complex Societies (Lessons 6-9)

Lesson	Word	Definition
7	the Olmec (n.)	ancient people who lived in the tropical lowlands of south-central Mexico from 1200 BCE to about 400 BCE and influenced many later Mesoamerican civilizations

Mesoamerican Societies: The Teotihuacan (Lessons 10-14)

Lesson	Word	Definition
10	Mesoamerica (n.)	"Middle America," a region of diverse societies with shared cultural traits
11	egalitarian (adj.)	aiming for equal wealth and status for all people
12	pantheism (n.)	the belief that the universe and nature are divine

Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya (Lessons 15-21)

Lesson	Word	Definition
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Vocabulary List

15	cultural practices (n.)	the behaviors shared by a group—the way they do things and the way they make things; expressions of culture often with hidden meanings or beliefs and values
18	astronomy (n.)	scientific study of stars, planets, and other objects in space
18	cyclical (adj.)	happening again and again in the same order; happening in cycles
19	sacrifice (n.)	the act of killing a person or animal in a religious ceremony as an offering to please a god
20	tribute (n.)	money or goods that a ruler or country is expected or required to give to another ruler or country, especially for protection

Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean (Lessons 22-26)

Lesson	Word	Definition
24	legacy (n.)	something that is passed down from the past to the present

LESSON PLANS

Human Geography and Regional Geographical Systems of the Americas

What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

CONTENTS

Lesson 1

Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

Lesson 2

Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

Lesson 3

Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 2)

Lesson 4

Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

Lesson 5

Formative Assessment

Overview

This geography cluster focuses on the people and places of Latin America, introducing students to the region's diverse inhabitants, where they chose to build their communities, and the physical and human geography of three specific regions of Latin America: Central America, the Caribbean, and South America. Students will explore the many facets of Latin American geography through videos, texts, and maps. They will also become familiar with the geographical features of the three regions through research and mapping.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this cluster, students should be able to...

- Identify the purposes of various maps of the region.
- Make inferences about the challenges and opportunities that geography poses in South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.
- Use Sustainable Development Goal 11 to learn key vocabulary to analyze cities, and use it to analyze the challenges and adaptations of several of the Americas' megacities.
- Construct social studies arguments that select relevant information to support claims with evidence gathered from multiple sources (WIDA ELD-SS.6-8.Argue.Expressive).

Vocabulary

TIER 2

inclusive

Latin America
sustainable

Cluster Focus Standards

Practice Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
PS 3: Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.	1-5
PS 7: Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced, and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems	2-5

Content Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
6.T5a.1: On a physical map of the world, use cardinal directions, map scales, key/legend, and title to locate Central America, the Caribbean Sea. On a map of the region, identify important physical features of the region (e.g. Gulf of Mexico, Yucatan Peninsula, the Panama Canal).	2-3, 5
6.T5a.2: Demonstrate knowledge of political geography by locating the current countries and major cities of Central America and the Caribbean Islands on a political map; use knowledge of maps to complement information gained from text about a country or region.	2-5
6.T5a.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, climate, major physical characteristics and natural resources influenced settlement, population size, and the economies of regions and countries in Central America and the Caribbean Islands.	1-5

6.T5b.1: On a physical map of the world, use cardinal directions, map scales, key/legend, and title to locate South America and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. On a map of South America, locate important physical features of the region (e.g. Isthmus of Panama, Andes Mountains, Cape Horn, Amazon River, and the southern, northern, eastern, and western regions of South America). Use other kinds of maps (e.g., landform, population, climate) to determine important characteristics of this region.	2-3, 5
6.T5b.2: On a political map of the region, demonstrate map reading skills to distinguish countries, capitals, and other cities and to describe their absolute location (using latitude and longitude coordinates) and relative location (relationship to other countries, cities, or bodies of water); use knowledge of maps to complement information gained from text about a city, country or region.	5
6.T5b.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries in South America.	1-5

Literacy Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
WCA.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.	5
WCA.6-8.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.	2-3

Unit 4, Cluster 1 Inquiry Chart (Teacher Version)

Unit EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
Cluster SQ	What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?
What questions will we ask?	

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 2: We mapped how people in different regions of Latin America adapted to their environment and used natural resources.	The Americas include many different types of geography that shape how people live, work, and connect such as mountains, cities, farmland, rivers, and coasts. Some environments create challenges, such as isolation or difficult travel, while others offer opportunities like fertile land or shared language.
Lesson 3: We explained how geography and resources shape life in Latin America by working together on annotated maps.	Maps help us understand not only where places are, but also how people have settled, adapted, and built communities in response to their environments. Some features, like mountain ranges or hurricanes, make travel, communication, or safety harder, posing challenges for how people live and move. Other features, such as rivers, coastal access, or fertile land, provide opportunities for farming, trade, and connection.
Lesson 4: We investigated Latin American megacities to understand urban challenges and how communities are working toward sustainability.	Managing a population this large in places like Mexico City or São Paulo requires innovative solutions to deal with limited space, traffic, and environmental damage. The layout and growth of a city can reflect a population's values like caring for nature or including all groups in city planning.

LESSON 1

Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Investigate the people and places of Latin America by engaging with multimedia sources and identifying key aspects of diversity.	Elaborate ideas and reasoning from different multimedia sources, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This unit kickoff lesson introduces Latin America in its geographic, ethnic, and linguistic diversity and in its physical contours and political boundaries. Through multiple viewings of a music video source and a close reading of its lyrics, students identify and take notes on varied characteristics of the region and learn that it is far from monolithic. They also begin to consider the unit's Essential Question, *How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?* and engage in a predictive discussion about it.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.3
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 1 Slide Deck
☐ “Latinoamérica” Video Analysis
☐ “Latinoamérica” Video Analysis (Teacher Version)
☐ Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Spaces & Values	5
Building a Know and Wonder Chart	15
Latinoamérica Video & Text Close-Reading Analysis	30

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [“Latinoamérica” Video Analysis \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports the collection of evidence and written responses
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists and supports students in summarizing what they see throughout the video screenings

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Suggest a couple of sentence starters from the Summarize LLB to use in working with the scaffolded handout. Students will benefit from working with a language-proficient peer and translating the questions and instructions. When watching the video, allow students to use subtitles.
- Look Fors: Responses should include the use of words from the word bank and lyrics using the sentence frames provided. Responses will most likely be translated.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students to use sentence starters and frames from both scaffold documents listed above. Students can use the word bank to complete their responses for the second watch. Students should write two or more sentences for the second and third watch responses.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound questions and sentences should use Tier 2 words and phrases like *celebrate* and *connect*.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete the activity independently.
- Look Fors: Responses analyzing the song should have multiple sentences. Students should contribute to the class discussions.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Create a Know and Wonder Chart in the format of your choice (digital or on chart paper) for each class period.

Prepare to teach this unit by exploring the [Background Brief: The Americas](#), which was designed to help you build content knowledge through a variety of resources. The brief also highlights current perspectives and research—along with potential misconceptions and any debates you should know about—so you can present this unit with confidence.

Lesson 1: Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

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Activator: Spaces & Values (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Spark curiosity by playing “Wicked—One Short Day,” featuring the Emerald City (0:00–1:15). Then ask:

- *What do you see in this video clip?*
- *What does this space tell you about the people who built it?*
- *What might they have valued?*

Ask students to take a minute to independently think about these questions in relation to the image. Then invite students to popcorn-share (share a quick thought, allowing many voices to be heard) and write their ideas on the board.

Possible responses:

- The city looks shiny, clean, and full of bright green lights. There are tall buildings, and everything looks magical and important.
- It looks like the people care a lot about beauty and impressing others. They may value magic, power, and creativity.
- The green color might show they care about unity or have a shared identity.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Briefly discuss the word “value” with students. Invite them to share their ideas of what values mean in order to ensure students can connect the concept to their own lives and understand how values influence people’s choices, cultures, and communities.

Share with students that this new unit will build on their learning about government, society, culture, and geography from the previous four units, but they will now focus on the people and places of Central America, the Caribbean Islands, and South America.

Building a Know and Wonder Chart (15 minutes)

Slide 3: Introduce the Unit 4 Essential Question to students:

Lesson 1: Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

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How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

Slide 4: Display the prepared class [Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart](#), and introduce the unit's Essential Question: *How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?*

Ask: *What do you already know about this question?*

- Have students discuss the Know question in a Think-Pair-Share format with a partner.
- They can also use the student handout version of the Know and Wonder Chart if they would like.

Ask student groups to share their ideas with the whole class. Be sure to record students' ideas under the Know category. Possible responses:

- I know that people build important buildings like churches or government buildings to show what they believe in.
- I know that cities have places for people to meet, like schools, town squares, or community centers.

Ask: *What do you wonder about this question?*

- Then prompt students to discuss the Wonder question in a Think-Pair-Share format with a partner, with the option to use their own copies of the chart to support their work.

Ask student groups to share their ideas with the whole group. As they share, be sure to chart students' ideas under the Wonder category. Possible responses:

- I wonder how public spaces show what a community cares about.
- I wonder if the same place can show different values to different people.

If there is time, ask students to share which questions from the Wonder portion of the chart they are most interested in investigating in the unit ahead.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Refer your ML students to the [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) to support the generation of new questions on the Know and Wonder Chart.

Lesson 1: Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

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Have the class's chart in an accessible spot for the remainder of the unit. Students will refer back to it throughout the unit, including in the next lesson.

Mention that research is an important mode of learning for our unit on the Americas and that questions and uncertainty drive research, making their questions a great contribution.

✦ Latinoamérica Video & Text Close-Reading Analysis (30 minutes)

Slide 5: Introduce Puerto Rican band Calle 13. Explain that Calle 13 is a Grammy-winning group known across Latin America for lyrics that challenge inequality and promote social justice.

Slide 6: Ask students to locate Puerto Rico on a map.

- Briefly review absolute and relative location, using Florida as a reference point. (Florida is approximately 1,150 miles from Puerto Rico, or 2.5–3 hours by plane.)
- Clarify that Puerto Rico is part of the United States. The people who live there are US-born citizens, and they also consider themselves part of Latin America.

Slide 7: Explain to students that they are going to watch the “Latinoamerica” video (5:42) by Calle 13 a total of three times. Each viewing will focus on different observations, helping students build questions and ideas about Latin American people and places.



TEACHING TIP

This video is full of powerful images and lyrics that show the beauty and diversity of Latin America. It tells the story of the continent through its people and the places in which they live and work. Students will see a variety of places and people, including Indigenous communities, people of all ages, and people with disabilities. Students should notice how different the featured environments are in the video, from mountains to cities to farms. Explain to students that Calle 13 is a music group that aims to promote understanding of the cultures of Latin America.



TEACHING TIP

Be aware that 30 seconds into the video clip, there is a realistic image of a pumping heart. This may surprise students, so it may be worthwhile to quickly share the image ahead of time or give advanced warning. Ask students to put their “music video director” hat on and consider what the thumping heart is there to represent.

Lesson 1: Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

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Distribute the [“Latinoamérica” Video Analysis](#) handout for note-taking after each of the video screenings.

- As students watch the video the first time, instruct them to pay special attention to the places and geographical features they see.
- Referencing the Graphic Organizer, instruct students to jot quick notes on the geographic features they saw, describe them, and write a question.

Ask for one or two student volunteers to share their answers. This first viewing and analysis should take no more than 10 minutes. You can refer to the [“Latinoamérica” Video Analysis \(Teacher Version\)](#) handout to support students’ discussions and comprehension.

Slide 8: In preparation for the second viewing, tell students that they will be focusing on people and their activities in relation to their environments.

- Before screening, read the two question choices so students can think about which one is best for them to answer.

Initiate a brief Think-Pair-Share.

- Provide students with a designated amount of time for them to complete the analysis questions on their Graphic Organizer.
- Then ask students to turn and share their answers with their partner.
- Finally, invite a couple of pairs of students to share their ideas with the class.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [“Latinoamérica” Video Analysis \(Sentence Frames\)](#) handout, and encourage them to use the [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to assist and support them in summarizing what they see throughout the video screenings.

Giving them time to process, question, reflect, and clarify orally helps all students to make meaning with their peers. It also provides necessary oral language practice for expressing their learning before solidifying their answers on their handouts.

Lesson 1: Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

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Slide 9: Students will focus on languages and the meaning of the song during the third viewing of the music video.

Ask students: *Do you know what language Calle 13 is using when they sing?*

Most students will identify Spanish, but some may also notice lyrics in Portuguese and the presence of some Indigenous languages in the video. Bring this up if students do not notice it themselves.

Before playing the video for the third time, read aloud the English translation of the excerpted lyrics on the last page of the [“Latinoamérica” Video Analysis](#) handout.

- Point out the columns in Spanish and English, and explain that these are only some of the lyrics.
- Students should answer the first question in the “Third Watch” section *before* they watch the video but *after* reading the lyrics.

Preview the final question on the video’s message, then play the video for a final time.

After the screening, initiate another brief Think-Pair-Share.

- Provide students with a designated amount of time to complete the analysis questions on their handout.
- Then ask students to turn and share their answers with their partner.
- Finally, invite a couple of pairs of students to share their ideas with the class.

Answers will vary, and there is no “correct” answer. This activity is about exploring how different people and places form a rich and diverse Latin America.



LEARN MORE

The music video leans toward natural and rural over urban environments though there are definitely scenes of city life that students should recognize. Later in this cluster, students will take a deep dive into modern Latin America’s cities. But if you wish to offer some balance to the video and preview our urban theme, these 4K drone videos, [“Downtown Lima, Peru”](#) by MTI Aerials and [“Mexico City Drone Hyperlapse”](#) by 漢客Hank, are captivating and give a different perspective.

This reference article, [“Calle 13 \(band\) facts for kids,”](#) from Kiddle, provides useful background on the band Calle 13 and is also shareable with students who wish to learn more about the group.

Lesson 1: Meeting the People and Places of Latin America

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“Latinoamérica” Video Analysis (Teacher Version)

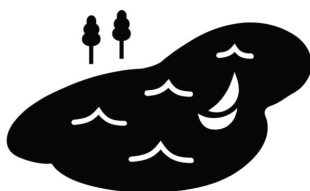
First Watch Directions: Here are some examples of the geographical features you can watch for in the video. Circle or check off the features you noticed.

Student responses will vary. Look for citations of specific evidence or information from the video in students' writing. Possible responses:

Mountain Range



Lake



Forest



City



1. What other geographical features did you see in the video?

- Geographical features (mountains, lakes, desert, rivers, ocean, sea, plains, farmland)
- Urban vs. rural dwellings (apartments, high-rises; farming communities, villages)
- Diverse climates (cold, high mountains; tropical forests; beaches, etc.)

2. Based on what you saw in the video, write a sentence that describes the physical geography of Latin America.

- I saw certain geographical features in the video including deserts, rivers, and tropical beaches.
- Latin America has mountains, lakes, and forests.

3. Write one question you have about the places you saw in the video:

- How are there deserts and snowy mountains in the same region?
- How have populations adapted to living in so many different types of geography?

Image sources:

- Mountain range image by Icon Pie via Noun Project, CC BY 3.0
- Lake image by Hayashi Fumihiro via Noun Project, CC BY 3.0.
- Forest image by Proicon via Noun Project, CC BY 3.0.
- City image by Rasama studio via Noun Project, CC BY 3.0.

Second Watch Directions: Choose one question below to answer about the people in the video.

- **Choice 1:** What do you notice the people in the video are doing? Choose one or two people or scenes to describe.
- People in the video are dancing and farming. This shows that culture and work are both important in Latin America.
- **Choice 2:** What do you notice about how the people in the video are interacting with their environment? Choose one or two people or scenes to describe.
- People in the video interact with their environment by growing food and fishing. This shows they use the land and water to survive and celebrate their culture.

Third Watch Directions: After watching the video one final time, reference the lyrics in order to answer the questions below.

1. Choose one line from the lyrics that talks about either places or people in Latin America, and write it below:

- "I've got the lakes, I've got the rivers" (places)
- "You can't buy the wind. You can't buy the sun." (environment/places)
- "...Caribbean Sea watching over small houses,..." (places)
- "I've got these teeth for when I smile." (people)
- "I am all of the saints on the necklace I wear." (people)
- "A sugarcane field under the Cuban sun." (places)

2. Based on this video, what do you think is Calle 13's overall message about Latin America? What images or lyrics help you know that?

- I think Calle 13's overall message is that Latin America is beautiful, powerful, and cannot be owned or bought.
- In their lyrics, they comment on the natural resources, the strength of the people, and pride in culture and land.
- The images of mountains, people dancing, farming, and celebrating, along with lyrics like "You can't buy the wind" show that Latin America is rich in ways that go beyond money.
- It's quite varied, with both urban and rural environments and a huge diversity of climate.
- Latin Americans are many different kinds of people, but they are connected to one another and the beautiful region where they live.
- We are one; unity is what is important. And independence is important—no one can buy us, no matter how much money they have.

“Latinoamérica” Lyrics

(excerpted, with English translation)

Tengo los lagos, tengo los ríos
Tengo mis dientes pa' cuando me sonrío
La nieve que maquilla mis montañas

Tengo el sol que me seca y la lluvia que me baña.
Un desierto embriagado con...un trago de pulque,
para cantar con los coyotes todo lo que necesito

Tengo a mis pulmones respirando azul clarito
La altura que sofoca
El otoño con sus hojas desmalladas
Los versos escritos bajo la noche estrellada
Una viña repleta de uvas
Un cañaveral bajo el sol en Cuba
Soy el mar Caribe que vigila las casitas
Haciendo rituales de agua bendita
El viento que peina mi cabello
Soy, todos los santos que cuelgan de mi cuello
El jugo de mi lucha no es artificial
Porque el abono de mi tierra es natural

Tú no puedes comprar al viento
Tú no puedes comprar al sol
Tú no puedes comprar la lluvia
Tú no puedes comprar el calor
Tú no puedes comprar las nubes
Tú no puedes comprar los colores
Tú no puedes comprar mi alegría
Tú no puedes comprar mis dolores

I've got the lakes, I've got the rivers.
I've got these teeth for when I smile.
The snow decorating my mountains.

I've got the sun that dries me off and the rain that cleanses me.
A desert drunk off pulque,* singing with the coyotes, it's all that I need.

I've got my lungs breathing sky blue,
An altitude that suffocates
The autumn with its fainting leaves,
Verses written under the starry night.
A vineyard filled with grapes.
A sugar cane field under the Cuban sun.
I am the Caribbean Sea watching over small houses,
doing rituals with holy water,
The wind that combs my hair.
I am all of the saints on the necklace I wear.
The harvest of my struggle is not artificial,
because it is born organically on my people's soil.

You can't buy the wind. You can't buy the sun.
You can't buy the rain. You can't buy the heat.
You can't buy the clouds. You can't buy the colors.
You can't buy my joy.
You can't buy my pain.

*a traditional indigenous Mexican drink

Text source: Adapted from the English translation at [Lyricstranslate.com](http://lyricstranslate.com). "["Latinoamérica" English translation](http://lyricstranslate.com)."

LESSON 2

Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

EQ How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

SQ What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Draw on geographic concepts to explain how people in different Latin American regions have faced environmental challenges and created opportunities by adapting to and using natural resources over time.

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE

Explain how geographical features and natural resources impacted people in different Latin American regions, orally, using connectors to express causal relationships.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson and the next focus on the prominent and important geographic features of different regions of South America, Central America (including today's Mexico), and the Caribbean islands. Using a variety of sources, students research these features and are introduced to the human and physical geography of these three regions by analyzing maps, texts, and videos. These experiences build toward an analysis of the Supporting Question: *What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?*

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.2, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.1, 6.T5b.3, WCA.6-8.7
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 2 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Geography of Central America Student Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Geography of South America Student Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Geography of the Caribbean Student Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Geography of Central America \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ [Geography of South America \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ [Geography of the Caribbean \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ [Geography of Central America](#)
- ☐ [Geography of South America](#)

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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- ☐ [Geography of the Caribbean](#)
- ☐ [Cluster 1 Inquiry Chart](#)
- ☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart

VOCABULARY

Latin America

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Launching the Question	20
Exploring the Geography of the Americas	30

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Geography of Central America \(Sentence Frames\)](#), [Geography of South America \(Sentence Frames\)](#), [Geography of the Caribbean \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Support written responses to prompts
- [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports inquiry language for creating questions

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Suggest a couple of examples from the Question LLB for students to use on the Inquiry Chart. Allow students to translate the instructions, sentence frames, and word bank. Allow students to watch the videos with headphones to slow down and use subtitles.
- Look Fors: Appropriate words or short phrases using the sentence starters and word banks on available scaffolds will be mostly translated or in their home language and may be created with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles, if necessary. Some translation support may be necessary to complete the Inquiry Chart and notes about sources.
- Look Fors: Complete sentences using the sentence starters provided and word banks may use some translation, if necessary.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this activity mostly independently. Encourage students to use the Question LLB for the Inquiry Chart, if necessary.
- Look Fors: More detailed compound and complex sentences should use academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary where possible.

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Determine if you want to work with the Inquiry Chart on chart paper or digitally. You will need separate class copies for each class period. Students will also need to have their own copies to work with throughout the cluster, either digitally or printed.

Have each class period's Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart from Lesson 1 easily accessible.

Secure digital devices for students to view the student slide decks and complete the research tasks.

Determine if students will complete their handouts physically or digitally.

Decide how you will divide students into 3 or 6 groups (depending on class size), and assign each group a region.

Optional: Create physical or virtual stations with added visuals, artifacts, and maps.

**Launching the Question** (20 minutes)**SPARK CURIOSITY**

Slide 2: Project a map to spark curiosity and to set up the Supporting Question. Remind students that an important way social scientists describe and define regions of the world is by using maps.

- Show a map of Latin America with political boundaries marked.
- Ask: *What do you notice?*

Keep the discussion brief. Ask students for simple observations. Remind students that the region of Latin America is north of the equator as well as south and that South America is the southernmost continent after Antarctica.

Slide 3: What does the term “Latin America” actually mean? Introduce a new vocabulary term that will be used heavily throughout the unit: *Latin America*.

- Say the word: *Latin America*.
- Use the word in context: *Scholars and historians do not all agree on the boundaries and countries that*

**TEACHING TIP**

For background, the article ["What Is Latin America?"](#) from ThoughtCo. has a helpful perspective, as does ["An Overview of Latino and Latin American Identity,"](#) from the Getty Museum's blog.

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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are included in the Latin American region.

- Share the student-friendly definition: *(noun) areas of the American continents where most people speak languages that come from Latin (Spanish, Portuguese, or French), including Mexico, most of Central and South America, and many Caribbean islands.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*
- Highlight the word's features: *Latin America is a noun. Latin American is an adjective that refers to the region or a person from the region.*

Slide 4: Play the preset “Tour the World” video excerpt (3:30–5:00) by Marbles the Brain Store, which names all of the countries in North and South America, providing visual and auditory support to the idea of a political map.

Slides 5–7: Without explaining to students what the next three maps represent, spend about a minute or two showcasing each one.

Prompt students to critically think about the intentions behind the maps by asking:

- *What kind of map is this?*
- *What features do you notice immediately?*
- *What information can we learn from this map?*

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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**TEACHING TIP**

The map on **Slide 5** is a physical map of South America, and students might notice the mountain range on the west coast (the Andes Mountains), the green areas of dense vegetation, and possibly even the Amazon River.

The map on **Slide 6** is a zoomable interactive map of ancient and other ruins of Central and South America. It is worth having students take a careful look at where ancient peoples settled so that in the next lesson they can note the correspondence with coastal population centers (and megacities) in the region today.

The map on **Slide 7** is a language map, specifically of Romance (Latin-based) languages spoken from Mexico and the Caribbean southward. The legend is a major clue, but if students still struggle, give the hint that this is about human geography instead of physical features.

INTRODUCE THE SUPPORTING QUESTION AND ELICIT INITIAL THINKING

Slide 8: Explain to students that in this cluster, they will move from examining geography's influence on people today to exploring influences on ancient societies.

Introduce the Cluster 1 Supporting Question:



What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

Slide 9: Introduce students to the [Cluster 1 Inquiry Chart](#) document.

- Remind students that the Inquiry Chart will continue to help them keep track of their ongoing learning and questions throughout the unit.
- Explain that historians ask many questions to understand and make sense of history and how it connects to the present day.
- Asking good questions starts with considering what they already know, which then helps them identify what they still need to explore and learn.

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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DEVELOP THE INQUIRY CHART

Ask: *What do you already know about this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to recall and share what they know about this topic from their initial work with the Unit 1 Know and Wonder Chart in Lesson 1 as well as previous learnings (Grade 6, Units 1–3, their lives, and/or other classes and resources).
- Possible responses: Latin American countries have a lot of natural resources, like rainforests, rivers, and minerals. They may also be aware that some countries face challenges with deforestation or pollution, but people are working to protect the environment through laws or conservation efforts.

Ask: *Which of the questions we brainstormed in our Wonder column of the Know and Wonder Chart might relate to this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Student responses will vary based on their Wonder questions.

Ask: *What other related questions can help us answer this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Possible responses: How did people adapt to different climates, like hot jungles or high altitudes? How did deserts or rainforests make travel or trade harder? Were there any resources that created opportunities for people in certain places?

Invite students to share their questions with the whole class.

- Consolidate or synthesize questions related to the Supporting Question as needed so there are three to four representative questions.
- Add these three to four questions to the “What questions will we ask?” section of the class’s Inquiry Chart.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their inquiry.

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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- Prompt students to record the questions on their own Inquiry Chart handouts.

PREVIEW THE LEARNING AHEAD

Share with students that in this cluster, they will use photographs, maps, videos, and readings to explore the geography of Latin America and its diverse regions and draw conclusions about how regional geography provides both challenges and opportunities.

You will return to this Inquiry Chart document in Lesson 5 and throughout the unit, so it is essential that you continue to preserve students' thinking here and have a separate chart for each class period.

✦ Exploring the Geography of the Americas (30 minutes)

Slide 10: Before setting students up in their regional expert groups, share with students: *You're now going to do your own research about the geography of Latin America. What kinds of sources do you think might help you gather information?*

Facilitate a brief whole-class discussion. Possible responses:

- Some helpful resources could include images, videos, maps, and short texts
- A mixture of primary and secondary sources

Ask: *Why might it be helpful to use more than one kind of source when studying geography?* Possible responses:

- Primary sources come straight from the event or are firsthand accounts. Secondary sources are interpretations or summaries of primary sources.
- Together, a variety of sources can give us a clear picture of an idea or concept.

This should prepare students for thoughtful resource use during their group work and helps to set up the closing reflection.

Provide a brief overview of the three regions that students will study: Central America, South America, and the



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide multilingual learners with scaffolded versions of the resource sets: [Geography of Central America \(Sentence Frames\)](#), [Geography of South America \(Sentence Frames\)](#), and [Geography of the Caribbean \(Sentence Frames\)](#). Encourage students to utilize the sentence frames and word banks provided.

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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Caribbean.

- Use a political map to highlight a few defining geographic characteristics or notable countries in each region.
- Explain that this overview will help students understand the broader context before diving deeper as regional experts.

According to groups' assigned regions, distribute printed copies of the handouts: [Geography of Central America](#), [Geography of South America](#), and [Geography of the Caribbean](#). Ensure students have access to digital devices and their assigned research student slide deck:

- [Geography of Central America Student Slide Deck](#)
- [Geography of South America Student Slide Deck](#)
- [Geography of the Caribbean Student Slide Deck](#)

Introduce the task. Explain that this is a 2-day assignment, where students will become experts on one region of Latin America.

Walk students through the tasks on each handout. Clarify:

- The target number of features they need to find
- They should identify different features for each linked resource

During work time, give students time to research their assigned region using the materials.

- They may work for the entire class period except the last 5–10 minutes, which will be reserved for discussion.
- Circulate to support comprehension and note-taking. You can refer to the [Geography of Central America \(Teacher Version\)](#), [Geography of South America \(Teacher Version\)](#), and [Geography of the Caribbean \(Teacher Version\)](#) to support this.

In the final 5 minutes of the period, bring the class back together, and ask students to refer to their handouts and notes. Lead a short reflection.

Ask: What kinds of sources did you use today to learn about your region? Were they primary or secondary?

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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Ask for a few volunteers to share their ideas with the group.

Possible responses:

- The video I used was a primary source.
- I used text and maps, both of which are secondary sources.

Ask: What challenges or opportunities did the geographical features of your region present for the population?

Again, ask for a few volunteers to share their ideas. Possible responses:

- In the Caribbean, the climate creates more hurricanes, which present safety challenges for people there.
- The coastal plains of South America provide opportunities for trade and settlement.

Explain to students that in the next class, they will share what they learned with new groups to explore the other two regions of Latin America.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Student groups may complete the work at different rates. If one or two groups finish early, you should invite them to circulate to a different region and sample one or two of the materials for that region, following their own interest.

Alternatively, students could work with an online game like [Latin America: Countries—Map Quiz Game](#) from Seterra to challenge their own knowledge of the countries in their region and where they are relative to one another.

Lesson 2: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 1)

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Geography of South America (Teacher Version)

Directions: For each source, list at least three important geographical features of South America. Then use evidence from those sources to explain how those features create challenges and/or opportunities for the people of the region. Finally, identify the source as primary or secondary.

Be sure to use the Geography of South America Student Slide Deck on your digital device for Sources 2–4.

Note: Geographical features include land and water features, vegetation, climate zones, resources, population, and plants and animals.

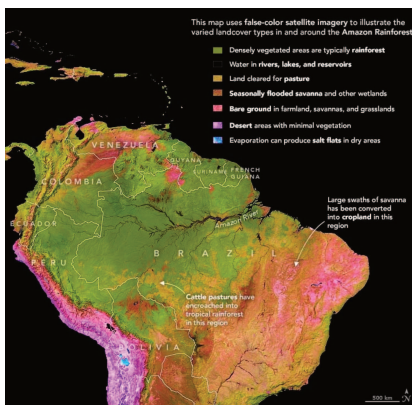
Geography Text

South America has three huge regions that are very different from each other: one dominated by mountains, one by river basins, and one by coastal plains. Within these three regions the physical landscape can change quickly, from desert to grasslands to highlands.

The Andes Mountains run up the western part of South America. They are the world's longest mountain range and are home to many groups of people and animals. Sometimes called a “wall of mountains,” the Andes present a challenge for farmers. Here they have to farm vertically (uphill) instead of on flat land. The Andes are also challenging for movement and communication. People use pack animals (llamas, alpacas, and other camelids) to move from place to place. To the south, the Andes consist of glaciers and snow-capped peaks. The most southern tip of South America is called Cape Horn and is generally cold all year long.



Vicuña. Image by David Torres Costales via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Map of Amazon deforestation.
Image courtesy of NASA.

South America is also home to the Amazon rainforest, the Earth's largest rainforest. It is often called the “lungs of the world” due to the high density of trees and plant life that slow down global warming. The rainforest surrounds the Amazon River, which creates the largest river basin in the world. The two other major rivers in South America are the Orinoco, which flows through Venezuela and Colombia, and the Paraná River, which flows through Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina.

South America's large areas of rich farmland are watered by rivers. They are used mostly for livestock and growing nuts, fruits, vegetables, and grains. Argentina and Brazil are examples of countries that export food around the world.

Text source: Written by Primary Source. Adapted from:

- National Geographic. ["North America: Physical Geography."](#) June 4, 2025.
- National Geographic. ["North America: Human Geography."](#) November 15, 2024.
- Lockhart, James and Roger Kittleson. ["Latin America: Ethnic diversity and its results."](#) June 23, 2025.
- Ramos, April, Marissa Del Toro, and Emma Turner-Trujillo. 2017. ["An Overview of Latino and Latin American Identity."](#) September 13.

Source 1: Geography text (from above)

Geographical features (at least three):

- The Andes Mountains (world's longest mountain range)
- Amazon rainforest and river basin (Earth's largest rainforest and river system)
- Cape Horn (cold, southern tip of South America)
- River systems (Amazon, Orinoco, Paraná)
- Farmland (for crops and livestock)

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Andes Mountains: Hard to farm, hard to travel/move, difficult communication; supports unique animals and cultures; terraced farming possible
- Amazon rainforest: Dense forest makes building or farming hard; biodiversity, oxygen production, natural resources
- Rivers and farmland: Water for farming, rich soil, supports food exports and livestock; risk of deforestation and flooding in some areas

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Image = primary source
- Text = secondary source

Source 2: Video (from the Geography of South America Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Coastal plains in eastern South America
- Grasslands (Pampas) in Argentina
- Tropical rainforests and rivers

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Coastal Plains: good for trade and settlement, vulnerable to hurricanes or sea level rise
- Grasslands (Pampas): great for farming and raising cattle

- Rainforests and rivers: transportation and freshwater, hard to build roads, environmental issues with deforestation

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Images/videos = primary source
- Commentary = secondary source

Source 3: Physical map (from the Geography of South America Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Oil (Venezuela, Brazil)
- Copper (Chile, Peru)
- Iron ore (Brazil)
- Natural gas (Bolivia, Argentina)

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Countries sell resources for money (exports)
- Leads to pollution, overuse of land, political conflict

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Primary source

Source 4: Climate map (from the Geography of South America Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Tropical rainforest (Amazon basin)
- Desert climate (Atacama Desert in Chile)
- Temperate climate (Southern Brazil, Argentina)

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Tropical climate supports rainforest and rivers but may cause flooding, pose more disease risks
- Desert is very dry, hard to grow food
- Temperate climate provides good weather for farming and living

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Primary source

The Panama Canal is a human-made waterway. It connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. It was completed in 1914. It runs through the middle of the Isthmus of Panama. (An isthmus is a thin strip of land connecting two larger land masses.) The canal allows large ships and barges to pass between the two oceans instead of going around the southern tip of South America. This makes travel and trade easier.



Map of Panama. Image by Platonides via Wikimedia Commons is in the public domain.

Text source: Written by Primary Source. Adapted from:

- National Geographic. "[North America: Physical Geography](#)." June 4, 2025.
- National Geographic. "[North America: Human Geography](#)." November 15, 2024.
- Bushnell, David and Ralph Lee Woodward. "[Central America](#)." June 30, 2025.
- Minster, Christopher. "[The Countries of Central America](#)." April 7, 2018.

Source 1: Geography text (from above)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Sierra Madre mountains
- Volcanic soil and frequent eruptions and earthquakes
- Tropical lowlands and cooler highlands
- Gulf of Mexico
- Yucatan Peninsula
- Warm sea currents (cause hurricanes)
- Panama Canal

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Mountains and volcanoes: Earthquakes and eruptions threaten safety but provide rich soil for farming.
- Tropical lowlands/highlands: Biodiverse ecosystems and varied climates support agriculture but may make transportation difficult. Crop varieties include oranges, coffee, sugarcane, avocados, and agave.
- Warm waters/Gulf of Mexico: Rich fishing grounds but there are increasing hurricane threats due to climate change.
- Panama Canal: Major opportunity for global trade and economic activity.

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Image = primary source
- Text = secondary source

Source 2: Video (from the Geography of Central America Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- From “The Landscape of Mexico & Central America” (0:00–6:20): Mountain ranges (Sierra Madre), fertile valleys, varied climate zones
- From “The Disappearing Forests of Panama” (18:00–22:40): Tropical rainforests, Panama Canal, diverse wildlife

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Fertile valleys and volcanoes create great conditions for farming.
- Rainforests provide resources and biodiversity but are threatened by deforestation.
- The Panama Canal boosts trade but must be carefully maintained.

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Images/videos = primary source
- Commentary = secondary source

Source 3: Volcano map (from the Geography of Central America Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Three active volcanoes and countries: Fuego (Guatemala), Arenal (Costa Rica), Izalco (El Salvador)

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Volcanoes create rich soil for crops but pose natural disaster risks (lava flows, ash, earthquakes).
- Volcanic tourism can be an economic opportunity and contribute to the country’s wealth.

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Primary source

Source 4: National Geographic map (from the Geography of Central America Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Biomes in Central America: Tropical rainforest, tropical savanna, montane (mountain) forest

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Rainforests provide biodiversity and water but face logging pressure.
- Mountain forests support certain crops and cool climates but are difficult to build infrastructure in.
- Savannas support grazing and agriculture but may be dry or fire prone.

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Primary source

Geography of the Caribbean (Teacher Version)

Directions: For each source, list at least three important geographical features of the Caribbean. Then use evidence from those sources to explain how those features create challenges and/or opportunities for the people of the region. Finally, identify the source as primary or secondary.

Be sure to use the Geography of the Caribbean Student Slide Deck on your digital device for Sources 2–4.

Note: Geographical features include land and water features, vegetation, climate zones, resources, population, and plants and animals.

Geography Text

The Caribbean archipelago, with over 7,000 islands in its chain, is in the Caribbean Sea. Many islands are independent nations. Some are territories of other countries. For example, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix) are territories of the United States. About 100 of the islands are inhabited. The uninhabited islands are usually small in size or made of coral reefs.

The people of the Caribbean are a mixture of Indigenous, African, and European. The Indigenous people settled in the Caribbean over 7,000 years ago.



Green sea turtle. Image by James St. John via Flickr, CC BY 2.0.



Caribbean Island Groups. Image by Brianski via Wikimedia Commons is in the public domain.

The Caribbean islands are often split into three distinct regions: The Bahamas (with more than 3,000 islands), the Greater Antilles, and the Lesser Antilles. The Bahamas (red on the map) are the furthest north. The Greater Antilles (in yellow) include the Caribbean territories of the United States. The Lesser Antilles (in green) make up the southern curve of the archipelago.

Most of the Greater and Lesser Antilles are very mountainous, with tropical rainforests covering most of the land. Most of the islands experience a wet season and a dry season. Annual rainfalls average 50 inches. The highest mountains get up to 200 inches! Many of the forests that once covered the Caribbean have been cut down to build plantations for sugarcane, bananas, cacao, spices, and citrus. The Caribbean also experiences tropical cyclones (hurricanes) from August to October. These hurricanes have become more frequent and damaging in recent years due to warming sea temperatures and climate change.

Text source: Written by Primary Source. Adapted from:

- National Geographic. ["North America: Physical Geography."](#) June 4, 2025.
- National Geographic. ["North America: Human Geography."](#) November 15, 2024.
- Britannica. ["Caribbean Sea summary."](#)
- Misachi, John. 2021. WorldAtlas. ["Geography of the Caribbean."](#) April 9.
- WorldAtlas. ["Caribbean Geography."](#)

Source 1: Geography text (from above)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Over 7,000 islands, but only about 100 are inhabited.
- Most islands are mountainous with tropical rainforests.
- Caribbean islands face hurricanes from August to October.

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Opportunity: Diverse locations for tourism and trade
- Challenge: Small, scattered populations
- Opportunity: Biodiversity, scenic beauty
- Challenge: Hard to build cities or farms
- Challenge: Natural disasters damage homes, crops, and infrastructure

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Image = primary source
- Text = secondary source

Source 2: Text source 2 (from the Geography of the Caribbean Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Puerto Rico: mountainous interior

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Opportunity: Beautiful landscapes for tourism
- Challenge: Difficult transportation

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Secondary source

Source 3: Video (from the Geography of the Caribbean Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Warm ocean waters around the Caribbean

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Opportunity: Attracts tourists for beaches and water sports
- Challenge: More hurricanes due to warmer sea

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Images/videos = primary source
- Commentary = secondary source

Source 4: Maps (from the Geography of the Caribbean Student Slide Deck)

Geographical features (at least three):

- Sugarcane (Cuba, Dominican Republic)
- Citrus fruits (Puerto Rico, Jamaica)

Challenges and/or opportunities:

- Opportunity: Export income and jobs
- Challenge: Overdependence on one crop
- Opportunity: Food and trade
- Challenge: Weather can destroy crops

Is it a primary or secondary source?

- Primary source

LESSON 3

Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 2)

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Explain how physical geography and natural resources influence human activity in different Latin American regions through collaborative map annotations.	Explain how physical geography and natural resources influenced different Latin American regions, using connectors to express causal relationships, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In groups, students share their regional “expertise” with one another from the previous lesson. Then they work together to create an annotated map with one or more labels for each region, drawing inferences related to challenges and opportunities.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.2, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.1, 6.T5b.3, WCA.6-8.7
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 3 Slide Deck
☐ Lesson 3 Exit Ticket
☐ Physical Map of Latin America
☐ Lesson 2: Geography of Central America
☐ Lesson 2: Geography of the Caribbean
☐ Lesson 2: Geography of South America

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Sharing Knowledge of the Americas	40
Exit Ticket	10

Lesson 3: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 2)

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports oral summaries of the findings from students' research
- [Lesson 3 Exit Ticket \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports written response to a prompt

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Students will likely need to move with a language-proficient partner from their first group into the new group, as they will need support to explain their area and learn about the others. Allow students to translate the instructions, sentence starters, and word bank for the Exit Ticket.
- Look Fors: Tier 1 words, phrases, or simple sentences using suggested word choices and sentence starters provided. Notes may be in their home language.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students may need support from peers to explain their area and learn about the others.
- Look Fors: More phrases and simple to compound sentences using the sentence starters and vocabulary from the word banks.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- Look Fors: More detailed sentences using Tier 2 and 3 academic vocabulary.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Ensure that students have access to the geography handouts from the previous lesson.

Gather supplies for students to create and annotate a map of Latin America together. Each group should receive:

- [Physical Map of Latin America](#)
- Markers or colored pencils
- 3 index cards for annotations (or space to write directly on the map)
- Thumbtacks to locate geographical features on a map
- Glue sticks to glue labels for geographic features (optional)

Lesson 3: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 2)

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Sharing Knowledge of the Americas (40 minutes)

Slide 2: If needed, provide additional time for students in groups to complete their research from the previous lesson (10–15 minutes).

Then arrange students into new “expert” groups.

- Each new group should have at least one South America “expert,” one Central America “expert,” and one Caribbean “expert.”

Ensure that students have access to their **Geography of Central America, Geography of South America, and Geography of the Caribbean handouts** from the previous lesson accessible.

Provide each group with:

- One copy of [Physical Map of Latin America](#)
- Markers or colored pencils
- Three index cards (or space to write annotations directly on the map)

Explain to students:

- They will now teach each other about their assigned region of Latin America using their notes from the research portion of the lesson.
- After they learn about each region, their group will collaboratively annotate a shared map using what each member contributes.
- The goal is for everyone to gain an understanding of the major geographical features across all three regions: South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage multilingual learners to utilize the [Cause-Effect Language and Literacy Builder](#) and [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) resources to support their oral summaries of the findings from their research.

Lesson 3: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 2)

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Slide 3: Review the directions and allow students to ask clarifying questions.

- **Pin your regions:** Mark or place one pushpin in each of the following regions: South America, Central America, the Caribbean.
- **Mark the geographical features:** Choose three features that stood out in your research and mark them/place a pushpin by them.
- **Provide content for your pins:** Write a short explanation for each geographic feature mark that describes a challenge or an opportunity that the feature represents for the people living in that region. Attach your written explanations to the map using annotation cards or by writing directly on the map.

**TEACHING TIP**

An alternative paper format is to have student groups use a larger wall map of the region and pin their annotation cards on the map.

Slide 4: Read the examples to give students an idea of how they can label their marks or pins on their map to describe challenges and opportunities.

After student groups finish their maps, prompt students to reflect on what they learned. On the back of one of the index cards or in a clearly marked space on the map, ask students to respond as a group to this prompt:

What is one important similarity and one important difference you noticed between the physical geography of the three regions?

Invite students to share their insights in a brief class discussion.

Lesson 3: Regions and Resources of Latin America (Part 2)

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**Exit Ticket** (10 minutes)

Slide 5: Distribute a copy of the [Lesson 3 Exit Ticket](#) handout to students, and invite them to respond to the prompt.

Then, after 5 minutes of independent work, debrief the activity by encouraging students to share their Exit Ticket writing.

Student responses will vary. Look for students to cite specific information and evidence in their responses and reasoning. Possible response:

- The Amazon River is mostly an opportunity for the population because it helps people travel and transport goods. It also provides water and supports farming in nearby areas.

Slide 6: As students share out, you can add their responses about the challenges and opportunities they chose and the inferences they made to the T-chart on the slide.

Close out the lesson by explaining that we will continue to study the impact of geography on Latin American culture, economics, politics, and way of life throughout this cluster.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide ML students with the [Lesson 3 Exit Ticket \(Sentence Starters\)](#) for this activity.

LESSON 4

Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

EQ How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

SQ What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Analyze the human geography of Latin American cities by identifying key urban challenges and innovations to explain how people are working to create healthier, more equitable communities.

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE

Compare human geography of Latin American cities to explain their challenges and opportunities, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson connects Latin America's human geography to the theme of sustainable cities. Latin America today is known for its large, vibrant cities and megacities. In this lesson, students become familiar with features and terminology relating to cities. They explore how cities can concentrate both wealth and opportunity as well as poverty and inequality, often due to migration from rural areas. Students examine how creativity, adaptation, and thoughtful planning are essential to making cities livable for all. Then they will apply concepts and vocabulary from the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 11 as they prepare to address the Supporting Question: *What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?*

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5a.2, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.3

See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 4 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Sustainable Development Goal 11](#)
- ☐ [Latin America's Largest Cities](#)

VOCABULARY

inclusive
sustainable

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Designing an Ideal City Block	10
Building Sustainable Cities in Latin America	5
Check-In	5
Investigating Sources: Megacities and Cities on the Rise in Latin America	30
Optional Extension: Values and Beliefs in City Design	15

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Latin America's Largest Cities \(Chunked Text\)](#) Supports reading comprehension
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports students in summarizing their observations and the text during the Observe and Read portions of the Investigating Sources routine

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language proficient peer, if possible, when reading, or focus on one reading if working alone. Students will likely need to translate the instructions or have them simplified. Consider highlighting key words in the readings for students at this level by bolding and italicizing them. Encourage students to take notes on the comparison of cities during the group discussion with help from a peer.
- Look Fors: Simple sentences should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words, which may be copied directly from the readings. Responses will likely be mostly translated and/or created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students should use the Chunked Text and LLB scaffolds and can use translation support as appropriate. Students would benefit from support in their home language, such as working with a language-proficient peer. Encourage students to take notes on the comparison of cities during the group discussion.
- Look Fors: Complete simple and compound sentences using the sentence frames should include more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the readings, and students' own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task independently.
- Look Fors: Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write multiple sentences using the key terms.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Gather blank sheets of paper for students to complete a sketch for the Activator activity. These can be full letter size or half sheets. Students will need to use both sides of the paper.

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Activator: Designing an Ideal City Block (10 minutes)

Slide 2: Distribute a blank sheet of paper (full or half size) before facilitating a visual Think-Pair-Share.

- Ask students to picture the best place they could live (what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, even smells like).
- Then say: *Imagine you get to design a city block where everyone feels safe, welcome, and happy. What would you include? Think about homes, parks, transportation, shops, and anything else people need to thrive.*

Ask students to sketch a simple "dream city block" on paper (nothing too detailed; stick figures are fine!).

- Have students label at least five features of their ideal city block.
- For example, clean water, playgrounds, trees, or community centers

Slide 3: After students have had a few minutes to draw and label, ask students to engage in a Think-Pair-Share discussion with a classmate. Provide some prompts to get their conversation started:

- *What features did you include?*
- *Why did you choose them?*

Pull the class back together for a brief discussion.

- Invite a few volunteers to share their ideas on what a successful city looks like to them.
- Explain to students that over the next couple of lessons, they will study various cities in Latin America in an attempt to understand the massive challenges populous places face and how to best approach these challenges.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Consider further supporting MLs by modeling your own simple sketch first and thinking aloud as you describe the features you chose. Provide sentence starters like "I included ____ because..." or "A good city has ____ so that..." to help students share their ideas clearly and confidently with a partner.

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Building Sustainable Cities in Latin America (5 minutes)



LEARN MORE

This activity introduces Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Students will learn key vocabulary to analyze cities in this lesson and beyond, and connect personally through a brainstorming task. See [United Nations Goal 11](#) for more on SDG 11 targets, which address issues from slums and green spaces to cultural heritage. As students explore Latin America's largest cities, such as São Paulo and Mexico City, they will connect modern challenges to ancient urban roots.

Slide 4: Create a shared list of desired features in a city by collecting students' share-outs on the board.

- Ask students to turn over their blank sheet of paper to record their collaboration.

Explain to students that one of the biggest geographic challenges for Latin American societies today is one people are facing all over the globe: how vast city populations can live together and keep the environment healthy for all.

- In this lesson and the next lesson, we'll take a deeper look at Latin America's biggest cities and how their people are adapting to this challenge.

Slide 5: Then remind students about the Cluster 1 Supporting Question:



What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

Explain to students that some of the challenges and opportunities students will read about relate to geography, and some do not. Cities showcase their values as they address challenges.

Slide 6: Introduce a key vocabulary word for this lesson: *sustainable*.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

While many of our local communities face large challenges, all have assets. Encourage students to critically think about both the challenges and opportunities that cities provide.

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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- Say the word: *sustainable*.
- Use the word in context: *Sustainable cities are planned to care for their environment by continually reusing natural resources.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *using resources wisely so they are available in the future.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Slide 7: Introduce another key vocabulary word for this lesson: *inclusive*.

- Say the word: *inclusive*.
- Use the word in context: *Inclusive cities take all people and their needs into account.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *considering all people in your decisions or actions.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Slide 8: Distribute a copy of the [Sustainable Development Goal 11](#) comic to pairs of students.

- Briefly remind students about the purpose behind the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

As students analyze the comic, ask them to consider: *Why would the United Nations want cities to have these features?*

- Ask for a few student volunteers to share their ideas with the class.

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Check-In (5 minutes)

Ask students to put a star (digitally or in writing) on one blurb in the comic that matches an ideal from their class list and explain the connection to a partner.



Investigating Sources: Megacities and Cities on the Rise in Latin America (30 minutes)

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Explain to students that we will study a series of Latin American cities, but we first need to understand the true size and scope of these cities. Many of these cities today are considered “megacities,” meaning cities that have more than 10 million inhabitants.

Slide 9: Project a series of maps and images to introduce the next activity. For each slide below, allow students to analyze the image, then briefly invite volunteers to share their insights.

Explain that this is a side-by-side map comparison of São Paulo and Boston (to put a megacity into a familiar context).

Slide 10: Explain that this is a photograph of São Paulo’s sprawling skyline.

Slide 11: Explain that this is a 2021 infographic with the world’s 20 largest cities depicted. Ask students to name the three cities shown that are in Latin America. (*São Paulo, Brazil; Mexico City, Mexico; Buenos Aires, Argentina*)



LEARN MORE

The article "[What is a 'megacity'](#)" from Iberdrola is a quick background read. It also includes approaches to some of the dilemmas of these cities, offering a good alignment with SDG 11. There is an infographic halfway through —“Megacities’ of Today and Tomorrow”—that could be shown to students as a supplement to the other materials for this activity.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Latin America’s Largest Cities \(Chunked Text\)](#) for this activity.

Guide students to use their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to support them in summarizing their observations and the text during the Observe and Read portions of the Investigating Sources routine.

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Slide 12: Distribute the [*Latin America's Largest Cities*](#) handout, which includes a series of readings on Latin American megacities (Mexico City, Río de Janeiro, Lima, and Bogotá).

- In each description, there is information about the history of the city, the population, the city's rise, and the challenges/innovations facing the city today.

Remind them that as they work with this source, they are working to answer the question: *How are Latin American people today developing sustainable and inclusive cities?*

OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Ask: *What document features do you notice?* Possible answers:

- Photographs
- Bold headers
- Text

Then ask: *What kind of sources are included? Are they primary or secondary? Why do you think the author of the text included both types of sources?* Possible responses:

- There are photographs. These are primary sources.
- The text is a secondary source.
- Including both types of sources helps the author provide evidence (primary) and context or explanation (secondary).
- Primary sources offer direct insight, while secondary sources help readers understand the bigger picture or significance.

READ THE DOCUMENT

Briefly review the directions on the handout, and underscore that students will highlight the following:

- One or more challenges or problems each city is having in making it livable for everyone
- One or more changes each city has made to help these problems

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Allow students to ask clarifying questions as needed. Then prompt them to begin working. As students work, circulate through the room to check for understanding.

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

In the next lesson, students will engage in a “snowball discussion” comparing these megacities. The “Challenges and Innovation” sections of the handout are the most relevant to preparing for the discussion.

If needed, ML students may focus just on these sections. Some students may benefit from only reading about two cities.

After reading the article in its entirety, bring students back together as a whole group.

Slide 13: Facilitate a Think-Pair-Share activity surrounding the Supporting Question with students’ new insight into the challenges and opportunities of megacities.

Ask students to independently think about and then discuss:
What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

Prompt students to turn to an elbow partner and discuss their ideas.

Working together, they should identify key information from the text and develop their arguments for a class discussion in the next lesson. Possible responses:

- Mexico City faces challenges like water shortages and high pollution due to rapid growth. To balance resource use and protect nature, the city limits car use with the Hoy No Circula program, which restricts driving on certain days to reduce pollution.
- Río de Janeiro struggles with overpopulated favelas lacking clean water and sewage systems. While the city is improving infrastructure and schools in these areas, fewer people moving there now helps the city better manage resources and improve living conditions.
- Lima deals with serious air pollution and garbage disposal problems. The city’s leaders have developed a

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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public system where voters decide on community projects, helping to allocate resources responsibly and address environmental challenges.

- Bogotá has worked to reduce air pollution and improve safety by promoting less car use and creating a greener city environment. This shows how the city balances urban growth with protecting nature and prioritizing human well-being.

Close by letting students know that in the next lesson, they will work in small groups to review the information and images and record their insights before engaging in a Formative Assessment.



TEACHING TIP

If you notice that most or all groups are making the same choice of city, challenge some of the groups to consider another choice by thinking about the nature or scale of the challenges individual cities face or about the level of innovation they have used to address problems. Or invite some groups with strong debaters to play devil's advocate so the discussion has a difference of viewpoints.

Optional Extension: Values and Beliefs in City Design (15 minutes)

Slides 14–15: Show the class a clip from Disney's *Zootopia* (to 2:36), where Judy the rabbit sees the city of Zootopia for the first time.

Before showing the video, tell students to be on the lookout for places where Zootopia is shown as *inclusive*, *safe*, and *sustainable*.

Students will most likely pick out moments of inclusivity and possibly safety. They may also mention trains, abundant water, and many kinds of trees and parks that make the city sustainable. It's fine if they can't find an example of all three.

After watching, have the students popcorn-share their observations—prompt them to clearly state the feature and who the feature includes or benefits (example: the tiny doors on the train for smaller animals).

Lesson 4: Meeting Urban Challenges in Latin America

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Then have them turn and talk with a partner (15 seconds each) about the *Zootopia* clip, linking it to the prompt, *What does the design of Zootopia tell us about what the animals there cared about or believed?*

Slide 16: Take some ideas from the pairs discussion. You might briefly examine the movie's title with your group. Discuss:

How does "utopia" relate to Zootopia?

Why do you think the filmmakers chose this title?

Slide 17: Introduce the term *utopia* formally.

- Say the word: *utopia*.
- Use the word in context: *Many people dream of living in a utopia, where everyone is treated equally.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Slide 18: Lastly, prompt students to begin to think about their own *values* and *beliefs* in describing the features of an ideal city.

Take student responses in a whole-class share-out.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Students who would benefit from a prompt may use this one, which echoes the language of the question: *I care about or believe in ____, so I would include ____.*

LESSON 5

Formative Assessment

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Use various sources to explain the challenges and opportunities that geography creates for people in different regions of the Americas.	Explain how Latin American nations use and protect natural resources, in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson begins with a Putting It Together discussion, where students return to the Cluster 1 Supporting Question and work on the Inquiry Chart, incorporating a “snowball discussion” in the process. They stamp their learning through a Formative Assessment Task. First, students practice their geography skills by identifying regions of Latin America on a map. Then, students revisit materials from Cluster 1 to answer our Supporting Question, *What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?* showcasing their claim, evidence, and reasoning skills.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.2, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.1, 6.T5b.2, 6.T5b.3, WCA.6-8.1b
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 5 Slide Deck
☐ Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task
☐ Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)
☐ Lesson 4: Latin America’s Largest Cities
☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart
☐ Lesson 2: Unit 4 Cluster 1 Inquiry Chart

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Snowball Discussion Prep	5
Putting it Together: Snowball Discussion	20
Formative Assessment	25
Optional Extension: Inhabitants Who Innovate	15

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports the collection of evidence and written responses
- [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists in making connections to answer questions

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Consider allowing students at this level to work with a peer and/or use translation for the Formative Assessment Task. Consider providing a model or choices that students could use to fill in the blank spaces in the sentence frames.
- Look Fors: Responses should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words like *resources* and *grow*. Students may copy from their notes to create their sentences. Responses will likely be mostly translated or created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students should use the Formative Assessment Task scaffold. Students may need support finding all of the information for the Formative Assessment Task.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound sentences using the sentence frames. Responses should include more relevant Tier 2 words like *pollution* and *environment*, and words from the readings and sentence frames.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students can use the sentence frames as a guide if necessary, but should be able to write their own sentences independently.
- Look Fors: Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary like *overpopulation* and *infrastructures* and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write a strong claim and multiple sentences for each part of the Formative Assessment Task.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Have each class period's Unit 4 Cluster 1 Inquiry Chart and Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart easily accessible.

Ensure students have their handouts from the cluster easily accessible.

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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Snowball Discussion Prep (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Explain that students will take the first 5 minutes of class to prepare for a “snowball discussion” on Latin American megacities. Direct students to select a city from their **Latin America’s Largest Cities** handout from the previous lesson and take on the perspective of a city leader (e.g., mayor).

A snowball discussion will allow students to discuss and build on their ideas first with one classmate, then a group of classmates, and finally with the entire class.

Ask students to annotate on their handout:

- The city’s challenges related to natural resources
- Opportunities for sustainability and improvement
- Proposed future adaptations or improvements

Encourage students to reflect on the following questions during their preparation:

- *What challenges does this source reveal about managing natural resources in this city?*
- *What opportunities for sustainability or improvement does this source highlight?*
- *What values do you see reflected in the actions or policies described?*
- *Is this source a primary or secondary source? How do you know?*
- *Why do you think the author included this kind of source here?*



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

If students need more support with this prep, you can distribute the [Optional Discussion Prep](#) handout. ML students can use the [Optional Discussion Prep \(Sentence Frames\)](#) version. You can refer to the [Optional Discussion Prep \(Teacher Version\)](#) to support students as they work.



Putting it Together: Snowball Discussion (20 minutes)

Slide 3: Explain to students that the snowball discussion will have three steps. Briefly review the following steps, then start a timer for each step.

Step 1: Partner Discussion (3 minutes)

- Students pair up with a classmate representing a different city.

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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- Each student shares their prepared ideas and evidence about their city's challenges and opportunities.
- Pairs discuss similarities and differences, building on each other's points.

Step 2: Quad Discussion (3 minutes)

- Pairs join with another pair to form groups of 4.
- Each group member shares a key insight from their pair's discussion.
- The group identifies common themes across the cities, noting how different cities face unique or shared challenges in managing natural resources.
- Group members continue to build on each other's ideas, linking specific examples to the Cluster 1 Supporting Question: *What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?*

Step 3: Whole Class Share-Out (3 minutes)

- Ask groups to share their main insights and questions with the whole class.
- Record ideas on a board or chart paper.
- Highlight examples of challenges, opportunities, values, and source types as students explain their reasoning.
- Address how the source types (primary or secondary) affect their understanding of the city's situation.

Slides 4–5: Present the **Unit 4 Cluster 1 Inquiry Chart** that the class created. Remind students of the Cluster 1 Supporting Question:



What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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SUMMARIZE OUR LEARNING AND SHARE OUR INITIAL THINKING

Ask: *What resources did we use in Lessons 2–4?*

Have students discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format, and call on a few students to share their responses. Possible responses:

- **Geography of Central America** **handout**
- **Geography of South America** **handout**
- **Geography of the Caribbean** **handout**
- **Sustainable Development Goal 11** **handout**
- **Latin America’s Largest Cities** **handout**

Review the activities from the cluster’s lessons in the “What did we do?” column. After reading each lesson’s summary, ask students to turn and talk about what they learned in that lesson.

SYNTHESIZE OUR IDEAS AND ANSWER THE SUPPORTING QUESTION

Ask: *What did we learn that helps us answer our Supporting Question?* Give students time to discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format once more.

Guide them to support their assertions with specific evidence and examples. Ask probing questions to help students reach key takeaways of the cluster. Possible responses:

- We learned that some countries are trying to protect nature while still growing their cities.
- Many Latin American countries are working to fix problems like pollution and deforestation.
- We saw that not every place has the same challenges, so each city has its own plan.
- People are starting programs to keep cities clean and safe for everyone.
- We learned that it’s hard to balance using resources and protecting nature, but many places are trying.

When student groups share with the whole class, record their responses in the “What did we learn?” column of the



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

The [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) can be used to support students’ summaries of the cluster, what they did, and how it helps answer the Supporting Question.

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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Inquiry Chart. Prompt students to record this information on their own handouts.

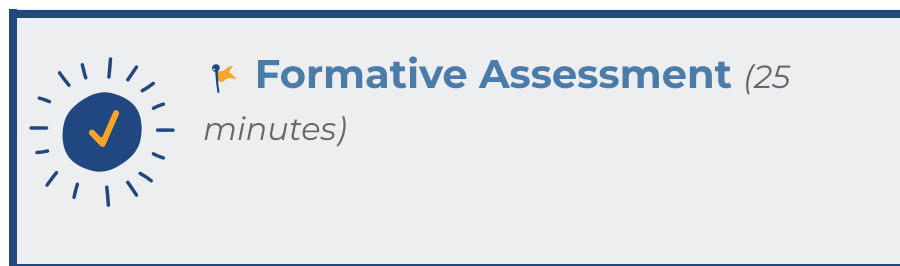
RETURN TO THE INQUIRY CHART

Finally, revisit the questions students added under the Supporting Question in Lesson 2 as part of their Launching the Question routine as well as questions from the Wonder column of the **Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart** from Lesson 1.

Ask: Have any of these questions been answered? Have any new questions come up?

Give students a few minutes to share their thinking and ideas with the whole group.

STAMP THE KEY LEARNING



Slide 6: Let students know that they will now engage in the final step of the Putting It Together routine by engaging in a Formative Assessment Task and working to determine which sources best help us understand the various challenges and opportunities faced by Latin American societies due to geography.

- Distribute the [Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task](#) handout to all students. Explain that this Formative Assessment Task will consolidate our learning from the unit's first cluster, assessing our map and analysis skills.
- Tell students that they will utilize our past resources to make a claim about Latin American society.

Preview the two parts of the assessment with students by reading the directions aloud.

- Part 1: Identify and label South America, Central America, and the Caribbean on their maps and answer the question.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#), and encourage them to utilize the [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) to assist in making connections.

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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- Part 2: Gather all handouts from the cluster (including the [Optional Discussion Prep](#) handout, if used). Students will cite evidence from their materials that will help them answer our Supporting Question: *What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?* Students will write a claim and support it with specific evidence from any primary or secondary source they studied during this cluster. Encourage them to explain how the challenges and opportunities in the source connect to their claim.

Prompt students to begin working. Be sure to move around the room to support students as needed. You can refer to the [Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task \(Teacher Version\)](#) as you do this.

Optional Extension: Inhabitants Who Innovate *(15 minutes)*

Slide 7: City and national leaders are not the only Latin American individuals working to adapt their cities and spaces for sustainability, fairness, or to express other features they value. This region has an enormous number of grassroots community action groups working on these problems.

Explain to students that together they will watch *Landfill Harmonic*, a short documentary about the Recycled Orchestra, a children's orchestra in Paraguay that performs with instruments made of recycled materials found in a nearby landfill.

Share that this video will allow them to see how regular people used creativity and innovation to make their city more inclusive, sustainable, safe, and resilient by incorporating something they cared about: music education and performance.

Slide 8: Before screening the video, show students this image. This gives a quick geographical context to the story.

- Share with them that they'll be watching a video about a neighborhood called Cateura, in Paraguay's capital city of Asunción.
- Asunción is one of South America's oldest cities, with a smaller population than the cities that students have been studying. It has about 525,000 residents.

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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Slide 9: Play the “Landfill Harmonic - the 'Recycled Orchestra’” video (to 3:32) by Keep America Beautiful for students.

- After it is over, ask students to share the innovations they saw.
- Ask them to identify parts of the video where these innovations led to more inclusivity, sustainability, or safety.



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

This case study emphasizes that the arts and creativity are part of the quality of life in cities. It blends together several of the features of SDG 11 (waste management and culture) and shows younger and older people in a South American community being problem-solvers.

Although inspiring, it also shows a perspective on Latin America that could be seen as deficit-based. While not the intent, it is an underlying message and can be countered in a few ways. First, there is an option to bypass this video and its accompanying activity. Students can instead circle back to their work from the day before and discuss or compare their ideal cities to the cities in the reading.

If showing the video, there is an option to simply state that the video only represents one small neighborhood in one city in one country. Students’ experiences here, very real of course, do not represent every student’s experience or access to funding and the arts.

A third option is to quickly discuss the experience of fundraisers, funding, or budgets within your school or district—an acknowledgement that there is generosity, innovation, and need in almost every place in the world.

Lesson 5: Formative Assessment

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Cluster 1 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)

Part 1: Identifying Locations on a Map

Directions: Label the following regions of Latin America on the map below: South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.



Blank map of North and South America. Image by Milenioscuro via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

A: Central America

B: Caribbean

C: South America

Respond to the following analysis question:

1. How do the land, climate, and natural resources in different parts of Latin America help explain where most people live and how they earn a living? Give one general example using the map below.



South America, physical-political world map. Image by Defense Mapping Agency via Wikimedia Commons is in the public domain.

Student answers will vary. Possible response:

- Most people live near coasts or rivers because the land is flatter, and there is more access to water and trade. For example, in Brazil, many cities are along the coast, where the climate is good for farming and fishing. These natural features help people find jobs and grow the economy.

Part 2: Making a Claim Using Evidence

Directions: Look back at the materials from the cluster.

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

1. Of all the materials you referenced, which primary or secondary source was most useful in helping you understand geography's challenges and opportunities in the Americas?

Article from Lesson 4: Latin America's Largest Cities

2. Is this resource a primary or secondary source? How do you know?

- The images were primary sources; these resources represent photographic evidence and firsthand accounts of cities, displaying one angle of the city. The text/written descriptions were secondary sources; these resources were written by someone who gathered information about different cities and explained it in their own words. It is not a firsthand account.

Directions: Answer the Cluster 1 Supporting Question: *What challenges and opportunities does geography pose in different regions of the Americas?* Create a clear claim about this question, and use evidence from any primary or secondary source you studied in this cluster to support your claim.

Student answers will vary. Look for detailed claim statements that fully answer the question and evidence that clearly supports their claim. Possible responses:

Your claim statement:

- The geography of Central America poses both challenges and opportunities.

What specific information or evidence from a cluster resource (quote, description, etc.) supports this claim?

- Geography of Central America handout: "Central America's many volcanoes cause frequent eruptions and earthquakes."
- Geography of Central America handout: "The strong sun, rich volcanic soil, and abundant water make this an important region for farming."

What challenges and opportunities are addressed in this source and connect to your claim?

- While volcanoes in the region of Central America cause challenges like eruptions and earthquakes, they also provide important nutrients to the soil. Because of this, Central America is an important region for farming and crop production.

Optional Discussion Prep (Teacher Version)

Directions: Read the main question for our discussion below, and complete the set of notes. Refer to your Latin America's Largest Cities handout from the previous lesson to help you.

Focus question: In your opinion, which of the four megacities (Mexico City, Río de Janeiro, Lima, or Bogotá) has made the strongest progress in becoming an inclusive, safe, and sustainable place for all people?

Your answer:

- Mexico City
- Río de Janeiro
- Lima
- Bogotá

This city has made strong progress by:

- Mexico City: Expanding public transportation, offering free college education, and reducing pollution through traffic restrictions
- Río de Janeiro: Improving education in favelas and fixing broken streets and parks
- Lima: Creating a system where citizens vote on how to spend city money and improving health care access
- Bogotá: Creating bike paths, improving transportation, and encouraging civic pride

Imagine you are a city leader (like a mayor, for example), and you are preparing to explain why your city is making progress and how it could continue to improve.

- Use the notes below to organize your ideas in preparation for the debate.
- Be sure to include at least one connection to your city's geography or natural resources (such as mountains, rivers, forests, or air quality).

Challenge:

What is a major problem that makes it hard for the city to be livable for everyone? Include a connection to geography or natural resources if it fits.

Student responses will vary. Look for student work to include specific information from the readings in their responses to each question. Possible responses:

Mexico City

- Traffic congestion and air pollution from too many cars
- Water shortages due to rapid growth
- The city is sinking because it was built on a lagoon

Río de Janeiro

- Over 1,000 favelas with poor housing, limited water, and no proper sewage or electricity
- Many people live in unsafe, unhealthy conditions

Lima

- Air pollution from vehicles
- Garbage piles up in rivers and on streets, hurting the environment

Bogotá

- Traffic problems due to rapid growth
- Poverty and inequality in some neighborhoods
- Natural geography (mountains) makes expansion and transport difficult

Adaptation:

How has the city responded to this challenge? How does this help make it safer, more inclusive, or better for the environment?

Student responses will vary. Look for student work to include specific information from the readings in their responses to each question. Possible responses:

Mexico City

- The Hoy No Circula program limits cars on the road based on license plate numbers
- Public universities are free, making education more inclusive
- Expanded metro system to help with transportation needs

Río de Janeiro

- The city is working with favela residents and schools to make education more inclusive.
- Fewer people are moving in, giving the city a chance to fix streets and parks.

Lima

- Citizens vote on public projects using technology
- Health care is free and being improved so more people can access it

Bogotá

- The city added bike paths and buses to reduce car use
- Invested in public spaces to bring people together

New ideas and improvements:

If you were a city leader, what change would you try next? How could it help people and protect nature?

Student responses will vary. Look for student work to include specific information from the readings in their responses to each question. Possible responses:

Mexico City

- Build more affordable housing near the metro stations
- Add more green spaces or bike lanes to reduce pollution and create healthy areas for all people

Río de Janeiro

- Build safer homes with clean water and electricity in favelas
- Use natural spaces like hills and coastal areas for public parks or gardens

Lima

- Create more public recycling and composting stations
- Add electric buses to reduce air pollution from traffic

Bogotá

- Plant more trees in the city to help air quality
- Offer free Internet in parks and community centers to support access to education and jobs

The Americas' Earliest Complex Societies

How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

CONTENTS
Lesson 6 Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy
Lesson 7 Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society
Lesson 8 Olmec Innovations
Lesson 9 Formative Assessment

Overview

In this cluster, students will investigate some of the earliest American lifeways and societies that archaeologists have begun to reconstruct in Mexico and South America. The Caral-Supe (or Norte Chico) civilization of Peru and the Olmec civilization of Mexico are two of the earth's complex societies that historians consider "cradles of civilization" because they arose independently of any others. Students will examine these through the lens of ancient world innovation, considering how they utilized natural resources to develop unique practices of daily life.

Note: If your class has been adding to a comparative timeline across the 6th grade year (digital or physical), it is highly recommended that you add the civilizations of Caral-Supe and the Olmec to your chronology.

- ### Learning Objectives
- By the end of this cluster, students should be able to...**
- Describe how ancient societies of the Americas used natural resources to innovate, solving challenges or enhancing daily life.
 - Draw comparisons or contrasts between the innovations of early American societies and those of other world regions.
 - Construct social studies arguments that select relevant information gathered from multiple sources to support claims with evidence and reasoning (WIDA ELD-SS 6-8 Argue Expressive).

Vocabulary

TIER 3
the Olmec

Cluster Focus Standards

Practice Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
PS 5: Determine the credibility of sources using distinctions among fact and opinion as well as information regarding maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.	7-9
PS 7: Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced, and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems	6, 8-9

Content Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
6.T5b.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries in South America.	6-9
6.T5c.1: Research and report on one of the major ancient societies that existed in Central America (Maya, Teotihuacán, and other civilizations such as the Olmec, Toltec, and Zapotec), or one of the major pre-Columbian Andean civilizations (Chavín, Moche, Nazca), their locations, and their cultural characteristics.	6, 8-9

Literacy Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
WCA.6-8.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.	8

Unit 4, Cluster 2 Inquiry Chart (Teacher Version)

Unit EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
Cluster SQ	How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?
What questions will we ask?	

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 6: We discussed how the Caral-Supe used natural resources to solve problems and compared their innovations to other ancient civilizations.	Early American societies created healthy and diverse diets using the crops and animals available in their environments. The Caral-Supe people built their society in a dry, desert-like area but used nearby rivers to farm and sustain a city with large buildings and organized communities.
Lesson 7: We determined the credibility and intentionality behind different sources on the Olmec.	The Olmec built complex cities in tropical environments by taking advantage of fertile soil and water sources for farming and trade. Strong sources of information (for example, sources written by historians or scientists) can help us learn accurate facts about how ancient people lived and adapted to their environments.
Lesson 8: We explained how the Olmec used rubber to improve their daily lives and reflected on the impact of innovations throughout ancient history.	The Olmec faced daily challenges like wet, muddy terrain, and needed durable tools and footwear. The Olmec used natural rubber for sandals, bands, game balls, and possibly tools, showing how they adapted to their environment using available resources.

LESSON 6

Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

EQ How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

SQ How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Analyze how the Caral-Supe civilization innovated with natural resources to solve problems and create a cooperative way of life.

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE

Synthesize how the Caral-Supe civilization innovated with natural resources, orally and in written note form.

LESSON OVERVIEW

Transitioning from the geography cluster, this lesson gives students one example of innovation with natural resources in a very early complex society. It begins with a comparative look at foodways and agricultural practices of the ancient Americas in relation to several complex societies studied in earlier units. This activator previews concepts and thinking skills used in the main activity. There, students learn about the oldest documented complex society in the Americas: Caral-Supe, located in modern-day Peru (and also called the Norte Chico civilization). Students enter the world of Caral-Supe by reading and organizing information from the remarkable story of Dr. Ruth Shady Solís, a trailblazing Peruvian archaeologist.

Caral-Supe is significant, not only for its age—a complex society now understood, thanks in large part to Dr. Shady's work, to be nearly 5,000 years old—but also for its unique use of natural resources to create a distinctive, cooperative way of life.

This lesson will also launch the Supporting Question for Cluster 2: *How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?* Students will activate prior knowledge to compare Caral-Supe with one or more complex societies of other continents in regard to their innovations for daily life.

LESSON STANDARDS

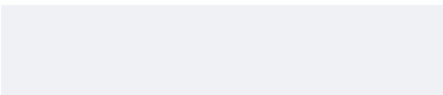
MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 6 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies](#)
- ☐ [Old Society, New Discoveries](#)
- ☐ [Old Society, New Discoveries \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ [Cluster 2 Inquiry Chart](#)
- ☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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PS 7, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.



LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: What’s For Dinner?	10
Launching the Question	10
Solving the Puzzle of Caral-Supe	30

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Old Society, New Discoveries \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports reading comprehension, note-taking, and written responses

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Allow students to translate the instructions and sentence frames. Allow students to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Consider providing a shorter version of the reading or providing a list of words/phrases for them to find in the reading.
- Look Fors: Students should find at least two examples from the reading to add to the chart and then add more during the discussion with help from a peer. Responses will most likely be translated and/or co-created with a peer and should use words from the reading.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students can use sentence starters and frames from both scaffold documents listed above. Allow students to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Consider providing a list of words/phrases for them to find in the reading or to work with a peer to underline key information.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound questions and sentences should use Tier 2 words and phrases. Students should find at least three examples from the reading to add to the chart and then add more during the discussion with help from a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete the activities independently.
- Look Fors: Responses should have at least four examples on the reading chart. Students should contribute to the class discussions.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Determine if you want to work with the Inquiry Chart on chart paper or digitally. You will need separate class copies for each class period. Students will also need to have their own copies to work with throughout the cluster, either digitally or printed.

Have each class period's Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart from Lesson 1 easily accessible.

Have colored pencils or markers available for students to use.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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Activator: What's For Dinner? (10 minutes)

Slide 2: Distribute the [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies](#) handout.

- This displays “dinner menus” from three societies of the ancient world on three different continents.
- Have students use the instructions on the handout and work with a partner for 2–3 minutes, jotting down similarities and differences, then discussing the questions at the end.
- After calling the class back together, take suggestions from several pairs to see what they concluded.

As students work, circulate the room and reference the [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies \(Teacher Version\)](#) to help guide their thinking.

A key concept for students to notice is that the ancient South American menu is entirely different from those of ancient East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

- Students may also point out that the Asian and African menus share many similarities as well as a few differences.
- Some students may make more abstract connections, for example, the use of animal products, an anchor grain, and seasonings or sweeteners are alike across all three.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide multilingual learners with the [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies \(Sentence Starters\)](#) handout. Encourage students to utilize the sentence frames provided.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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Slide 3: Next, facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity. Read the prompts on Slide 3 aloud, or ask a student volunteer to read. Utilize the prompts below to push students' critical thinking:

- What challenges did each society likely face when building a diet from local resources?
- What opportunities did their local environment provide?

During your class discussion, listen for and emphasize a few key concepts:

- Guide students toward recognizing the role of climate, geography, domesticated animals, and native crops. Ancient diets were shaped by the geographic resources and climatic conditions of each region.
- Ancient farmers experimented over time to find crops and practices that supported health and survival.
- The ancient Andean diet was highly adapted and rich in nutrition, even without many of the grains and animals found elsewhere.
- The presence or absence of certain animals was a big environmental factor. For example, llamas only lived in the Andes. Therefore, people in ancient Mesopotamia or Aksum did not eat llama jerky.



LEARN MORE

Llamas and alpacas were an exception in the ancient Americas: the Andes was the only region before Columbus with large domesticated mammals for transportation and food. That lack of large domestic animals had consequences for other parts of the continent!

You might pause here to explain this if you wish, showing an image of llamas and an alpaca for those unfamiliar with these animals.



LEARN MORE

Students might point out that this vegetable and grain-based diet is highly recommended for healthy eating. If they looked at the natural foods section of a local supermarket today, they would see many of the “ancient superfoods” of the Americas on display! Students may also identify that these diets were colorful and tasty, also a part of balanced nutrition.

Note: unique pre-Columbian foods cultivated in North and South America and nowhere else; it also shows that some foods were unique to specific American subregions, while others crossed over.



Launching the Question (10 minutes)

SPARK CURIOSITY

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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Cluster 2: The Americas' Earliest Complex Societies

Slide 4: Activate students' prior knowledge of how complex societies have solved problems using natural resources in earlier units while setting the stage for comparative thinking in this unit.

- Ask students to reflect on regions they've studied this year—West Asia, North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Pose the following questions: *What are some problems that societies in these regions faced? How did they address them?*

Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity.

- As students contribute ideas, guide them in identifying how specific problems (flooding, harsh desert, infertile land, food preservation) influenced societies to better utilize natural resources to their advantage (camels, salt, terracing, crop rotation, canals, irrigation systems).
- Ask students to help create a list based on what they studied this year.
- Circulate the room as students discuss, and assist as necessary.
- Tell students that in upcoming lessons, they will be doing some comparative thinking to answer this question.

Explain to students that in this cluster, they will move from examining geography's influence on people today to exploring how ancient societies took advantage of available natural resources.

INTRODUCE THE SUPPORTING QUESTION AND ELICIT INITIAL THINKING

Slide 5: Introduce the Cluster 2 Supporting Question:



How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

Slide 6: Introduce students to the [Cluster 2 Inquiry Chart](#) document.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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- Remind students that the Inquiry Chart will continue to help them keep track of their ongoing learning and questions throughout the unit.
- Explain that historians ask many questions to understand and make sense of history and how it connects to the present day.
- Asking good questions starts with considering what they already know, which then helps them identify what they still need to explore and learn.

DEVELOP THE INQUIRY CHART

Ask: *What do you already know about this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to recall and share what they know about this topic from their initial work with the Unit 1 Know and Wonder Chart in Lesson 1 as well as previous learnings (Grade 6, Units 1–3, their lives, and/or other classes and resources).
- Possible responses: Early complex societies in the Americas used natural resources like land, water, and stone to survive and build their civilizations. I know that groups like the Maya and Inca farmed in hard places like mountains or jungles. They used systems like terracing and irrigation to grow food. I've also heard that they built cities using local materials like stone. These societies traded resources and made tools from things like wood, bone, and metal.

Ask: *Which of the questions we brainstormed in our Wonder column of the Know and Wonder Chart might relate to this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Student responses will vary based on their Wonder questions.

Ask: *What other related questions can help us answer this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Possible responses: What kinds of crops did ancient societies plant, and how did they use the land? What



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their inquiry.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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happened if past populations used too many natural resources in their region?

Invite students to share their questions with the whole class.

- Consolidate or synthesize questions related to the Supporting Question as needed so there are three to four representative questions.
- Add these three to four questions to the “What questions will we ask?” section of the class’s Inquiry Chart.
- Prompt students to record the questions on their own Inquiry Chart handouts.

PREVIEW THE LEARNING AHEAD

Share with students that in this cluster, they will use photographs, maps, videos, and readings to explore ancient complex Latin American societies and their use of natural resources in order to draw conclusions about how resources shape cultures and societies.

You will return to this Inquiry Chart document in Lesson 9 and throughout the unit, so it is essential that you continue to preserve students' thinking here and have a separate chart for each class period.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe’s Ancient Legacy

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Solving the Puzzle of Caral-Supe (30 minutes)

Slide 7: As a transition, remind students that studying the foods and diets of past societies is one important way to understand how natural resources and geography shaped daily life, but it's not the only way.

- Explain to students that we will explore the distant past of the Americas to see how some early societies creatively adapted to and innovated with their natural environments.

Prepare students to watch a video clip on Caral-Supe.

- Explain that Caral-Supe (sometimes called Norte Chico) is an ancient society of South America. Researchers now consider it the oldest (currently known) complex society in all of North and South America!
- To begin, students will see the site as it is today and meet the researcher who is most responsible for uncovering and explaining this very early complex society. Dr. Ruth Shady Solís, an archaeologist and anthropologist from Peru, uncovered where Caral-Supe is located.

Ask students to consider the questions featured on the slide as they watch the video:

- What comparison does Dr. Ruth Shady make to show us how old Caral-Supe is?
- What words would you use to describe the environment?
- What natural resources would be needed for people to thrive in this area?

Slide 8: Play the “Caral-Supe: The oldest civilization in the Americas” video (1:30–3:50) by Visit Peru.

Slide 9: After screening, direct students’ attention to the questions again.

- Ask students to pool their ideas with a classmate, each taking a turn to start one of the first two questions.



TEACHING TIP

["First City in the New World?"](#) by *Smithsonian Magazine* offers background on the little-known Caral-Supe civilization, named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009. Students explore it through the story of Ruth Shady Solís, the pioneering Peruvian archaeologist whose work reshaped views of ancient South America. Her story also highlights a Latin American female scientist, supporting cultural and gender-role awareness.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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Then have several students volunteer their responses.

- Possible responses: She compares the construction of Caral's monumental buildings to the building of Giza pyramids and Sumerian cities, all 4,000 to 5,000 years ago. The landscape is arid, and water would be needed for people to thrive in this area.

Slide 10: Briefly help students situate Caral-Supe geographically by projecting Google Earth.

- Identify its location relative to the Peruvian capital of Lima and on the South American continent as a whole.
- Then zoom into the site.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

The purpose of this mapping moment is to orient students geographically and help them make a connection to the geography lessons they recently completed.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

If you wish, model how to do the activity by reading the first paragraph together as a class. Ask students what, if anything, they would underline in this paragraph.

Slide 11: Arrange students to work in pairs or groupings of your choice, and distribute colored pencils or markers.

- Distribute the reading and note-taking sheet [Old Society, New Discoveries](#).
- Explain to students that they will read more about Ruth Shady's discoveries and the puzzles she solved.
- Read the directions aloud, and reinforce that students will be looking for how Caral-Supe organized people to solve problems and how they used natural resources to improve or enhance daily life.
- Students will use these findings for a comparison in a future lesson.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide multilingual learners with the [Old Society, New Discoveries \(Sentence Frames\)](#) handout. Encourage students to utilize the sentence frames provided.

Circulate as students work to check for understanding. Refer to the [Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies \(Teacher Version\)](#) to help guide students.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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Cluster 2: The Americas' Earliest Complex Societies

With about 3–5 minutes left in class, bring student groups back together as a whole class.

Ask for a few volunteers to share a summary sentence they recorded on their handout.

- As students listen to each other, encourage them to add to their handouts as needed.
- Again, you can refer to the Teacher Version to support students' comprehension.

Lesson 6: Uncovering Caral-Supe's Ancient Legacy

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Old Society, New Discoveries (Teacher Version)

Directions: Read the article and underline sentences that provide evidence of the Caral-Supe people solving problems and improving their lives.

- Underline with one color any sentences that show inhabitants of Caral-Supe organizing people to solve a problem.
- Underline with a second color any sentences that show people of Caral-Supe using a natural resource to improve or enhance daily life.
- If you find both in the same sentence, underline that sentence in both colors.

Dr. Ruth Shady Solís was puzzled.

It was the early 1990s. Ruth Shady was a young archaeologist who was working on a site in Peru, the country where she was born. The site, Caral-Supe, had many pyramids and other massive stone structures. The largest pyramid was 100 feet tall and as wide as four football fields. Building these was a huge accomplishment for an ancient society.



Caral-Supe archaeological site. Image by AlisonRuthHughes via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

At other archaeological sites in Peru, pieces of broken pottery covered the ground. But as much as they searched, Shady and her crew of researchers could not find broken pottery anywhere. Did the people of this society fail to fire pottery at a time when all of their neighbors could do so?

Shady did not think this was possible. She had a different theory. But she had to prove it.

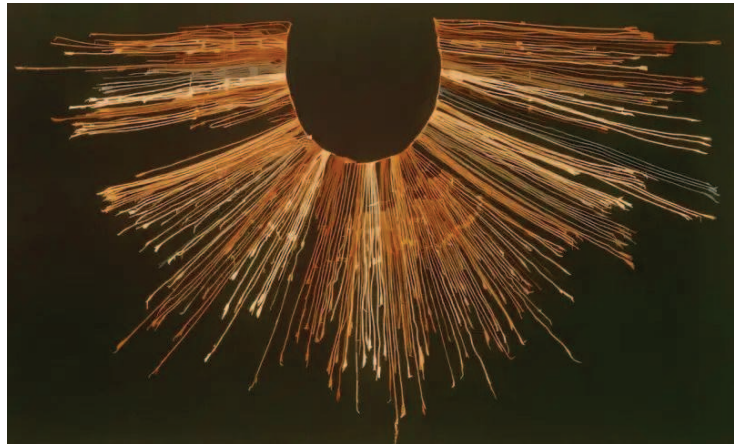
In 1999, she and her research team finally found an object they could send for carbon dating. It was an ancient bag woven from plants and found inside a pyramid, where it was used to haul building stones. When the report came back, it proved her theory that this site was even older than the invention of pottery on the continent. Science proved that Caral-Supe was 10 centuries older than anyone had ever thought. She had identified the oldest known civilization in the Americas.

Shady and her team had other big puzzles to solve about Caral-Supe.

The people of this society practiced farming using irrigation from a nearby river. But they did not grow any cereal grains. Without a cereal grain, how did they feed their large population? And why did they farm so much cotton instead? One answer came from the numerous ancient fish bones found at Caral-Supe. Shady discovered that the inland people of Caral-Supe made large cotton fishing nets for the people of the coast. In return, the people of the coast supplied the city with fish. Shady had shown that these people developed a cooperative way of life that helped both communities to thrive and live in peace.

Ruth Shady and other archaeologists still work at Caral-Supe today. They keep finding new surprises. Long ago, people noticed there was almost no art or decoration on the giant structures. But a research team recently found dozens of flutes made from pelican bones inside one of the buildings. (Pelicans are a type of large water bird.) These ancient flutes are evidence that this society enjoyed music.

There are no signs of a written language at Caral-Supe. But researchers did uncover an artifact they think is a *quipu*: a cluster of strings tied with knots. Quipus were used by much later South American societies to communicate and keep records. Ruth Shady believes that the ancient people of Caral-Supe invented this system for preserving knowledge, but not all archaeologists agree with her.



An Inca quipu. Image by Claus Ableiter via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

As far as the missing pottery, researchers eventually learned that the people of Caral-Supe used large dried pumpkins or gourds instead of pottery to contain seeds and store food.

All of these discoveries have helped to reconstruct the daily life of a South American civilization that is as old as ancient Egypt.

Text sources:

- "[First City in the New World?](#)" *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2002.
- "[Norte Chico civilization](#)," *The New World Encyclopedia*.
- Hirst, K. Kris. 2019. "[The Norte Chico Civilization of South America](#)." ThoughtCo. March 3.

Directions: After reading, use this chart to organize your ideas. Under the correct heading, write a summary of each sentence you underlined.

Student summaries will vary. Look for specific information from the reading in their writing. Possible responses:

Organizing people to solve a problem	Using a natural resource to improve or enhance daily life
• People organized together to solve problems in their society. • They used natural resources to improve or enhance daily life. • Communities worked together to construct pyramids and other massive buildings. • Heavy building stones were dragged in large nets to construction sites.	• Stones were used to build pyramids, and cotton was used to make fishing nets. • They were able to supply enough food to support the large population of the city.
• They discovered a way to build an irrigation system to bring water where it was needed.	• Pelican bones were turned into musical instruments. • Music enhanced daily life and contributed to cultural expression.
• People on the coast who fished cooperated with people living uphill on the dry coastal plain.	• Cotton strings may have been used to record information or leave messages.
• Community members coordinated to farm various vegetables that would serve many different uses.	• Gourds and pumpkins were used instead of pottery to store food and as containers for seeds.

Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies (Teacher Version)

Directions: Featured below are typical “dinner menus” from three societies of the ancient world on three different continents (Asia, Africa, and South America).

- With a partner, discuss what you notice about the three lists, focusing on similarities and differences.
- Then work together to answer the questions below the menus.

Ancient Mesopotamia	Ancient Ethiopia	Ancient Andes
• Barley (in breads and stews) • Wheat • Chickpeas • Lentils • Honey • Onions • Sometimes meat and milk from sheep	• Barley (in breads and stews) • Wheat • Chickpeas • Lentils • Honey • Ensete (Ethiopian banana) • Sometimes meat and milk from cows	• Quinoa (in breads and stews) • Potatoes • Maize (corn) • Chili peppers • Llama jerky

1. What could explain the similarities among the menus?

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

- Ancient Mesopotamia and Ethiopia grew some of the same crops, like barley, wheat, chickpeas, and lentils. These foods were common in ancient farming and were good for making stews and breads.
- This shows that ancient people shared farming knowledge or discovered similar foods that grew well in their environments.
- Ancient Mesopotamia and Ethiopia also used honey and sometimes ate meat, which shows some common food practices.
- All three societies were agricultural and relied on plants that were easy to grow and store.

Key ideas to look out for:

- Use of grains and legumes (barley, wheat, lentils, chickpeas)
- Common use of honey
- Farming and agriculture
- Similar tools or cooking methods (like stews)
- General human needs for carbs and protein

2. What could explain the differences among the menus?

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

- The menus are different because each society lived in a different part of the world with different land and climate.
- For example, the Andes had quinoa, potatoes, and maize, which grow well in high mountain areas.
- Ethiopia has ensete (a type of banana) that grows in tropical areas.
- Mesopotamia had onions and sheep, which fit their dry, river valley environment.
- Geography affected what foods were available and what animals people raised.

Key ideas to look out for:

- Geography and climate shaped diets
- Different crops and animals based on region
- Andes = high altitude → quinoa, potatoes, llamas
- Ethiopia = tropical highlands → ensete, cows
- Mesopotamia = dry rivers → wheat, onions, sheep
- Environment determines what food can be grown or raised

Text sources:

- Brothwell, Don and Patricia Brothwell. 1998. *Food in Antiquity: A Survey of the Diet of Early People*. Johns Hopkins Press.
- "[Ancient Mesopotamian foods](#)" (FoodTimeline library)
- Burger, Richard and Nikolaas Van Der Merwe. 1990. "[Maize and the Origin of Highland Chavín Civilization: An Isotopic Perspective](#)." *American Anthropologist*. March, pp. 85-95.
- Anwar, Yasmin. 2021. "[The superfoods that fueled ancient Andeans through 2,500 years of turmoil](#)." PhysOrg. November 30.
- "[Feasting with the Ancients: Ethiopian Food](#)" (Ethiopian Food)
- McCann, James C. 2009. *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine*. Ohio University Press.

LESSON 7

Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Evaluate the credibility of various sources to learn about the ancient Olmec people through the identification of a source's creator and the presence of facts and opinions.	Explain sources' credibility to learn about the ancient Olmec people, in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

As a pair, the next two lessons introduce another foundational society of the ancient Americas while centering research skills. The lesson begins with a visual inquiry activity in which students closely analyze an image of an Olmec colossal head to generate curiosity and observational questions. Through a structured Think-Pair-Share routine, students articulate initial interpretations and engage in peer dialogue. The lesson then transitions to a guided video viewing, during which students take notes on assigned topics related to Olmec life and culture. Following the video, students participate in a collaborative “Give One, Get One” exchange to synthesize and share information with peers. The lesson concludes with a class debrief to reinforce the importance of identifying credible sources and fully understanding an author's purpose.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 5, 6.T5b.3
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

☐

[Lesson 7 Slide Deck](#)

☐

[Olmec Innovation Research \(Teacher Version\)](#)

☐

[Olmec Background \(Teacher Version\)](#)

☐

[Viewing Assignment Cards](#)

☐

[Olmec Background](#)

☐

[Olmec Innovation Research](#)

VOCABULARY

the Olmec

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Wrapping Your Head Around an Ancient Artifact	5
Video Clip: Meet the Olmec	20
Investigating Sources: Evaluating Sources for Research	25

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Olmec Innovation Research \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports reading comprehension, note-taking, and written responses
- [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists and supports students during the Activator activity

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially during the video and reading assignments. Allow students at this level to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Also tell them the specific part of the video that answers their question. Consider providing students at this level with basic sentence starters to respond to the questions about the video. Allow students to translate the instructions, sentence frames, and word bank.
- Look Fors: Appropriate words or short phrases should use the sentence starters provided on available scaffolds. Responses will be mostly translated and may be created with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles if necessary. Some support from peers may be necessary to complete the video and source analysis.
- Look Fors: Complete sentences should use the provided sentence frames and word banks and may use translation as necessary.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this activity mostly independently.
- Look Fors: More detailed compound and complex sentences should use academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary where possible.

Lesson 7: Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Prepare viewing cards prior to showing a video clip by making copies of the [Viewing Assignment Cards](#) and cutting them up so you have one card per student.

Determine if you will share the research resources ("[Mesoamerican people perfected details of rubber processing more than 3,000 years ago: study](#)" from Phys.org, "[Olmec](#)" from Britannica Kids, and "[Ancient Agrarian Societies: The Olmec and Chavín](#)" from OER Project) in digital or printed form.

For the OER source, be sure to set the Lexile level to 840 before printing.

Activator: Wrapping Your Head Around an Ancient Artifact *(5 minutes)*

Slide 2: Project the image of a colossal stone head made by the Olmec near La Venta, Mexico.

- Explain to students that they will start class with a close analysis of an artifact from the ancient Americas.
- Prompt students to look closely at the image.
- **Important:** Do not give any historical context yet. The goal is to spark curiosity.
- Pause on this slide for a minute for students to silently observe the image.

Slide 3: Project a second image of the same head with a person included to give students a sense of scale. Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity:

- **Think:** Set a timer for 2 minutes. Students quietly observe and write down their thoughts or questions.
- **Pair:** Set a timer for 1 minute, then ask students to turn to a classmate to discuss their insights.
- **Share:** Bring the class back together. Take a few popcorn-style comments or questions.

Ask: *What surprised you?* Possible responses:

- I didn't know ancient people could make something so big and detailed.
- I thought the Olmec head was smaller until I saw the person.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their inquiry.

Lesson 7: Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

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Ask: *What would it be like to discover something this massive underground?* Possible responses:

- It would feel like finding a lost treasure or something from a movie.
- I'd wonder how people made it and why they buried it.

Slide 4: Reveal the artifact's identity: a colossal Olmec head. To provide context, read the slide's bullet points aloud, or ask student volunteers to read them aloud to the group.

Slide 5: Introduce a key vocabulary term for the lesson: *the Olmec*.

- Say the word: *the Olmec*.
- Use the word in context: *The Olmec built large stone heads that still amaze researchers and archaeologists today.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *(noun) an ancient people who lived in the tropical lowlands of south-central Mexico from 1200 BCE to about 400 BCE and influenced many later Mesoamerican civilizations.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Explain to students that they will investigate the Olmec's various innovations and utilization of natural resources by completing their own research, then making comparisons to other ancient societies.

Lesson 7: Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

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Video Clip: Meet the Olmec (20 minutes)

Distribute one card from the [Viewing Assignment Cards](#) handout to each student. Each card represents a topic from Olmec life and culture.

Explain to students that we will watch a short video to learn about the Olmec civilization and its use of natural resources.

- As students watch, they should take notes on their assigned topic.
- After the video, students will act as “experts” on their topics and share what they learned with classmates.

Slide 6: Play a portion of the video, “Olmec and Maya Civilizations” (1:07–8:44), by EdYouToo.

Slide 7: After the video, facilitate a “Give One, Get One” activity. Distribute [Olmec Background](#) to each student.

- Share that they will move around and share information about their assigned topic.
- As they talk, they should fill in the missing boxes on their handout by learning from others.
- Each exchange should last 1–1 ½ minutes. Use a timer to help manage time.
- During conversations, students should also discuss how each topic connects to natural resources. For example, the colossal stone heads were carved from stone using stone tools and possibly moved using rivers—both are natural resources.
- Optional: If preferred, students can do this in table groups instead of moving around.



TEACHING TIP

Produced by EdYouToo for diverse learners, this animated video uses humor and clear visuals to engage students. While narration speed can be adjusted, the slower pace suits most learners. Note a factual error at 3:15: it should say people inhabited Mesoamerica by 21,000 BCE, not 2,100 BCE); consider pausing to correct it.

The video introduces both the Olmec and Maya, as the former greatly influenced later civilizations. Since students will study the Maya in more depth later, this early exposure helps build curiosity.



Investigating Sources: Evaluating Sources for Research (25 minutes)

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

To transition, explain to students:

- The video was just one source. To fully answer our big question about the Olmec, we need to use multiple

Lesson 7: Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

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sources and evaluate them carefully.

- Teachers and librarians select trustworthy materials, but students also need to learn how to evaluate sources.
- Today you'll practice this skill using the Investigating Sources routine. In the next class, you'll apply it to a research task.

Slide 8: Distribute the [Olmec Innovation Research](#) to all students, and share the following resources in your preferred method (printed or digital):

- "[Mesoamerican people perfected details of rubber processing more than 3,000 years ago: study](#)" (Phys.org)
- "[Ancient Agrarian Societies: The Olmec and Chavín](#)" (OER Project, 840L version)
- "[Olmec](#)" (*Britannica Kids*)



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide multilingual learners with the [Olmec Innovation Research \(Sentence Frames\)](#) handout. Encourage students to utilize the sentence frames provided.

Let students know:

- All three sources appeared in a search for “ancient Olmec civilization.”
- They will use these sources to answer a research question in the next lesson.
- Today's goal is to identify how we know whether these sources are credible.

OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Model how to evaluate the Phys.org article using a teacher think-aloud.

While modeling, ask students to:

- Observe: Who made this source, and when? (David L. Chandler, 2010)
- Read: Does it mostly present facts or opinions? What makes you think that?

In this think-aloud, remind students to:

- Look at titles, homepages, headings, and other context clues.

Lesson 7: Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

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- Skim the text to determine the maker of the source and whether the source presents mostly facts or opinions.

Slide 9: Review an example of a non-credible source. Ask: *Do you think this is a credible source to use for research? Why or why not?*

Invite a few student volunteers to share their prior knowledge of Wikipedia. Then explain that Wikipedia is not the best source for research because anyone can change the information (it is a public encyclopedia), and it's not always checked by experts. While Wikipedia can be a good place to start learning, one should use more reliable sources like books or articles written by historians.

READ THE DOCUMENT

Then prompt students to begin evaluating the remaining three sources in pairs or small groups. As students work, move around the room to support their pacing and comprehension. You can refer to [Olmec Innovation Research \(Teacher Version\)](#) for this.

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION

Set aside a few minutes at the end of class to debrief student findings. Wrap up by discussing the final question from Part 1 of the handout: *Which source about the Olmec people is most useful and reliable to help us answer the Cluster 2 Supporting Question?*

Ask students to:

- Share which source they found most useful or trustworthy and why.
- Encourage them to cite clues like who made the source, what kind of information it had, or whether it seemed factual.

Invite students to revise or complete their responses in the Connect section of the handout after hearing peer ideas.

Lesson 7: Nature and Innovation in Olmec Society

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Olmec Background (Teacher Version)

Directions: As you hear about each topic from your peers, record your learnings under each question below.

What religious beliefs did the Olmec people have? How does this connect to natural resources?

- Believed in many gods (polytheism)
- Worshipped nature gods like the rain god and the maize god
- Believed in powerful animal spirits like the jaguar
- Built temples and pyramids for religious ceremonies
- Believed in an underworld and an afterlife
- Used statues and carvings to honor their gods
- Many Olmec gods were based on natural forces and animals.
- Stone was used to build temples and carve religious statues.
- Maize and rain, both natural resources, were central to religious beliefs.

How did the Olmec people pass along knowledge? How does this connect to natural resources?

- Through oral storytelling
- By carving symbols on stone (early writing)
- Teaching skills from parents to children
- Using art and monuments to show important ideas
- Sharing traditions through ceremonies and rituals
- Possibly through trade and contact with other groups
- Carvings were made on stone, a local resource.
- Ceremonial spaces and monuments were constructed using earth materials.
- Knowledge about farming and nature was passed down to help people use the land effectively.

What did the Olmec people do for recreation? How does this connect to natural resources?

- Participated in religious festivals
- Made music with instruments like drums and flutes
- Danced during ceremonies
- Created and admired art
- Spent time with family and community

- Musical instruments were made from wood, gourds, and animal skins.
- Art materials included clay, stone, and paint from natural dyes.
- Recreation often celebrated nature and seasons through festivals.

How did the Olmec people feed their community? How does this connect to natural resources?

- Grew crops like corn (maize), beans, and squash
- Fished in rivers and coastal areas
- Hunted animals such as deer and birds
- Gathered fruits and nuts
- Used slash-and-burn farming methods
- Traded for food with other groups (for fish, especially)
- The Olmec relied on fertile land, rivers, and forests for food.
- Farming used local soil and water resources.
- Hunting and gathering depended on local plants and wildlife.

What skills and technologies were developed by the Olmec people? How does this connect to natural resources?

- Created rubber from tree sap
- Built large stone heads and monuments
- Developed early farming techniques
- Used tools made from stone and jade
- Built drainage systems to control water
- Developed early forms of writing and calendars
- Technologies were often based on available resources—rubber trees, stone for sculpture and tools, water systems using local rivers, and farming methods adapted to the environment.

What forms of art were created by the Olmec people? How does this connect to natural resources?

- Carved giant stone heads from basalt
- Made small jade and ceramic figurines
- Painted murals and decorated pottery
- Created masks and sculptures
- Used art to show gods and important people
- Decorated tools and jewelry with designs

- Art was made from materials like stone (basalt), clay, and jade—all local resources.
- Natural dyes were used for color.
- Artistic themes often represented nature, animals, and gods connected to the environment.

Olmec Innovation Research (Teacher Version)

Part 1: Understanding Sources

Directions: Engage in the Investigating Sources routine by answering questions for each source based on what you observe and read. Then connect your findings with the Supporting Question.

Outside of source makers and dates, student responses will vary. Look for the citation of specific information from the sources in their explanations. Possible responses:

Source 1: Mesoamerican people perfected details of rubber processing more than 3,000 years ago. (Phys.org)

Observe: Scan the article. Then answer the questions below.

1. Who made the source, and when?

David L. Chandler from Massachusetts Institute of Technology wrote this in 2010, and it was published on the Phys.org website.

Read: Closely read the text. Then answer the question below.

2. Does this source mostly present facts or opinions? Explain your reasoning.

Mostly facts; it summarizes the research completed by MIT including a series of discoveries made by archaeologists and interpretations of evidence. It includes some expert opinions, but they are clearly supported by research.

Source 2: Ancient Agrarian Societies: The Olmec and Chavín (OER Project)

Observe: Scan the article. Then answer the questions below.

1. Who made the source?

Bridgette Byrd O'Connor, a historian working with the OER Project

Read: Closely read the text. Then answer the question below.

2. Does this source mostly present facts or opinions? Explain your reasoning.

Mostly facts, with occasional interpretation or context added to help students understand historical significance. It avoids personal opinions and focuses on evidence-based ideas.

Source 3: Olmec (Britannica Online)

Observe: Scan the article. Then answer the questions below.

1. Who made the source?

Britannica Online

Read: Closely read the text. Then answer the question below.

2. Does this source mostly present facts or opinions? Explain your reasoning.

Mostly facts; Britannica is an encyclopedia, so it's designed to inform rather than persuade. Interpretations are supported by evidence.

Connect: Think about all three sources that you read, and answer the question below.

- Which source about the Olmec people is most useful and reliable to help us answer the Cluster 2 Supporting Question? Explain your reasoning.

Cluster 2 Supporting Question: *How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?*

- Source 1: This source is useful because it explains how ancient people used rubber from trees to make useful things like bouncy balls and waterproof shoes. The research shows how ancient people had perfected a system of chemical processing that could fine-tune the properties of the rubber depending on its intended use.
- Source 2: This source is useful because it explains how the Olmec farmed and built cities. It shows how they used rivers, soil, and other natural resources to survive and grow food. It helps answer how they used the land to solve problems like getting food and water.
- Source 3: This source is useful because it gives a lot of facts about the Olmec people and what they built. It talks about how they used stone to make big heads and how they lived near rivers. It is written by experts and has clear information, so it is very reliable.

Part 2: Research

Directions: Using the Investigating Sources routine, observe and read each source again, recording information to help answer the research question below.

- **Research Question:** What challenges did the Olmec face in daily life, and how did rubber help them solve problems and create new opportunities?

Student responses will vary. Look for specific evidence or information from the source in their notes. Possible responses:

Source 1: Mesoamerican people perfected details of rubber processing more than 3,000 years ago. (Phys.org)

Observe What document features are there? (Type of document, photographs, maps)	Read How did the Olmec use rubber? (Direct quote, summary in your own words)
• News article format with a title and subheading • Photo of a modern rubber ball • Scientific explanation of rubber chemistry • Quotes from researchers	• The Olmec were the first to mix natural latex with other materials to make rubber stronger or stretchier. • They used rubber to make balls for playing, waterproof sandals, bands, and other useful items. • Rubber helped them with both work and recreation by making better tools, clothing, and sports equipment. The Olmec created rubber by combining plant materials and used it to make items like shoes and glue. • Rubber was especially important for making balls used in a ritual ball game that had cultural significance. • Rubber improved daily life by helping them create useful and symbolic tools.

Source 2: Ancient Agrarian Societies: The Olmec and Chavín (OER Project)

Observe What document features are there? (Type of document, photographs, maps)	Read How did the Olmec use rubber? (Direct quote, summary in your own words)
- Images: maps and photographs of artifacts with captions - Article text with headers	- The Olmec invented rubber and used it to solve practical problems, like keeping their feet dry. - Rubber also helped them participate in a religious game that was important to their society. - Rubber connected both daily life and spiritual life.

Source 3: Olmec (Britannica Online)

Observe What document features are there? (Type of document, photographs, maps)	Read How did the Olmec use rubber? (Direct quote, summary in your own words)
- Images: photographs of artifacts with captions - Article text with links on keywords/ideas	- The Olmec made rubber for both practical and sacred purposes. - They used rubber to create items that improved daily living and supported important traditions. - Rubber was an innovation that helped them in many parts of life.

Part 3: Connect

Directions: Now that you've investigated all three sources, answer the question below.

How did the Olmec people's use of rubber help them solve problems or create new opportunities in their society?

Student responses will vary. Look for specific evidence or information from the sources in their writing. Possible responses:

- The Olmec used rubber to make balls for games and waterproof things to stay dry. This helped the Olmec enjoy sports and stay safe in the rain.
- The Olmec also used rubber for sandals, which protected their feet. Rubber helped solve problems and made life easier and more fun for the Olmec.

LESSON 8

Olmec Innovations

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Identify how the Olmec used natural resources like rubber to solve problems or enhance daily life.	Synthesize how the Olmec used natural resources to solve problems or enhance daily life, in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson is the second part of a two-day sequence focused on Olmec society and innovation. Building on the background knowledge and source analysis from the previous lesson, students investigate how the Olmec used natural resources, specifically rubber, to enhance daily life. Through a guided research activity, students explore the practical and cultural significance of rubber in Olmec society, practicing key research and note-taking skills that support the unit's Summative Assessment. To deepen understanding, students then compare innovations from the Olmec or Caral-Supe with those from other ancient civilizations they've studied, creating a comparative cartoon or poster. This task supports students' development of historical thinking and allows for cross-cultural analysis.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 5, PS 7, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.7
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 8 Slide Deck
☐ Lesson 7: Olmec Innovation Research (Teacher Version)
☐ Lesson 7: Olmec Innovation Research
☐ Lesson 6: Old Societies, New Discoveries
☐ Lesson 6: Old Societies, New Discoveries (Teacher Version)

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Investigating Sources: Olmec Innovation: The Power of Rubber	35
Comparing Innovations of Ancient Societies	15

Lesson 8: Olmec Innovations

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- **Lesson 7: Olmec Innovation Research (Sentence Frames)** Supports reading comprehension, note-taking, and written responses
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports students' research

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer, if possible, especially during the reading and cartoon assignment. Allow students to translate the instructions and sentence starters. Consider providing a list of possible document features for them to choose from, and have students search the documents for the word *rubber*.
- Look Fors: Responses should use Tier 1 and 2 words and phrases. Simple sentences should use the sentence frames provided. Responses will most likely be translated and/or co-created with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students may need support during the reading, but have them search the documents for the word *rubber* and choose the most relevant sentences. Consider allowing them to work with a peer on the reading as necessary.
- Look Fors: Simple to compound sentences should use Tier 2 vocabulary and the provided sentence frames. Responses should be a combination of words from the readings and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- Look Fors: More detailed sentences should use Tier 2 and 3 academic vocabulary. Student summaries should be in their own words.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Students will need digital devices to access the research resources.

Additionally, for the cartoon creation at the end of the lesson, each student will need a blank sheet of paper.

Lesson 8: Olmec Innovations

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Investigating Sources: Olmec Innovation: The Power of Rubber (35 minutes)

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Slides 2–3: Distribute digital devices, and explain that today is a research day focused on how ancient societies used natural resources to enhance daily life.

- Remind students of the Olmec innovation of natural rubber. Today they will investigate why it mattered.



LEARN MORE

To share more background, explain that the Olmec made rubber by tapping tree sap and mixing it with other plants to trigger a chemical reaction—an impressive example of Indigenous scientific knowledge. Show modern rubber tapping using the video on Slide 3.

Slide 4: Display the main research question for today's lesson:

What challenges did the Olmec face in daily life, and how did rubber help them solve problems and create new opportunities?

OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Ask students to take out their **Olmec Innovation Research** handout from the previous class.

- Students will revisit the sources they evaluated previously to find relevant information in order to answer our focused research question about the Olmec and rubber.

Review the structure for “Part 2: Research.” For each source, they'll first observe the text/images, then read closely to answer two prompts:

- What document features are there? (Type of document, photographs, maps)
- How did the Olmec use rubber? (Direct quote, summary in your own words)



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their research. As a reminder, they were given the **Olmec Innovation Research (Sentence Frames)** handout to work with in the previous lesson.

Lesson 8: Olmec Innovations

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READ THE DOCUMENT

Explain that students will research using the process described on their handout. Once you've read the directions aloud and answered any questions, students can begin.

- Students now revisit Source 1 (Phys.org), Source 2 (OER Project), and Source 3 (Britannica Online).
- Guide them to summarize rubber use in their own words.

Refer to the **Olmec Innovation Research (Teacher Version)**, and emphasize the following key points for students to discover during their research:

- Rubber was used for footwear, bands, work tools, and game balls.
- It had both practical (waterproof shoes) and cultural/religious (ball game) value.

Circulate to support comprehension and quoting strategies.

Comparing Innovations of Ancient Societies *(15 minutes)*

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION

Slide 5: Bring students back together, and lead a class discussion about what they learned through their research. Ask:

- *How did the earliest American civilizations innovate with natural resources?*
- *What challenges did they need to overcome?*
- *How did they enhance daily life?*

Lesson 8: Olmec Innovations

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Possible responses:

- Early American civilizations drew on natural resources to meet basic needs (staple crops, fishing nets).
- Early American civilizations had significant environmental challenges to overcome (the Andes Mountains, lack of water, thick jungle terrain).
- Early American civilizations drew on their natural resources to enhance life as part of their culture (ball game, pelican bone flutes).

As students share, chart their ideas on the board, perhaps using a web to categorize specific innovations/uses of resources under various headings (cultural, artistic, food, etc.).

Slide 6: Distribute a plain sheet of paper to all students. Explain that students will use their **Old Society, New Discoveries handout** or the **Olmec Innovation Research handout** to:

- Choose one innovation from Caral-Supe or the Olmec that used natural resources to solve a problem or improve daily life.
- Draw a simple one-panel cartoon or sketch showing the innovation in action (e.g., rubber sandals helping someone walk in the rain or a quipu being used to record information).
- Add a short caption explaining what the innovation is and how it helped people in that society.

Slide 7: Display the example to guide students.

Some important items to reiterate before students begin:

- Comparisons can be broad ("both built monuments") or specific ("This society built pyramids; that one built ziggurats").
- Allow brief research if students want to review other societies. This builds foundational comparative skills for seventh grade.

Students can begin their cartoons in class (and complete them for homework if necessary). Keep the slide visible to support brainstorming.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

To connect past and present, ask students to consider:

- How is our society using natural resources to address major challenges like global warming? (You can mention wind power as an example.)
- How do the innovation strategies of the Caral-Supe or Olmec compare to those used today?

Lesson 8: Olmec Innovations

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LESSON 9

Formative Assessment

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Explain how the Olmec and Caral-Supe used natural resources like rubber to solve problems or enhance daily life.	Summarize evidence and reasoning from sources about the Olmec and Caral-Supe to answer an inquiry question in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students complete a Formative Assessment that synthesizes their learning about how the Olmec and Caral-Supe civilizations used natural resources like rubber to solve problems and improve daily life. Building on previous lessons where students researched innovations and analyzed sources, they will work individually and in groups to compare ancient societies' innovations, discuss their findings, and answer an inquiry question using evidence from multiple sources. This lesson emphasizes critical thinking and sourcing and writing skills to support students' understanding of early complex societies in the Americas and their creative problem-solving with natural resources.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 5, PS 7, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 9 Slide Deck
☐ Cluster 2 Formative Assessment Task
☐ Cluster 2 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)
☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart
☐ Lesson 6: Unit 4 Cluster 2 Inquiry Chart
☐ Lesson 8: Cartoons

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Comparing Cartoons	5
Putting it Together	15
Formative Assessment	30

Lesson 9: Formative Assessment

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Cluster 2 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports the collection of evidence and written responses
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Helps to identify a main idea and supporting details to engage in oral discussion

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Consider allowing students at this level to work with a peer and/or use translation for the Formative Assessment. Consider providing a model or choices that students could use to fill in the blank spaces in the sentence frames for Part 2 of the Formative Assessment Task.
- [Look Fors](#): Responses should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases like *resources* and *used*. Students may copy from their notes to create their sentences. Responses will likely be mostly translated or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students should use the Sentence Frames scaffold. Students may need support finding all of the information for the Formative Assessment Task.
- [Look Fors](#): Complete simple and compound sentences using the sentence frames should include more relevant Tier 2 words like *production* and *environment*. Sentences should include words from the readings and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students can use the sentence frames as a guide if necessary but should be able to write their own sentences independently.
- [Look Fors](#): Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write a strong claim and multiple sentences for each part of the Formative Assessment Task.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Have each class period's Unit 4 Cluster 2 Inquiry Chart and Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart easily accessible.

Comparing Cartoons (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Ask students to gather their innovation cartoons from the previous class that focused on how the Caral-Supe

Lesson 9: Formative Assessment

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or the Olmec used natural resources to solve problems or improve daily life.

Arrange students into small groups of 3–4. Review the directions for this short discussion activity:

- Take turns presenting your cartoon to your group.
- Briefly explain what innovation you illustrated and how it helped solve a problem or improve life for the Caral-Supe or the Olmec.

Discuss the following guiding questions:

- *What challenge did the ancient complex society face?*
- *How did their innovation help address it?*
- *What natural resource did they use?*

As students turn to discuss their cartoons in their small groups, display a list of sentence frames that may be helpful for students to reference during their discussion.

Finally, bring the class back together and pose one last question: *Did you find that the Caral-Supe or Olmec had more similarities or differences with the civilizations they were compared to? What might that suggest?*

Invite a few student volunteers to share insights from their group discussion with the whole group.



Putting it Together (15 minutes)

Slide 4: Explain that for the rest of the class, students are going to return to the Cluster 2 Supporting Question and “put together” what they have learned so far about examples of how early complex societies in the Americas solved problems using natural resources.

Slides 5–6: Present the **Unit 4 Cluster 2 Inquiry Chart** that the class created in Lesson 6, and remind students of the Cluster 2 Supporting Question:



How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?

Lesson 9: Formative Assessment

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SUMMARIZE OUR LEARNING AND SHARE OUR INITIAL THINKING

Ask: *What resources did we use in lessons 6–8?*

Have students discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format, and then call on a few students to share their responses. Possible responses:

- **Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies**
- **Old Society, New Discoveries**
- **Olmec Background handout**
- **Olmec Innovation Research handout**

Review the activities from the cluster's lessons in the “What did we do?” column. After reading each lesson's summary, ask students to turn and talk about what they learned in that lesson.

SYNTHESIZE OUR IDEAS AND ANSWER THE SUPPORTING QUESTION

Ask: *What did we learn that helps us answer our Supporting Question?* Give students time to discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format once more.

Guide them to support their assertions with specific evidence and examples. Ask probing questions to help students reach key takeaways of the cluster. Possible responses:

- Ancient American civilizations like Caral-Supe and the Olmec developed innovative ways to use their natural environments, such as creating irrigation systems in dry regions or using local materials for art and construction.
- These societies arose independently and were unique in many ways, but they also shared similarities with other ancient civilizations around the world, such as problem-solving with available resources and organizing cooperative communities.

When student groups share with the whole class, record their responses in the “What did we learn?” column of the Inquiry Chart. Prompt students to record this information on their own handouts.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Model for ML students by thinking aloud about one thing learned. Then model how to add evidence to show how you know this. Use students' own words first, and then go back and refine the language together, referring to language models from the whole cluster.

Be sure to also encourage students to refer to their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) handouts to support this step of the Putting It Together routine.

Lesson 9: Formative Assessment

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RETURN TO THE INQUIRY CHART

Finally, revisit the questions students added under the Supporting Question in Lesson 6 as part of their Launching the Question routine as well as questions from the Wonder column of the **Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart** from Lesson 1.

Ask: Have any of these questions been answered? Have any new questions come up?

Give students a few minutes to share their thinking and ideas with the whole group.

Lesson 9: Formative Assessment

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STAMP THE KEY LEARNING

**Formative Assessment** (30 minutes)

Slide 7: Let students know that they will now engage in the final step of the Putting It Together routine by completing a Formative Assessment Task and working to determine which sources best help us understand ancient Latin American societies' use and innovation of natural resources.

- Distribute the [Cluster 2 Formative Assessment Task](#) to all students.
- Tell students that they will utilize our past resources to make a claim about Olmec society.

Preview the two parts of the assessment with students:

- Read the directions for Part 1 and Part 2. Ask students to gather helpful handouts from this cluster. Explain to students that they will need to cite evidence from their materials that will help them answer our Supporting Question: *How did early complex societies in the Americas solve problems using natural resources?*
 - Remind students to:
 - Make a claim
 - Support their claim with evidence
 - Explain why it matters

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide ML students with the [Cluster 2 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#) handout. Encourage students to utilize the sentence frames provided as well as the [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their research.

Lesson 9: Formative Assessment

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Cluster 2 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)

Part 1: Identifying Relevant Sources

Directions: Look back at the sources you used during your research on the ancient complex societies of Caral-Supe and the Olmec. Use these articles and handouts to help you respond to the questions below.

Article: "Old Society, New Discoveries"	Student handout: Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies	Phys.org article: "Mesoamerican people perfected details of rubber processing more than 3,000 years ago."	OER Project article: "Ancient Agrarian Societies: The Olmec and Chavín"	Britannica Kids article: "Olmec"
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Student answers will vary. Look for the inclusion of specific information from the source in the response to each question. Possible responses:

1. What is one example from your research that shows how either the Caral-Supe or the Olmec used natural resources in creative or useful ways? (Use a quote or describe key details from a source.)

- One example of how the Olmec used natural resources is making rubber from trees and vines to create balls for games.
- The Caral-Supe found a way to use river water to farm by building irrigation canals.
- According to the source, "The Olmec used latex from rubber trees and mixed it with morning glory vines." This shows that they understood how to make the rubber stronger.

2. What source did you reference to answer the question above? (Write the title or author of the source.)

The most helpful source was the...

- Phys.org article: "Mesoamerican people perfected details of rubber processing more than 3,000 years ago."
- OER Project article: "Ancient Agrarian Societies: The Olmec and Chavín"
- "Old Society, New Discoveries" article
- Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies handout
- Britannica Kids article: "Olmec"

3. Was this source a primary or secondary source? How do you know?

- Phys.org article: Secondary; it summarizes scientific studies and findings.

- OER Project article: Secondary; it interprets and explains historical developments.
- Old Society, New Discoveries article: Secondary; it shares new archaeological discoveries in an explanatory way.
- Comparing Diets of Three Ancient Societies handout: Secondary; it draws on various sources to compare cultures.
- Britannica Kids article: Secondary; it summarizes known facts for a general audience.

4. Who created this source? What do you know about them? (Think about their background or expertise.)

- Phys.org: Science writers and editors who report on new academic research
- OER Project: Historians and educators who write curriculum for students
- Old Society, New Discoveries: Historians or archaeologists who study ancient cities
- Comparing Diets: Educators who prepared materials for student learning
- Britannica Kids: Experts or editors who write reference materials for students

5. When and where was this source created? (Include the date and place if available.)

Answers will vary, and most sources do not include dates. Possible responses:

- The Phys.org article was published in 2010. It was likely written in the US based on the website.
- The Britannica article doesn't list a date, but it's from a trusted encyclopedia.

6. Who was the intended audience for this source? How can you tell?

- It was written for students or young readers. The language is simple and includes helpful visuals.
- It was written for people learning about history. It provides comparisons and background knowledge.
- The source includes definitions and summaries, which help learners understand the topic better.

7. Did the source mostly present facts or opinions? Give one example.

- Phys.org: mostly facts. Example: "The Olmec improved rubber by adding chemicals from morning glory vines."
- OER Project: mostly facts. Example: "The Olmec used rivers to support farming."
- Old Society, New Discoveries: mostly facts. Example: "The Caral-Supe civilization is over 5,000 years old."
- Comparing Diets: facts. Example: "Andean people relied on potatoes and quinoa."
- Britannica Kids: mostly facts. Example: "The Olmec lived in what is now Mexico."

8. Do you think this is a credible (trustworthy) source? Why or why not? (Use what you wrote above to explain your thinking.)

- Yes, it uses information from scientists, archaeologists, and historians.

- Yes, the site is known for providing reliable educational material.
- Yes, it provides facts with evidence and was made for students to learn from.

Part 2: Making a Claim Using Evidence

Directions: Answer the following question as you reference your class notes. Use the space below to:

- Make a claim
- Support your claim with evidence
- Explain why it matters

How did ancient complex societies in the Americas use natural resources to solve problems or meet their needs? Why were these innovations important?

- Ancient societies like the Olmec and Caral-Supe used natural resources in creative ways to help their civilizations succeed.
- The Olmec used rubber from trees and added vines to make it stronger, which they used for games and possibly tools or waterproof items.
- The Caral-Supe built irrigation systems using stones and canals to bring water to their crops.
- These innovations were important because they allowed societies to meet everyday needs like farming and cultural activities. This helped them grow and last for many generations.

Mesoamerican Societies: The Teotihuacan

How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

CONTENTS
Lesson 10 Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders
Lesson 11 Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets
Lesson 12 Daily Life in Sacred Spaces
Lesson 13 Teotihuacan’s Role in Ancient Trade
Lesson 14 Formative Assessment

Overview

This lesson cluster introduces students to one of the major complex societies of Mesoamerica: the Teotihuacan. In the lessons, students delve into ways in which the design and features of cities—a focus of study in this unit—provide windows into the beliefs and values of their inhabitants, including their cosmological vision.

- ### Learning Objectives
- By the end of this cluster, students should be able to...**
- Make inferences about how the features of a city reveal its values and beliefs.
 - Identify several ways that Mesoamerican societies interacted with and influenced one another.
 - Determine sources that will be helpful in answering inquiry questions.
 - Construct social studies arguments that select relevant information to support claims with evidence gathered from multiple sources (WIDA ELD-SS.6-8.Argue.Expressive).

Vocabulary

TIER 3
egalitarian Mesoamerica pantheism

Cluster Focus Standards

Practice Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)

PS 3: Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.	10-14
PS 5: Determine the credibility of sources using distinctions among fact and opinion as well as information regarding maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.	12-14

Content Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
6.T5b.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries in South America.	10
6.T5c.1: Research and report on one of the major ancient societies that existed in Central America (Maya, Teotihuacán, and other civilizations such as the Olmec, Toltec, and Zapotec), or one of the major pre-Columbian Andean civilizations (Chavín, Moche, Nazca), their locations, and their cultural characteristics.	10-14

Literacy Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
SLCA.6-8.5: Integrate multimedia components and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.	12
WCA.6-8.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.	10-11, 13-14

Unit 4, Cluster 3 Inquiry Chart (Teacher Version)

Unit EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
Cluster SQ	How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?
What questions will we ask?	

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 10: We located major Mesoamerican civilizations in time and place, exploring how Teotihuacan's geography and architecture reflect cultural values.	Teotihuacan's location in the Valley of Mexico provided natural resources that helped support a large, complex society. The city was carefully planned, built in the highlands of central Mexico using natural features like rivers and obsidian deposits.
Lesson 11: We researched how the features of the ancient city of Teotihuacan reveal its people's values and beliefs.	With wide avenues and aligned buildings, Teotihuacan's layout reflects values of order, community, and connection to the cosmos. Housing was relatively equal in size, suggesting an egalitarian social structure uncommon in other ancient cities.
Lesson 12: We evaluated how features of Mesoamerican cities reflected cultural beliefs and values by analyzing visuals and video evidence from Teotihuacan.	Teotihuacan's design included sacred buildings and public spaces aligned with geography and cosmic order, showing a deep respect for the universe. The presence of gods linked to natural forces reveals that the Teotihuacanos believed their land and structures were part of a divine order (pantheism).

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 13: We analyzed how Teotihuacan influenced neighboring societies through trade and cultural exchange and practiced effective note-taking strategies.	Teotihuacan used trade (not war) to spread its cultural influence. Its location, design, and resources supported this economic and cultural power. The city's urban planning and architecture helped support large-scale trade, with plazas, markets, and roadways designed for movement and interaction.

LESSON 10

Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Locate major Mesoamerican civilizations in time and place, exploring how Teotihuacan’s geography and architecture reflect cultural values.	Explain how Teotihuacan’s geography and architecture reflect and connect to cultural values, orally.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students begin their exploration of ancient Mesoamerican societies by situating the Olmec, Teotihuacan, and the Maya in time and place. The lesson starts by reviewing a timeline to highlight the rise and fall of Teotihuacan and its overlap with the Maya civilization, emphasizing how these early societies built on one another. Students then learn the meaning of "Mesoamerica" and identify its geographic location using a map featuring modern countries. Through observation of Teotihuacan’s location and natural resources, students consider why people settled there. Then they engage with images of buildings to spark discussion about how architecture reveals cultural values and ways of life. The lesson introduces the Cluster 3 Supporting Question, *How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?* and launches the cluster’s Inquiry Chart, which students will use to track their thinking. Students are introduced to Teotihuacan as a “city of superlatives,” reading a short article and collecting evidence to justify the city’s major attributions.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.7
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 10 Slide Deck ☐ The Rise of Teotihuacan ☐ The Rise of Teotihuacan (Teacher Version) ☐ Cluster 3 Inquiry Chart ☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart
VOCABULARY
Mesoamerica

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Getting Situated in Time and Place	10
Launching the Question	10
Teotihuacan: A City of Superlatives	30

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [The Rise of Teotihuacan \(Chunked Text\)](#) Supports reading comprehension and written responses to prompts
- [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports oral language practice for forming and posing questions

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Students will benefit from working with a language-proficient peer, if possible, especially during the Think-Pair-Share activities. Suggest a couple of examples from the Question LLB for students to use on the Inquiry Chart. Allow students to translate the key facts, instructions, and sentence frames. Encourage students to work with peers who can support them through reading and highlighting.
- Look Fors: Phrases or short, simple sentences should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words. Responses will most likely be translated and/or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students can choose sentence starters from the Question LLB to use on the Inquiry Chart. Encourage students to work with peers to record information about the sources.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound sentences should use Tier 2 words and phrases.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete the activities independently.
- Look Fors: Detailed responses about sources and the information they provide should use academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary where possible.

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Determine if you want to work with the Inquiry Chart on chart paper or digitally. You will need separate class copies for each class period. Students will also need to have their own copies to work with throughout the cluster, either digitally or printed.

Have each class period's Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart from Lesson 1 easily accessible.

Spend some time getting to know the Virtual Field Trip (the logistics of operating it and some of the content) so you are comfortable modeling the resource with students. Visit the first page of the handout [Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan \(Teacher Version\)](#) to help with your orientation.

Arrange students into groups of 4 prior to this lesson (and the next lesson). Make sure every group (or student if possible) has a digital device to access the virtual tour.

Getting Situated in Time and Place (10 minutes)

Remind students that as they learned in the previous cluster, the Olmec were the earliest known major complex society that developed in Mesoamerica, followed by many other societies.

Explain to students that the rest of our Americas unit will focus on three ancient complex societies as important examples: the Teotihuacan, the Maya, and the Taíno.

Explain that Teotihuacan's name is pronounced "TAY-oh-tee-WA-kahn."

- Teotihuacan is a name given to the ancient city by the Aztec people, who arrived in the region centuries after the city's peak.
- The word comes from the Nahuatl language and means "the place where gods were born."
- Today, Teotihuacan is used to refer both to the city itself and to the broader society and culture that built and lived in it.
- The city is often called "Teo" (TAY-oh) for short.

Slide 2: Project a timeline for students to situate these ancient complex societies in time.

- Ask for a student volunteer to locate the Olmec period on the timeline.

**CULTURAL COMPETENCE**

In the Spanish pronunciation, the city's name is said with the accent on the final syllable: "Teotihuacán." We use the Nahuatl version here.

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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- Ask another student to point out when Teotihuacan began to grow (around 100 BCE, after the Olmec decline).

Invite all students to calculate how long Teo lasted as a complex society (about 750 years).

Then ask for a student volunteer to point out the period of the ancient Maya people and to describe the extent of its overlap with Teotihuacan. Be sure to share the idea that the classic Maya cities declined 250 years after Teo, but the Maya people survive today.

Slide 3: Explain the context behind *Mesoamerica* by introducing the term as a new vocabulary word.

- Say the word: *Mesoamerica*.
- Use the word in context: *Mesoamerica was home to advanced societies long before Europeans arrived.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *“Middle America,” a region of diverse societies with shared cultural traits.*
- Highlight the word’s features: *Mesoamerica is a noun. Mesoamerican is an adjective that refers to the region or a person from the region.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Introduce its geography using the simple map included on the slide.

- Ask students which modern-day countries were historically part of Mesoamerica.
- Explain to students that Mesoamerica includes land from north-central Mexico to northern Costa Rica, in today’s terms. In addition to Mexico (part of North America), it includes several countries we think of as Central America: Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica (in fact, every modern Central American country except Panama overlaps with historic Mesoamerica).

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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Slide 4: Project a map of modern-day Mexico, featuring Teotihuacan. Explain to students that Teo is the first great Mesoamerican city that we will study.

Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share. Ask students to independently read the following questions on the slide, then discuss their thoughts with a nearby classmate.

- *Where is Teo located relative to modern Mexico City? (Northeast, about 30 miles)*
- *Teo is in the Valley of Mexico. Is this valley in the lowlands or highlands? How do you know? (Highlands are the more elevated areas that are darker on the map.)*

Ask students if they can roughly locate modern-day Mexico City and the Yucatán Peninsula. If possible, label these on the map on Slide 4. Then provide students with some context:

- Natural resources were part of the reason people chose to settle here.
- The region had spring water for irrigation, fertile soil, and large deposits of valuable obsidian, a hard volcanic rock used to make tools.

Explain that we are going to take some time to learn about Teotihuacan because cities and how they influenced each other are a major focus of our Americas unit.



Launching the Question (10 minutes)

SPARK CURIOSITY

Slide 5: Project a series of images showing a variety of buildings.

Pose the following question: *What can a building tell us about the people who built it?*

Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity.

- As students contribute ideas, guide them in identifying how buildings and spaces tell us a story about people and culture.
- Ask students to help create a list of impressions from each building.

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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- Circulate the room as students discuss and assist as necessary.

Debrief together as a class. Use some of the discussion questions below to push critical thinking:

- *What do you notice about the size, shape, or location of the building?*
- *Who do you think used it, and why?*
- *What does it tell us about what the people valued?*

Emphasize cultural clues such as beliefs or religion, community gathering, power or leadership, and art and design.

Explain to students that in upcoming lessons, they will study how spaces and places tell a unique story about regions and their culture.

INTRODUCE THE SUPPORTING QUESTION AND ELICIT INITIAL THINKING

Slide 6: Introduce the Cluster 3 Supporting Question:



How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

Slide 7: Introduce students to the [Cluster 3 Inquiry Chart](#) document.

- Remind students that the Inquiry Chart will continue to help them keep track of their ongoing learning and questions throughout the unit.
- Explain that historians ask many questions to understand and make sense of history and how it connects to the present day.
- Asking good questions starts with considering what they already know, which then helps them identify what they still need to explore and learn.

DEVELOP THE INQUIRY CHART

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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Ask: *What do you already know about this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to recall and share what they know about this topic from their initial work with the Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart in Lesson 1 as well as previous learnings (Grade 6, Units 1–3, their lives, and/or other classes and resources).
- Possible responses: Mesoamerican societies terraced the land to grow food. Ancient populations built large temples and pyramids for religious purposes. Their cities were carefully planned around important buildings in the center. Carvings and symbols showed certain beliefs. Big structures were often made for kings, gods, or special events.

Ask: *Which of the questions we brainstormed in our Wonder column of the Know and Wonder Chart might relate to this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Student responses will vary based on their Wonder questions.

Ask: *What other related questions can help us answer this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Possible responses: Why did Teotihuacan society build pyramids and temples? What materials did they use to build their structures, and why? How were cities organized in Teotihuacan society?

Invite students to share their questions with the whole class.

- Consolidate or synthesize questions related to the Supporting Question as needed so there are three to four representative questions.
- Add these three to four questions to the “What questions will we ask?” section of the class’s Inquiry Chart.
- Prompt students to record the questions on their own Inquiry Chart handouts.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their inquiry.

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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PREVIEW THE LEARNING AHEAD

Share with students that in this cluster, they will use photographs, maps, videos, and readings to explore ancient complex Mesoamerican societies, focusing on how structures and spaces show us important aspects of their culture.

You will return to this Inquiry Chart document in Lesson 13 and throughout the unit, so it is essential that you continue to preserve students' thinking here and have a separate chart for each class period.

Teotihuacan: A City of Superlatives (30 minutes)

Slide 8: Introduce Teotihuacan as a city, and emphasize some key facts:

- Teotihuacan's original name and builders are unknown.
- Approximately 80–90% of the city has not yet been excavated.
- The Aztecs, who encountered the city 900 years later, named it Teotihuacan, meaning “City of the Gods.”
- The city was exceptional in size, design, and influence—worthy of many superlatives.

Spend a minute defining and giving examples of superlatives, then challenge students to convert some on their own (*If I say “fast,” you say “...”?*).

Distribute the article [The Rise of Teotihuacan](#) in hard copy or digital format to all students.

- Arrange students into small groups of 3 to 4.
- Ask students to take turns reading aloud (round-robin).
- As they read, students should highlight any superlative words or phrases they find.
- Model one example first: “earliest city.”
- Direct students to complete Part 2 after reading, which asks them to identify the type and usefulness of various sources.



LEARN MORE

For background on Teotihuacan and its famous attributes, see "[Lessons from Teo](#)" from Boston University and "[In This Ancient City, Even Commoners Lived in Palaces](#)" from Slate.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [The Rise of Teotihuacan \(Chunked Text\)](#) handout for this activity.

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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As students work, move around the room to support their pacing and comprehension. You can refer to the [The Rise of Teotihuacan \(Teacher Version\)](#) handout to support this.

After about 20 minutes, bring the students back together to debrief the reading as a class.

- Collect student examples, and create a list of superlatives (directly on Slide 8 or somewhere else in the classroom).
- Encourage students to suggest other fitting superlatives based on the reading (most organized, most influential, most modern).
- Ask students to review the chart and recall details about Teotihuacan that justify these superlatives.

Finally, direct students to the article's title. Ask: *Could someone disagree with this claim?*

- Emphasize that a strong claim is backed by evidence—this article models that.
- Connect to students' final Summative Assessment project: They will make a claim about their chosen ancient city using supporting criteria.

Slide 9: In the last 5 minutes of class, organize students to engage in a brief comparison activity. Ask: *What made Teotihuacan unusual...or not?*

In their small groups, ask students to list:

- Two similarities with other ancient cities
- Two differences from other ancient cities

Possible responses:

- Similarities include pyramids like Caral-Supe, Egypt, and Nubia, and frescoes like Egypt.
- Differences include luxurious housing for commoners and an entire city aligned to a central avenue.

Ask for student volunteers to share insights from their group discussions to deepen comparative thinking practice.

Lesson 10: Teotihuacan: Ancient City of Wonders

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The Rise of Teotihuacan (Teacher Version)

Part 1 Directions: Take turns reading the article aloud (round-robin style) with your group. As you read, **highlight** any superlative words or phrases you find. After reading through the article once, reflect on the sources that help us better understand what life looked like in Teotihuacan.

Why Was Teotihuacan the **Most Important Ancient Mesoamerican City?**

by Michael E. Smith, Arizona State University

(adapted from "[Teotihuacan, Ancient Mesoamerican Metropolis](#)" and used with permission)



View down the Avenue of the Dead, from the Pyramid of the Moon. Image by Johannes Kruse via flickr, CC BY 2.0.

Five reasons Teotihuacan is the **most important ancient city** of the Americas:

1. Teotihuacan was one of the **earliest cities in the New World.**

Teotihuacan ("Teo" for short) was an early city in central Mexico, certainly the **earliest large city in the region**. Teo was founded several centuries before the Common Era. It reached its height between about 200 and 600 CE.

2. Teotihuacan was one of the **largest cities in the world.**

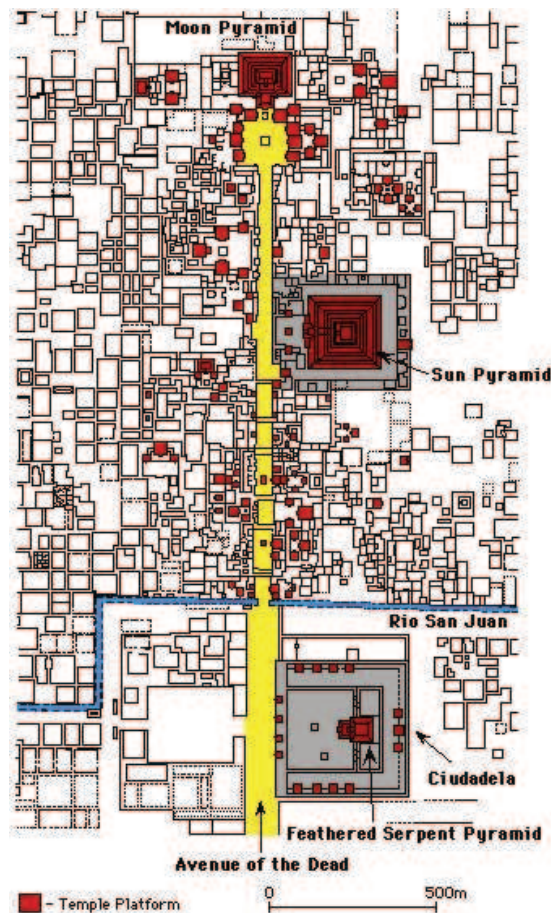
Teotihuacan's population is estimated at around 100,000 residents. They lived in an urban **area larger than 12 square miles**. During Teo's early period, Constantinople had over 400,000 residents. By the end of Teo's height, Chang'an in China had that many people or more. Teotihuacan was not far behind, and it was clearly the **largest city in the Americas**.

3. Teotihuacan was the most extensively planned ancient city in the New World.

After an initial period of settlement, the city was rebuilt following an orthogonal grid plan. (Orthogonal means having lines that are perpendicular or form right angles.) Nearly every one of the several thousand buildings was lined up with the north-south alignment of the "Avenue of the Dead" (in yellow on the map). The grid layout of Teo suggests that its rulers had **considerable control and power** to enforce their will. They destroyed irrigated farmland for urban development and made all buildings conform to the main grid. Urban planning in ancient cities can be measured by the degree of coordination among buildings and spaces (very high at Teo). It can also be measured by the area to which the planning is applied (again, **large** at Teo).



Map of Teotihuacan. Image courtesy of the Teotihuacan Mapping Project ([downloadable Teotihuacan Map](#))

**Teotihuacan: Reconstruction of Central Zone**

Drawing by Mike Ritchie and Kumiko Sugiyama
after Millon 1973; Millon, Drewitt, and Cowgill 1973

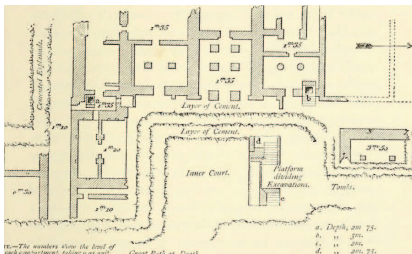
Map of Teotihuacan layout. Image by Rene Millon via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Teotihuacan **looked more like a modern city than other ancient cities did**. Of course, cities from the past should not be judged by comparing them to modern-day cities. But it is striking how much Teotihuacan looks like a modern city. The major features that the city shares with US grid-planned cities include its use of orthogonal grid planning and its **large size**. Another feature it shares with modern cities is its overall spatial pattern. In most modern cities, civic buildings are in the center, and low-rise residences spread out for miles. Buildings were organized in a similar way in Teo.



Boston aerial view. Image by Timothy Jarrett via flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0.

4. Teotihuacan was the setting for a radical social experiment.



The ancient cities of the New World Image by Internet Archive Book Images via Wikimedia Commons, no known copyright restrictions



Atetelco White Court Image by Ymblanter via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

Teotihuacan stands out as **radically different from most Mesoamerican cities**. The housing, in the form of **large multifamily apartment compounds**, is unusual in two ways. One, it is highly standardized. And two, each family's house is **much larger and more luxurious** than in other cities. The walls are plastered and painted with colorful fresco murals of gods and rituals (using the same methods used much later by Michelangelo to paint the walls of Rome's Sistine Chapel). Also, it appears that Teotihuacan was ruled by a council of some sort and not by a powerful king. There are no sculptures or paintings of their faces. Archaeologists are not even sure which building was the royal palace.

5. Teotihuacan's trading and conquests affected much of Mesoamerica.

The foreign influence of Teotihuacan was the **greatest of any Mesoamerican city**. First, Teo was the capital of a small empire that conquered much of central Mexico. Teo **engaged in trade with most of the known parts of Mesoamerica**. Its merchants or officials controlled the major obsidian* quarries near Pachuca, and the distinctive green-tinted Pachuca obsidian was traded by Teotihuacan merchants to the Maya region and beyond.



Pachuca obsidian blade. Image courtesy of NOAA-OER.

And then another kind of Teo influence—architecture and royal styles—also spread throughout Mesoamerica, including to the Maya realm. Teo's style was the "in" style of its period. Kings all over Mesoamerica built temples in the distinctive Teo style, and Teotihuacan royal costume elements became the rage among Maya kings. No Aztec empire, trade, or stylistic influence spread nearly so far as that of Teotihuacan.



Talud-tablero style temple. Image by Steven Newton via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

*a black or green glass-like rock that comes from the cooled lava of volcanoes

Part 2 Directions: Imagine you are a historian studying the city of Teotihuacan in depth. Evaluate the list of sources in the chart below. Identify primary and secondary sources that could help someone learn more about Teotihuacan, and explain what specific information it could provide for your research. Use the example to guide your work.

Then reflect on the analysis question below the chart.

Source	Type of source (primary or secondary)	Information provided about life in Teotihuacan
<i>Example:</i> The article "Why Was Teotihuacan the Most Important Ancient Mesoamerican City?" written by Michael E. Smith	secondary	Summarizes expert knowledge and research about various aspects of life in Teotihuacan
A fresco mural found inside an apartment compound	primary	Shows what religious beliefs or daily life may have looked like in the city
A textbook chapter on Mesoamerican civilizations	secondary	Provides synthesized information about culture, politics, and society
Ruins of a multifamily apartment compound	primary	Provides evidence about how people lived, social structure, and housing
Archaeological remains of obsidian tools	primary	Indicates the kinds of trade goods used and crafted
A documentary video about Teotihuacan	secondary	Interprets findings from archaeologists for a general audience
City layout and orthogonal grid remains	primary	Demonstrates urban planning and governmental control

Which type of source do you think is more reliable when trying to understand life in Teotihuacan? Why is it helpful to study a mix of primary and secondary sources?

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

- Primary sources are more reliable because they come directly from the time of Teotihuacan. Physical objects like murals, building remains, and tools were actually created or used by the people who lived there, so they give us firsthand evidence of what life was really like. We can see their art, architecture, and technology without someone else's interpretation. While secondary sources are helpful for giving background or expert opinions, they can sometimes include bias or errors. Studying both types is important because primary sources show the raw evidence, and secondary sources help explain it and connect it to bigger ideas.
- Secondary sources are often more reliable for understanding life in Teotihuacan because they bring together many types of evidence and expert interpretations. However, studying a mix of primary and secondary sources is helpful because primary sources give us direct evidence from the past, while secondary sources help us understand and make sense of that evidence. Combining both types allows us to form a clearer and more accurate picture of ancient life.

LESSON 11

Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets

- EQ

How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
- SQ

How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Research how the features of the ancient city of Teotihuacan reveal its people’s values and beliefs.	Explain how features of Teotihuacan connect to people’s values and beliefs, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students participate in a self-guided virtual field trip of Teotihuacan to explore how the city’s physical structures reveal the beliefs, values, and priorities of its ancient builders. The lesson encourages independent exploration of an interactive 3D model though it can be adapted for small-group or teacher-led navigation. Using a structured handout, students record observations and make inferences about Teotihuacanos’ values, guided by prompts and class discussion. The lesson concludes with a Concentric Circles debrief activity, during which students rotate through three peer discussions to synthesize their learning, distinguish between primary and secondary sources, and practice evaluating source reliability.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.7
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

☐

[Lesson 11 Slide Deck](#)

☐

[Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan](#)

☐

[Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan \(Teacher Version\)](#)

VOCABULARY

egalitarian

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan	35
Debrief: Concentric Circles	15
Optional Extension: Continued Field Trip	30

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan \(Word Bank\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports close looking and description skills

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Students will benefit from working with a language-proficient peer, if possible, during the virtual field trip and Concentric Circles. Allow students at this level to watch videos with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Allow students to translate the instructions, sentence frames, and word bank, and work with a peer on their responses.
- Look Fors: Responses should include appropriate words or short phrases using the word bank and sentence starters provided and will be mostly translated and/or created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students to watch the videos with headphones to slow down and use subtitles if necessary. Some support from peers may be necessary to complete the virtual field trip and understand the questions.
- Look Fors: Complete simple and compound sentences should use the sentence starters provided and word banks. Sentences may use some translation if necessary.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this activity mostly independently.
- Look Fors: More detailed compound and complex sentences should use academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary where possible.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Ensure students have access to individual digital devices.

A good video and article to begin building your own understanding of the city of Teotihuacan may be found at "[Teotihuacan](#)" from Smarthistory.

Lesson 11: Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets

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Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan (35 minutes)

Slide 2: Explain to students that today they will take a self-guided tour of the ancient city of Teotihuacan, researching tangible clues that help us to figure out intangible ideas:

How did the spaces and places built by Teotihuacanos mirror what they cared about and believed?

Clarify “values” as good examples of intangibles. Ask students to consider clues like:

- What they put a lot of effort or energy into
- Who they showed in their pictures or images
- How they spent their time

Slide 3: Introduce students to an important term needed to answer a question about housing: *egalitarian*.

- Say the word: *egalitarian*.
- Use the word in context: *Based on housing sizes, Teotihuacan was one of the most egalitarian cities in the world for much of its existence.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: (adjective) *aiming for equal wealth and status for all people.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

(Optional) Slide 4: Display the Gini scale, which measures inequality. Ensure students understand where ancient complex societies “fall” on this scale.

Slide 5: Demonstrate navigation of the VFT Teotihuacan site by Arizona State University. Project the site and walk through features before students access it independently.

Navigation tips:

- Click “Start Trip” to remove the white box.
- Use the speaker icon to mute music.



TEACHING TIP

Remind students that in their unit on sub-Saharan Africa, they learned about the difference between tangibles (physical things) and intangibles (ideas, values). If needed, invite students to volunteer their prior knowledge on these terms.

Lesson 11: Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets

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- The curved arrow toggles automatic rotation.
- Magnifying glasses zoom in/out.
- Arrows or green labels jump to locations.
- Media boxes open by clicking images/videos and close by clicking the “Media” tab.

Then have them load the site on their own devices and (if time allows) practice using these tools.

Slide 6: Distribute the [Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan](#) handout. Explain that students will explore a virtual model of Teotihuacan to examine specific sites. As they visit, they will:

- Watch the specified videos
- Answer the questions on the handout



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide MLs with a scaffolded version of the handout: [Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan \(Word Bank\)](#). Encourage students to utilize the word banks and sentence starters provided. The [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) can also be used to support close looking.



TEACHING TIP

This lesson is written with the assumption that students will navigate around Teotihuacan on the virtual field trip with a partner to keep the exploration as student-centered as possible. However, it can easily be adapted into an all-class activity with teachers navigating from stop to stop, students working on questions, and then the class debriefing. Decide in advance what approach will be most functional for your class, and adapt handouts as needed.

Demonstrate how to explore Stop 1 and look around. Ask: *What features do you see?* Possible responses:

- Pyramids
- Plazas
- Wide avenues

Then guide them to record their observations on their handout.

Lesson 11: Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets

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Prompt students to continue their explorations of the two sites with a partner and take notes on their handout. Circulate to assist with navigation and refer to the [Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan \(Teacher Version\)](#) to support comprehension and note-taking.

**TEACHING TIP**

If time allows, take a moment to talk about the end of this early society. Share with students that civilizations decline in different ways at different speeds. Teotihuacan's story is fascinating because the city appears to have been destroyed and burned on purpose, perhaps by its own people through an uprising. Why this happened is just one mystery about the city. See the "Historical Overview" section at the beginning of the article "[Teotihuacan](#)" from *World History Encyclopedia* for background on the burning and sacking of the city, which we know occurred from archaeological evidence.

Debrief: Concentric Circles (15 minutes)

Slide 7: To debrief the virtual field trip of Teotihuacan, facilitate the Concentric Circles discussion.

Review the directions with students prior to forming the physical circles of students within the classroom:

- Stand in two concentric circles. The students' inside and outside circles should face one another so that each student is standing across from a partner.
- Each set of partners will receive a question to discuss for 5 minutes. Both students share and listen.
- Once the timer goes off, students in the inner circle move one spot to their right.
- We will repeat this style of discussion for another two rounds to learn about various global issues and your proposed solutions.

Help to facilitate this movement in an efficient manner so that each of the two circles has an even (or close to even) number of students.

- Ensure balanced numbers in each circle. If needed, create one group of 3.
- Use a timer to manage 3–5 minutes per round.

Lesson 11: Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets

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- Encourage students to refer to their notes and support answers with evidence from the virtual field trip.

Slide 8: Prompt students to discuss the question on the board with their partner: *How do the spaces and places built by Teotihuacanos mirror what they care about and believe?*

Possible responses:

- The large pyramids and temples show that religion was very important to the Teotihuacanos.
- The carefully planned layout of the city, including wide avenues and aligned buildings, shows they valued organization, community, and perhaps believed in cosmic order.

General guidance:

- Remind students that the city of Teotihuacan was carefully planned.
- Encourage them to think about what kinds of buildings they saw (e.g., pyramids, wide avenues, temples).

When the time is up for each question, have students in the inner circle move one position to their right.

Slide 9: Students should now be paired up with a new classmate.

Repeat the process for the next question: *What kinds of primary and secondary sources helped us learn about Teotihuacan during our virtual field trip? How can you tell the difference between the two types of sources?*

Possible responses:

- Primary sources included murals, artifacts, and ruins from Teotihuacan itself.
- Secondary sources included the narrated video tour and informational websites, which interpret the primary evidence.

General guidance:

- If needed, remind students: Primary sources come from the time being studied (artifacts, murals), while

Lesson 11: Teotihuacan: City of Gods and Secrets

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secondary sources are created later by someone studying or explaining the past (videos, websites).

- Encourage students to give examples from the virtual field trip.

Slide 10: Ask students to rotate one last time and to pair up with a new classmate.

Repeat the process for the final question: *If two sources about Teotihuacan give different information, how can you decide which one is more reliable?*

Possible responses:

- Check who created the source and whether they are an expert or used evidence to support their claims.
- Compare both sources to see which one includes more factual details and fewer personal opinions.

General guidance:

- Encourage students to consider who made the source, when it was made, and why.
- Help students understand that credible sources usually use facts, not just opinions.

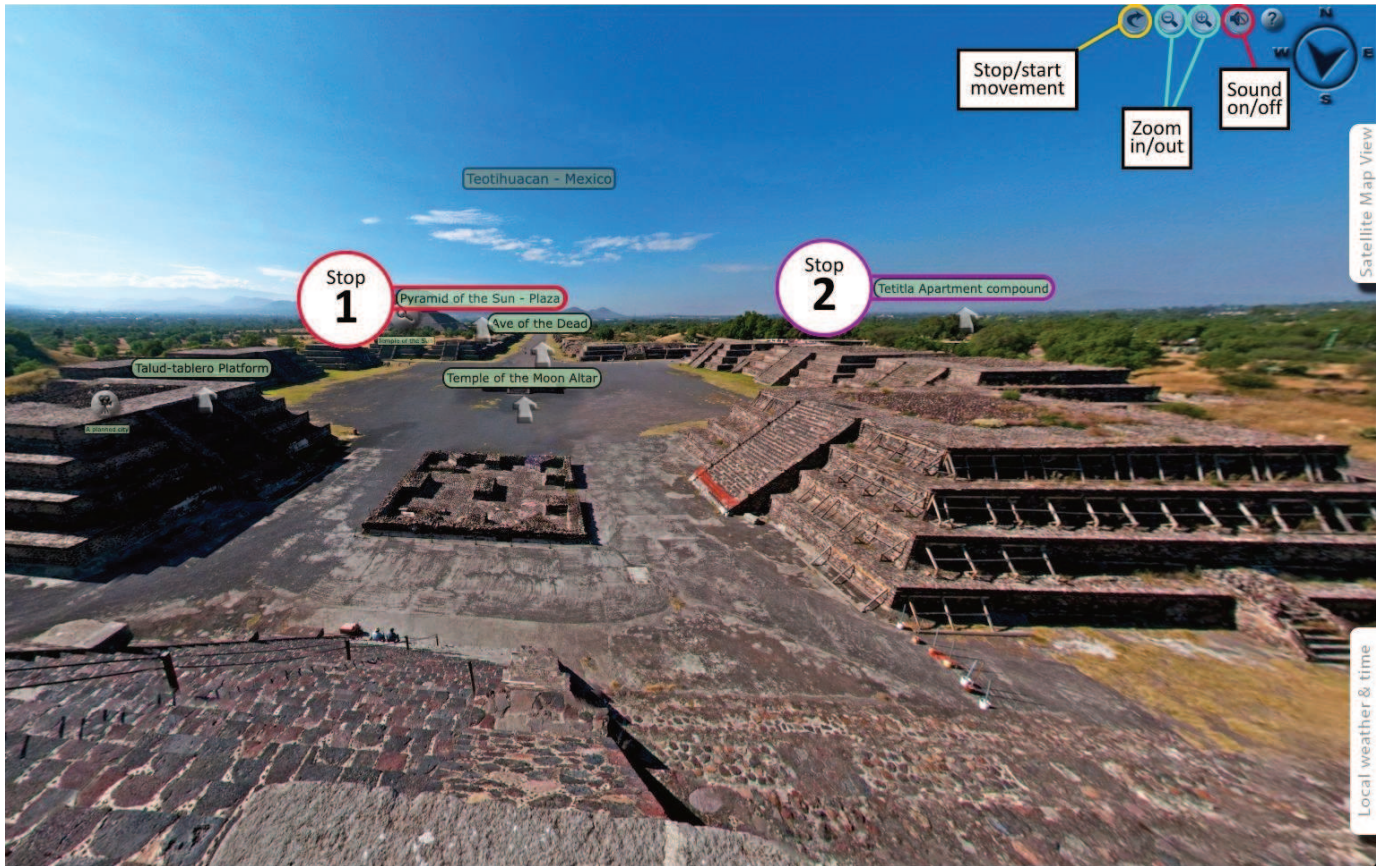
Optional Extension: Continued Field Trip

(30 minutes)

Allow students to continue exploring Teotihuacan virtually and visiting additional sites. Students could spend additional minutes (or even hours) wandering through the complex, browsing images, and watching short informative video clips.

Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan (Teacher Version)

Directions: Tour the ancient site by visiting Stops 1 and 2. Then answer the questions below.



Screenshot of Teotihuacan from Virtual Field Trip by Arizona State University.

Navigation tips:

- Click “Start Trip” to make the white box disappear.
- The arrows or green place labels advance you to that location.
- Once at a location, you can zoom, click on things, and rotate. You can click and drag to change your viewpoint.
- When you click on pictures or videos, the Media box will open. To close it, click the green “Media” tab at the top.

Directions: Visit the two stops. Look around and watch the specified videos. While at each stop, answer the questions below.

Stop 1: Pyramid of the Sun

Click on the “Pyramid of the Sun - Plaza.” Look around the ancient city from the platform.

What features do you see?

- Pyramids/temples with stairs
- Platforms
- Large plaza
- Altars
- Wide main avenue

Climb up the massive structure and briefly look around at each level (“Base” - “Lower” - “Top” of Sun Pyramid). Then open the media folder “City layout” (found at the top of the Sun Pyramid) and watch the videos “City layout and view” and “grid system.”

How did they structure the city? What role did the sun play in structuring the city?

- It is a planned city
- Grid system, walls are built at a 90-degree angle
- East-west orientation around the sun
- The solar calendar revolves around the sun's positioning in the sky around the city

What do the structures and spaces you see suggest about the beliefs or values of the Teotihuacan people?

- They put great effort into making large monuments that people could go up.
- The pyramid shape was like a mountain, showing a connection to features of nature.
- This could have been a sacred place, where rituals or burials happened.
- It may have an association with the underworld since it is below the pyramid.

How does this site help you answer the Supporting Question: *How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?*

- Mesoamerican societies shaped their land and buildings to reflect their religious beliefs and cultural values. In Teotihuacan, the layout of the city was carefully aligned with celestial patterns, especially the movement of the sun, showing the importance of astronomy and timekeeping.
- The massive pyramids symbolized mountains, which were sacred in Mesoamerican spirituality and allowed people to ascend closer to the heavens for religious rituals.
- The open plazas and wide avenues supported communal gatherings and ceremonial processions, emphasizing the role of shared public religious life.
- Overall, their city planning, architecture, and orientation of structures reveal a strong connection between their physical environment and their spiritual worldview.

Stop 2: Tetitla Apartment Compound

Explore the outside: Click on “Close up images” and browse a series of images of murals. Then watch the “Interpreting murals” video.

What features do you see? What did you learn?

- Apartment compounds for several families, with shared spaces and courtyards
- Apartments were single-story and sometimes painted
- Some murals represent the beliefs and activities that families were engaged in
- Some murals represent important individuals or gods
- Some murals represent ceremonies surrounding death and burials
- Murals provide us with clues into the beliefs of the ancient population

Explore the inside: Click on “Compound activities” and watch the “Activities in the Compound” video.

What are some examples of activities completed in the compounds?

- Production of obsidian tools
- Production of pottery
- Production of textiles

What does the housing and artwork (murals) show us that the Teotihuacan people believed and valued?

- The government built these unusual, very standardized apartment compounds, which were much more similar in size than we usually see.
- Certain compounds specialized in making certain crafts (such as obsidian blades or ceramics).
- They valued this kind of partly private, partly shared space.
- They valued art.
- They cared about goddesses and religious leaders.
- Paintings of warriors/war shows they had a need for force.

How does this site help you answer the Supporting Question: *How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?*

- The Teotihuacan society shaped their land and buildings to support both community life and religious expression. In Teotihuacan, standardized apartment compounds were built for many families to live and work together, showing the value they placed on cooperation and shared resources. These spaces were not just homes—they were also centers for craft production, such as pottery, tools, and textiles, which supported the city's economy and culture.
- Murals painted on the walls expressed religious beliefs, deities, and ceremonial practices, blending everyday life with spiritual meaning.
- This integration of work, family, and faith within the same space demonstrates how their built environment reflected their cultural values of interconnectedness, specialization, and reverence for the divine.

LESSON 12

Daily Life in Sacred Spaces

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Evaluate how features of Mesoamerican cities reflected cultural beliefs and values by analyzing visuals and video evidence from Teotihuacan.	Interpret and describe video evidence about Teotihuacan orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students begin by analyzing features of their own communities to explore how physical spaces reflect shared values. Building on prior knowledge of how people design cities to reflect what they care about, students examine video clips and visual evidence to research key features of Teotihuacan (such as apartment compounds and pyramids). Students work collaboratively to answer research questions, analyze visuals, and draw inferences about how land and architecture were shaped by religious and social values. In groups, students will share their findings through class presentations to inform their classmates on various topics.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 5, 6.T5c.1, SLCA.6-8.5
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 12 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Video Clip Visual Student Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Video Research Assignments](#)
- ☐ [Video Research Assignments \(Teacher Version\)](#)

VOCABULARY

pantheism

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Spaces and Places Today	5
Video Research: Daily Life in a Sacred Space	30
Teo Culture Jigsaw	15
Optional Extension: Six Word Stories	10

Lesson 12: Daily Life in Sacred Spaces

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Video Research Assignments \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports written language for expressing learning

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Allow students to translate the instructions and sentence starters. Allow students at this level to watch videos with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Assign appropriate questions to students at this level within their groups, and pair with a peer for the jigsaw activity.
- Look Fors: Tier 1 and 2 words, phrases, or simple sentences should use sentence starters provided. Responses will most likely be translated and/or created with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students may need support during the videos and jigsaw activity from their peers. Allow them to use subtitles as necessary.
- Look Fors: Phrases and simple to compound sentences should use the sentence starters and Tier 2 vocabulary. Responses should be a combination of words from the videos and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- Look Fors: More detailed sentences should use Tier 2 and 3 academic vocabulary. Student responses, both written and oral, should be in their own words.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Decide whether you want to divide students into pairs or small groups, and assign a topic for research. There are three topics that should be somewhat evenly divided among the students in the class.

Secure digital devices for students to use in pairs or small groups.

Lesson 12: Daily Life in Sacred Spaces

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Activator: Spaces and Places Today (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Prompt students to think about the spaces and places in towns and cities today, including where they live. Aspects of their towns and cities have been purposely built and designed.

Slide 3: Then prompt students to consider the list of features on the slide.

Ask: *What do these features tell us about what people care about, believe in, and value?* Invite students to discuss the question with an elbow partner for a couple of minutes.

Then ask for volunteers to share their thinking with the whole group. Possible responses:

- Bike and bus lanes designate specific areas for specific vehicles. This helps keep people safe.
- Schools and libraries show that people care about access to education and continued learning.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage students to utilize the sentence frames provided on Slide 3.

Model one example aloud (i.e., “A playground shows that people care about children and fun.”). Then give students time to practice in pairs before sharing out.

🚩 Video Research: Daily Life in a Sacred Space (30 minutes)

Slide 4: Explain that the Teotihuacan also built their communities intentionally and included aspects to reflect what they cared about, believed in, and valued. Read the text on the slide aloud or ask for a student volunteer to read:

- Teotihuacan was sacred to its people and visitors from across the region.
- The city’s layout reflected a sacred landscape and cycles of renewal (to make new or fresh again).
- Centuries later, the Aztecs visited the ruins of Teotihuacan and believed it was where the gods had gathered to restart the world and time.
- Priests and others performed rituals to reenact creation and honor the cosmos (the universe and its order).

Lesson 12: Daily Life in Sacred Spaces

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Slide 5: Introduce a new term that students will encounter throughout this lesson: *pantheism*.

- Say the word: *pantheism*.
- Use the word in context: *People who follow pantheism might say that walking in a forest is like visiting a temple.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *the belief that the universe and nature are divine.*
- Engage with the word: Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.

Slide 6: Explain to students that Teotihuacanos practiced pantheism. Some examples of their deities included:

- Great Goddess (of water, fertility, earth)
- Rain/Storm God
- Feathered Serpent
- Sun God
- Old Fire God

Slide 7: Project a panoramic image of Teotihuacan. Share two important background facts with students:

- Teo's pyramids and plazas were designed to reflect the geography of nearby mountains and plains.
- This showed that the Teotihuacanos understood their place in the cosmos.

Slide 8: Briefly remind students that our Cluster 3 Supporting Question revolves around the Mesoamerican use of land and structures:



How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

Arrange students into pairs or small groups, and distribute the [Video Research Assignments](#) handout. Inform students of their research topic (as determined in the Advance

Lesson 12: Daily Life in Sacred Spaces

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Preparation section), and have them circle or put a star on that section of the handout.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Video Research Assignments \(Sentence Starters\)](#) handout for this activity. Encourage students to utilize the sentence starters provided and to reference their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) handout to guide their responses.

Explain that each group will use the [Video Clip Visual Student Slide Deck](#) to view short excerpts of a video and answer questions on their handouts. There are three topics:

- Apartments
- Mesoamerican Pyramids in Comparison
- Special Features of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid

Once each group has completed their section of the handout, they will then teach the class about their assigned topic with the following procedure:

1. Identify information that answers your questions.
2. Display and explain slides that illustrate your answers.
3. Make an inference in response to the Supporting Question.

Briefly review the handout, including the viewing directions and the questions for each group. Ask students to decide within each group who will be responsible for each question on their group handout.

Prompt students to begin. Circulate the room and assist groups where needed. Reference the [Video Research Assignments \(Teacher Version\)](#) to help guide students.

Teo Culture Jigsaw (15 minutes)

Reorganize students into groups of three, where each student researched a different topic. Ask students to present their topic one at a time to their groupmates.



TEACHING TIP

In the first Feathered Serpent clip, the narrator weighs in that the scaly, round-eyed figure on the pyramid is probably the god Tlaloc. Let students in the “Special Features of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid” group know that most scholars now believe it not to be Tlaloc but Cipactli—a mythological caiman or crocodile. This is because the eyes are the lower circles to the sides; the upper disc motifs represent “precious,” not Tlaloc’s goggle eyes. This is a good opportunity to point out that ideas often shift over time with new evidence or as more convincing arguments emerge.

Lesson 12: Daily Life in Sacred Spaces

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- Students should share information relevant to their research, illustrating their points with the slide images listed in their section of the handout.
- When others are presenting, students who are listening will record their learnings under the questions listed in that topic's section of the handout.

In the final 5 minutes of class, bring the groups back together as a whole group.

Ask: *How did this video source help us answer our Supporting Question?* Possible responses:

- It showed how Teotihuacan's layout and architecture reflected Mesoamerican beliefs about nature and the cosmos.
- It provided visual evidence of how religious and social values were embedded in city planning and sacred buildings like pyramids and apartment compounds.

Ask: *What made this source useful in answering our Supporting Question? Think about the maker, date, and place of origin.* Possible responses:

- The video included expert commentary and reconstructions, which helped us understand what the ancient structures were used for and what they symbolized.
- It was created by historians and archaeologists with knowledge of Mesoamerican cultures, making it a reliable and informative source.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

If time allows, ask students one or two questions that help connect their ideas about Teotihuacan to the Sustainable Development Goal 11 vocabulary introduced earlier (*inclusive, sustainable*). For example,

- *What evidence did you see that Teotihuacanos saw their city as inclusive?*
- *What evidence was there that it was sustainable?*

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Optional Extension: Six Word Stories (10 minutes)

Ask students to write a six word story about Teotihuacan that captures some aspect of the city or its values. As models, feel free to share these examples for Boston, or write one of your own.

Old seaport city looks outward, forward
Boston: city of revolution, colonial beginnings

Invite students to share their six word stories with each other by posting them to a digital board or a physical board in the classroom.



BUILD LITERACY

For guidance on implementing six word stories in the classroom, see ["Spotlight on Strategies: Six Word Story"](#) from Discovery Education.

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Video Research Assignments (Teacher Version)

Apartments

Directions: Follow the steps below, using the Video Clip Visuals Student Slide Deck and recording notes as needed.

1. Decide which members of your group will listen for information to answer each question below as they watch the video.

- How did people live?
- People lived in apartment compounds that were shared by multiple families.
- Each compound had rooms for living and working, often around a central patio.
- There were no kings' palaces; instead, people lived in communities and shared responsibilities. (Students may infer this shows equality or community focus.)
- What did they make in their apartment compounds?
- People made pottery, stone tools, and other goods within their apartments.
- Some compounds specialized in crafts like obsidian toolmaking or ceramic figurines.
- Their homes were both living and working spaces.
- What kind of ethnic neighborhoods did they have, and how do we know?
- Teotihuacan had multiethnic neighborhoods, including groups from the Oaxaca region and the Gulf Coast.
- We know this from art styles, burial practices, and food remains (like Gulf Coast shells).
- This suggests the city welcomed outsiders and was a diverse urban center.

2. Watch the “Teotihuacan: Where One Becomes a God” video from 6:45 to 9:59 (Slide 2).

3. If needed, rewatch the video for information relevant to your question.

4. Go to Slides 4–7 and review the visuals. These will be your visual aids when you are teaching your classmates about your topic.

5. Based on what you have learned from the video, write a response to the Supporting Question that you can share with the class.

How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

Student responses will vary. Look for the inclusion of specific information from the video and images in their writing. Possible response:

The Teotihuacan society shaped their land by building shared apartment compounds. They changed the land by organizing homes into neighborhoods so they could live and work in communities. This shows they cared about equality and cooperation. One example from the video is how different families lived together and made tools in their homes.

Mesoamerican Pyramids in Comparison

Directions: Follow the steps below, using the Video Clip Visuals Student Slide Deck and recording notes as needed.

1. Decide which members of your group will listen for information to answer each question below as they watch the video.

- How were Mesoamerican pyramids different from Egyptian pyramids?
- Egyptian pyramids were tombs for kings, while Mesoamerican pyramids were temples for gods.
- Mesoamerican pyramids had flat tops for rituals instead of pointed tops.
- They were part of city life, not just monuments in the desert.
- What were the uses of Mesoamerican pyramids?
- Used for religious rituals, offerings, and astronomical ceremonies.
- They were platforms for temples, used to connect with the gods.
- People sometimes buried offerings or people inside.
- What was their style and decoration like?
- Decorated with bright colors, murals, and stone carvings
- Included images of gods, animals, and sacred symbols
- The Feathered Serpent Pyramid had carvings of serpents and jaguars

2. Watch the “Teotihuacan: Where One Becomes a God” video from 14:00 to 16:07 (Slide 2).

3. If needed, rewatch the video for information relevant to your question.

4. Go to Slides 9–11 and review the visuals. These will be your visual aids when you are teaching your classmates about your topic.

5. Based on what you have learned from the video, write a response to the Supporting Question that you can share with the class.

How did Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

Student responses will vary. Look for the inclusion of specific information from the video and images in their writing. Possible response:

The Teotihuacan society shaped their land by building flat-topped pyramids for rituals. They changed the land by raising stone platforms so they could be closer to the sky and gods. This shows that they cared about religion and the heavens. One example from the video is how their pyramids were decorated with god figures and murals.

Special Features of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid

Directions: Follow the steps below, using the Video Clip Visuals Student Slide Deck and recording notes as needed.

1. Decide which members of your group will listen for information to answer each question below as they watch the video.

- What kinds of images appear on the pyramid's surface?
 - Carvings of the Feathered Serpent (Quetzalcoatl) and fire serpents
 - Alternating heads: some snake-like, others more jaguar-like
 - The decorations are repetitive and likely symbolic of water, rain, and fertility
- What was the tunnel below the pyramid meant to recreate, and what was found there?
 - The tunnel may have recreated the underworld or the creation place.
 - Found inside: liquid mercury, jewels, jade figurines, and sculptures of gods.
 - The tunnel may have represented a journey into the spiritual world.
- What were the possible uses of the Ciudadela (large plaza)?
 - The Ciudadela may have been used for public rituals, gatherings, or military parades.
 - It could hold thousands of people—likely a ceremonial center for the city.
 - The layout may have symbolized order and power.

2. Watch the “Teotihuacan: Where One Becomes a God” video from 20:31 to 25:15 (Slide 2).

3. If needed, rewatch the video for information relevant to your question.

4. Go to Slides 13–16 and review the visuals. These will be your visual aids when you are teaching your classmates about your topic.

5. Based on what you have learned from the video, write a response to the Supporting Question that you can share with the class.

How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

Student responses will vary. Look for the inclusion of specific information from the video and images in their writing. Possible response:

The Teotihuacan society shaped their land by creating plazas and tunnels to reflect their spiritual beliefs. They changed the land by digging tunnels and decorating pyramids so they could recreate the underworld. This shows that they cared about religion and the journey of the soul. One example from the video is the tunnel with mercury and jade beneath the Feathered Serpent Pyramid.

LESSON 13

Teotihuacan’s Role in Ancient Trade

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Analyze Teotihuacan’s influence through trade and cultural exchange using information from a text.	Identify key aspects of a text on Teotihuacan’s influence through trade and cultural exchange, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson introduces students to the concept of interactions between ancient societies, using Teotihuacan as a case study to explore how trade and cultural exchange shaped Mesoamerican history. The lesson begins with an activator discussion, where students consider how societies influence each other (through trade, migration, innovation, and more) before connecting those ideas to Teotihuacan’s role as a major center of commerce and communication. Students then engage in the Investigating Sources routine with an article about ancient long-distance trade. Through guided practice and independent reading, students learn how Teotihuacan exerted influence not through conquest, but through trade networks and cultural diffusion, laying the foundation for deeper study of Mesoamerican civilization and historical literacy.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 5, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.7
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 13 Slide Deck
☐ Long-Distance Trade in the Americas (Teacher Version)
☐ Long Distance Trade in the Americas

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Interactions Between Societies	10
Investigating Sources: Ancient Long-Distance Trade in Mesoamerica	40

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Long-Distance Trade in the Americas \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Assists and supports students in the Investigating Sources routine
- [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports students in the first step of the Investigating Sources routine

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Consider allowing students to read the version of the reading in Spanish if appropriate. Allow students to translate the questions and sentence frames.
- [Look Fors](#): Responses should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words, phrases, or simple sentences. Responses will likely be mostly translated or created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students to read the article at the reading level most appropriate. Encourage students to use the sentence frames provided.
- [Look Fors](#): Complete and compound sentences using the sentence frames should include more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the reading and sentence frames, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- [Look Fors](#): Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Decide whether to distribute the "[Long-Distance Trade in the Americas](#)" article from OER Project digitally or as printed copies. Secure digital devices if students will access the article online.

Be sure to use the "Version" selector to set an appropriate Lexile level for the article (recommended: 850L).

Lesson 13: Teotihuacan's Role in Ancient Trade

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Activator: Interactions Between Societies

(10 minutes)

Slide 2: Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity. Ask: *How can societies interact with and influence each other?*

Provide students 1 minute to consider the question independently. Then ask students to turn to a classmate and discuss their thoughts for 2 minutes.

Finally, invite student volunteers to share their thoughts. Possible responses:

- They can trade knowledge, materials, and innovations.
- People can migrate between societies.
- Societies may go to war with one another or ally with one another.

Explain to students that today we will study Teo's relations with its neighbors, especially how the city and its population interacted with and influenced the societies around it. The city was the Mesoamerican center of trade and communication for about 500 years.

Slide 3: Project a quotation from three historians of Mesoamerica:

For the Classic Period [150 to 650 CE], Teotihuacan had no rival in the extent of its influence or the intensity of its contacts with the rest of Mesoamerica.
— Michael D. Coe, Javier Urcid & Rex Koontz

Ask student volunteers to rephrase the quote, focusing on the words' extent and intensity, to check their understanding. This is a quick way to practice paraphrasing, an important note-taking skill.

Explain that although Teotihuacan rarely used military force, it influenced others through settlements, communication, and especially trade.

- Students will now explore how trade helped spread that influence.
- We will practice effective note-taking while reading an article on long-distance trade.



TEACHING TIP

Thinking about their own time may help students to understand the idea of societal influence. Ask students to consider how the US interacts with and influences other countries or how some country or culture of particular interest to them influences the US.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Teo conducted trade near and far, and its style heavily influenced the culture and style of other places. You might say that Teo was the most successful “influencer” city of its day.

Lesson 13: Teotihuacan's Role in Ancient Trade

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Investigating Sources: Ancient Long-Distance Trade in Mesoamerica (40 minutes)

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Slide 4: Explain that in order to learn about the Teotihuacan's use of trade, students will explore an article that includes photographs and maps.

OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Distribute the [Long Distance Trade in the Americas](#) handout, and ensure that students have access to the "[Long-Distance Trade in the Americas](#)" article in your predetermined format.

Slide 5: Organize students into pairs or small groups. Then read the directions on the handout aloud, and preview the Observe prompts:

- *What kind of source is this? How do you know?*
- *Who is the maker, and when was this source created?*

Prompt students to work with their partner(s) to scan the source and answer the two questions.

READ THE DOCUMENT

Slide 6: Then preview the Read prompt: *Were there primarily facts or opinions included in the text? Give one example and explain how you know.*

Again, prompt students to work with their partner(s) to closely read the text and answer the question.

As students work, circulate to support, clarify, and reinforce expectations. Refer to the [Long-Distance Trade in the Americas \(Teacher Version\)](#) to help guide students.

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION

With about 10 minutes left in class, bring students back together as a whole group.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Long-Distance Trade in the Americas \(Sentence Frames\)](#). Encourage students to utilize their [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) handout as they engage in this step of the routine.



LEARN MORE

See David Carballo's article "[Trade Routes in the Americas Before Columbus](#)" from Academia for background, plus an excellent map of trade routes that you may wish to share with students (p. 170).

Lesson 13: Teotihuacan's Role in Ancient Trade

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Slide 7: Pose the Connect prompt: *What information can this source provide that will help you answer the Cluster 3 Supporting Question?*

Have students turn and talk with an elbow partner before writing their response on their handout. Then ask a few students to share their ideas with the whole group. Encourage students to add to their handouts as needed.

Close the lesson by letting students know that in the next lesson, they will revisit this Supporting Question once again through the Putting It Together routine.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to refer to the [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) handout for this portion of the routine.

Lesson 13: Teotihuacan's Role in Ancient Trade

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Long-Distance Trade in the Americas (Teacher Version)

Directions: Follow the prompts below as you read the OER article, “Long-Distance Trade in the Americas,” to engage in the Investigating Sources routine.

Student answers will vary. Look for the inclusion of specific information from the source in their writing. Possible responses:

Observe: Scan the article. Then answer the questions below.

1. What kind of source is this? How do you know?

- The text is a secondary source because it is not a firsthand account but a summary of information. The photos are primary sources.

2. Who is the maker and writer?

- Word History Project is the maker. The writer is Bennett Sherry.

Read: Closely read the text. Then answer the question below.

3. Were there primarily facts or opinions included in the text? Give one example and explain how you know.

- There were primarily facts included in the text. One example is, "In the fifth and sixth centuries CE, Teotihuacan was one of the largest cities in the world, home to as many as 200,000 people."

Connect: Think about what you read, and answer the question below.

4. What information can this source provide that will help you answer the Cluster 3 Supporting Question?

Cluster 3 Supporting Question: *How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?*

- The Teotihuacan society built short-distance and long-distance trade routes to support their different needs. The Aztec Empire's capital city, Tenochtitlán, was built to have large markets, straight streets, and impressive architecture.

LESSON 14

Formative Assessment

EQ How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

SQ How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources to explain how Mesoamerican societies shaped their buildings and cities to reflect cultural values.

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE

Summarize information to explain how Mesoamerican societies shaped their buildings and cities to reflect cultural values, in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students consolidate their learning about Mesoamerica by completing a Formative Assessment Task. They will be asked to evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources. Throughout the cluster, students examined how Mesoamerican societies shaped their buildings and cities to reflect cultural values such as spirituality, cosmology, and social organization. Students revisit key resources, including handouts, video assignments, and the virtual field trip, to determine which sources best help answer the Supporting Question: *How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?* By reflecting on what they have learned and citing specific evidence from primary and secondary sources, students build sourcing and reasoning skills while reinforcing their understanding of how material culture reveals societal beliefs and values.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 5, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.7

See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 14 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Cluster 3 Formative Assessment Task](#)
- ☐ [Cluster 3 Formative Assessment Task \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ Lesson 10: Unit 4 Cluster 3 Inquiry Chart
- ☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Putting it Together	15
Formative Assessment	35

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Cluster 3 Formative Assessment \(Sentence Frames\)](#). Supports the collection of evidence and written responses
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#). Support students' summaries of the cluster, what they did, and how it helps answer the Supporting Question

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Consider allowing students at this level to work with a peer and/or use translation for the Formative Assessment Task. Consider allowing students at this level to translate questions and sentence frames.
- Look Fors: Sentences should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases. Students may copy from their notes to create their sentences. Responses will likely be mostly translated or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students should use the Sentence Frames scaffold. Students may need support finding all of the information for the Formative Assessment Task.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound sentences using the sentence frames that include more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the readings, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students can use the sentence frames as a guide if necessary, but should be able to write their own sentences independently.
- Look Fors: Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write multiple sentences for each part of the Formative Assessment Task.

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Have each class period's Unit 4 Cluster 3 Inquiry Chart and Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart easily accessible.

Ensure that students have access to all past materials from the cluster, which they will need to reference to complete this assessment.

**Putting it Together** (15 minutes)

Slide 2: Explain to students that our first activity will help prepare them for the upcoming Formative Assessment Task by reviewing key sources and thinking critically about how each connects to big ideas from the cluster.

Ask students to gather the following materials from this cluster:

- **The Rise of Teotihuacan handout**
- **Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan handout**
- **Video Research Assignment handout**
- **"Long-Distance Trade in the Americas" (OER article)**

Slide 3: Display the directions and two claims. Explain to students that they will work with a partner to:

- Review each of the three resources.
- Choose one resource for Claim A and one for Claim B.
- Discuss and write or verbally explain why each resource is a strong match for its claim.

Circulate as students work. Encourage them to cite specific details in their responses. Possible responses:

- Claim A: The temple's design in the field trip video shows alignment with astronomical events, such as the sun rising over the Temple of the Sun on specific dates. This reflects the importance of cosmology and religious rituals in the design of Mesoamerican cities.
- Claim B: The layout of Teotihuacan shows clear organization, including wide avenues, large plazas, and residential compounds that reflect a structured

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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society. The resource explains how the city's design represented different social roles and helped support a centralized authority.

Invite a few pairs to share their resource choice and reasoning for either claim.

Explain that we will return to the Cluster 3 Supporting Question and “put together” what they have learned so far about the resources and what they can tell us about Latin American societies.

Slides 4–5: Present the **Unit 4 Cluster 3 Inquiry Chart** that the class created. Remind students of the Cluster 3 Supporting Question:



How did the Teotihuacan society shape their land and buildings to match their culture?

SUMMARIZE OUR LEARNING AND SHARE OUR INITIAL THINKING

Ask: *What resources did we use in Lessons 10–13?*

Have students discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format, and call on a few students to share their responses. Possible responses:

- **The Rise of Teotihuacan handout**
- **Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan handout**
- **Video Research Assignments handout**
- **"Long Distance Trade in the Americas" (OER article)**

Review the activities from the cluster's lessons in the “What did we do?” column. After reading each lesson's summary, ask students to turn and talk about what they learned in that lesson.

SYNTHESIZE OUR IDEAS AND ANSWER THE SUPPORTING QUESTION

Ask: *What did we learn that helps us answer our Supporting Question?* Give students time to discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format once more.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

The [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) can be used to support students' summaries of the cluster, what they did, and how it helps answer the Supporting Question.

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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Guide them to support their assertions with specific evidence and examples. Ask probing questions to help students reach key takeaways of the cluster. Possible responses:

- We learned that the design and features of Mesoamerican cities like Teotihuacan reflected the spiritual beliefs and cosmological views of the people who built them.
- We learned that Teotihuacan played a key role in shaping a shared cultural style across Mesoamerica through trade and cultural exchange.
- We learned that the buildings and spaces created by Mesoamerican societies showed what they valued, such as religion, astronomy, and social organization.
- We learned that Teotihuacan was connected to other societies through networks that spread ideas like temple-building, writing systems, and religious practices.

When student groups share with the whole class, record their responses in the “What did we learn?” column of the Inquiry Chart. Prompt students to record this information on their own handouts.

RETURN TO THE INQUIRY CHART

Finally, revisit the questions students added under the Supporting Question in Lesson 10 as part of their Launching the Question routine as well as questions from the Wonder column of the **Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart** from Lesson 1.

Ask: Have any of these questions been answered? Have any new questions come up?

Give students a few minutes to share their thinking and ideas with the whole group.

STAMP THE KEY LEARNING

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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Formative Assessment (35 minutes)

Slide 5: Let students know that they will now engage in the final step of the Putting It

Together routine by engaging in a Formative Assessment Task. In this activity, students will work to determine which resources best help us understand how ancient Latin American societies, specifically the Caral-Supe and the Olmec, used natural resources to solve problems and meet their needs.

Distribute the [Cluster 3 Formative Assessment Task](#) to students.

- Explain that this Formative Assessment Task will consolidate our learning from the unit's third cluster, assessing sourcing and analysis skills.
- Tell students that they will utilize our past resources to consider what resources are best for research.

Preview the two parts of the assessment with students:

- Read the directions for Part 1 (Architecture and Belief Systems), and briefly provide clear expectations for students to recommend a resource that best helps someone understand how buildings in Teotihuacan society reflected religious or spiritual beliefs. Direct them to explain why the resource is useful and to describe what can be learned from it.
- Read the directions for Part 2 (City Design and Social Organization), and ask students to choose a resource that best explains how Teotihuacan cities were designed to reflect their cultural values and social structure. Direct students to comment on the reliability of the resource and describe what can be learned from it.

Prompt students to begin working. Be sure to move around the room to support students as needed. You can refer to the [Cluster 3 Formative Assessment Task \(Teacher Version\)](#) handout.

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide ML students with the [Cluster 3 Formative Assessment \(Sentence Frames\)](#). You can also encourage them to utilize the [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) to assist in making connections.

Lesson 14: Formative Assessment

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Cluster 3 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)

Directions: Review the materials from each resource listed below that you used in Cluster 3. Then answer the questions. Be sure to cite specific information (such as date, place of origin, purpose, point of view, and intended audience) in your responses.

Cluster 3 Resources			
Mural analysis and secondary background information from the The Rise of Teotihuacan handout	Visual and video sources from the Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan handout	Excerpts and visuals used in the Video Research Assignment handout	Maps, artifacts, and source descriptions from the “Long-Distance Trade in the Americas” OER article

Student responses will vary. Look for students to name specific resources and aspects of the resource that help answer the prompt. Possible responses:

Part 1: Architecture and Belief Systems

1. If someone wanted to learn about how Teotihuacan society shaped their buildings to reflect spiritual or religious beliefs, which resource would you recommend? Why?

Be sure to include the type of resource (primary or secondary), its creator, origin, and intended audience.

I would recommend the Virtual Field Trip to Teotihuacan handout. This source is a secondary source created for students to learn about the city. It was made by educators and historians to show how buildings like the Pyramid of the Sun and the Temple of the Feathered Serpent were used for religious ceremonies. The purpose is to educate, and the audience is students. It includes facts and images, not just opinions.

2. What is one thing they could learn from this resource about the relationship between architecture and belief in Teotihuacan society?

They could learn that the pyramids were built to connect with the gods, especially the sun god. The pyramids were huge and placed in important areas, showing how religion was a big part of daily life and city planning.

Part 2: City Design and Social Organization

1. If someone wanted to learn about how Teotihuacan society organized its cities to reflect their culture, which resource would you recommend? Why?

Be sure to evaluate its reliability. Consider whether the information is fact or opinion, who made it, and when it was made.

I would recommend the *The Rise of Teotihuacan* handout. This resource is a secondary source that gives facts about how the city was designed. It was written recently by historians. It is credible because it uses facts, dates, and archaeology. It explains how Teotihuacan had wide roads like the Avenue of the Dead and how buildings were grouped based on social roles.

2. What is one thing they could learn from this resource about the connection between city layout and social or political organization in Teotihuacan society?

They could learn that the city was carefully planned. The most important buildings, like temples, were in the center. That showed who had power. There were also neighborhoods that showed how people were divided by jobs or status.

Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya

How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

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Formative Assessment

Overview

This cluster focuses on the Maya. These lessons introduce students to Maya city-states, rulership, ritual traditions, a creation myth, systems of knowledge, and trade. It also offers opportunities to draw comparisons with other ancient societies they have studied.

Note: To learn more about the Maya today, see the video [The Maya People](#) (NMAI).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this cluster, students should be able to...

- Make inferences about how the features of a city reveal its values and beliefs.
- Identify several ways that Mesoamerican societies interacted with and influenced one another.
- Determine sources that will be helpful in answering inquiry questions.
- Construct social studies explanations that develop reasoning, sequences with linear and nonlinear relationships, evidence, and details, acknowledging strengths and weaknesses (WIDA ELD-SS6-8. Explain.Expressive).

Vocabulary

TIER 2	TIER 3
cyclical sacrifice	astronomy cultural practices tribute

Cluster Focus Standards

Practice Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
PS 3: Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.	15-21
PS 7: Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced, and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems	15-16, 18-21

Content Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
6.T5b.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries in South America.	18
6.T5c.1: Research and report on one of the major ancient societies that existed in Central America (Maya, Teotihuacán, and other civilizations such as the Olmec, Toltec, and Zapotec), or one of the major pre-Columbian Andean civilizations (Chavín, Moche, Nazca), their locations, and their cultural characteristics.	15-21

Literacy Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
SLCA.6-8.5: Integrate multimedia components and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.	18
WCA.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.	21

WCA.6-8.8: When conducting research, gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, 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.

15-16, 19

Unit 4, Cluster 4 Inquiry Chart (Teacher Version)

Unit EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
Cluster SQ	How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?
What questions will we ask?	

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 15: We identified major features of past and present Maya society using an interactive website in order to engage in inquiry about Maya beliefs and values.	The Maya built large pyramids like La Danta, which shows that religion and ritual were central to their society. Some Maya structures were hidden by forests, but new laser technology helps historians understand how much they valued sacred spaces.
Lesson 16: We studied Maya beliefs and practices using visual and textual sources to make inferences about how rituals reflected their values and responses to challenges.	Maya rituals helped people stay hopeful and connected, especially during hard times like drought or conflict. Their shared beliefs and traditions helped them stay united and pass their culture down across generations.

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 17: We analyzed a Maya creation myth to identify connections between mythology, nature, geography, and spiritual values.	Maya rituals and practices were closely tied to their religious beliefs, often honoring gods like the Maize God and Rain God. Creation myths such as the Popol Vuh helped the Maya make sense of natural events and gave moral lessons important to their culture.
Lesson 18: We analyzed how and why the ancient Maya observed celestial phenomena by explaining the cultural significance of skywatching in Maya society.	The Maya believed the sky held divine meaning and carefully watched stars, planets, and the sun to guide rituals and farming. Since sky events are cyclical, the Maya created calendars to plan important religious ceremonies at specific times.
Lesson 19: We used sources to identify how the Maya ball game reflected and reinforced values and beliefs.	The ball game was a ritual response to challenges that the Maya faced, such as keeping the gods happy, ensuring good harvests, or bringing balance between life and death. Sometimes the game ended in sacrifice, especially of the losing captain, showing how seriously the Maya took offerings to the gods.
Lesson 20: We evaluated how Maya rulers lived and ruled by analyzing ancient murals and comparing their roles and power to rulers in Egypt and Mesopotamia.	Ancient murals show that Maya rulers were seen as almost divine figures, with special titles and powerful roles. Maya practices like tribute giving and public ceremonies reflected their belief in a divine social order, where rulers acted as intermediaries between humans and gods.

LESSON 15

The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Identify major features of past and present Maya society using an interactive website in order to engage in inquiry about Maya beliefs and values.	Describe features of Maya archaeological sites orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson introduces students to the Maya complex society by situating it in both time and geography while emphasizing the enduring presence of Maya people and culture. The “Finding the Maya” Activator activity uses maps, timelines, and class discussions to establish where and when the Maya lived and how archaeologists have recently rediscovered ancient Maya cities using LiDAR technology. Students engage with a demonstration using a laser pointer and gum to explore how modern tools reveal the ancient world. Students view video clips, maps, and images such as the enormous La Danta pyramid to build a sense of wonder about Maya achievements. Students then engage with the Cluster 4 Supporting Question, *How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?* and the development of an Inquiry Chart to guide learning throughout the unit. In a follow-up activity, students begin to explore an interactive Smithsonian resource and analyze cultural practices of both ancient and modern Maya communities, using digital tools, group collaboration, and reflective discussion to recognize Indigenous continuity and deepen their cultural understanding.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.8
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 15 Slide Deck ☐ The Maya World Note Catcher ☐ The Maya World Note Catcher (Teacher Version) ☐ Lessons 15–20 Glossary ☐ Cluster 4 Inquiry Chart ☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart
VOCABULARY
cultural practices

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: “Finding” the Maya	10
Launching the Question	10
Meeting the Maya: Observations and Questions	30

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [The Maya World Note Catcher \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports note-taking and written responses
- [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists and supports students during the Launching the Question routine

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Allow students to translate the key facts, instructions, and sentence starters. Encourage students to work with peers who can support them through reading and discussion.
- **Look Fors:** Phrases or short, simple sentences using the sentence starters provided should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words like *made* and *important*. Responses will most likely be translated and/or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Encourage students to work with peers who can support the reading activity. Allow students to use translation as necessary during the reading activity. Students can work together on the Note Catcher.
- **Look Fors:** Simple and compound questions and sentences should use Tier 2 words and phrases like *value* and *materials*. Responses may be co-created with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete the activity independently, although they may take longer in the reading activity.
- **Look Fors:** More detailed sentences should use Tier 2 and 3 academic vocabulary, like *monument* and *belief system*. Students should contribute to the class discussions.

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Determine if you want to work with the Inquiry Chart on chart paper or digitally. You will need separate class copies for each class period. Students will also need to have their own copies to work with throughout the cluster, either digitally or printed.

Have each class period's Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart from Lesson 1 easily accessible.

If possible, procure the physical objects indicated below (a laser pointer and chewing gum) for the Activator activity. Chiclets would be perfect. Their name was taken from the Spanish *chicle* (chewing gum) and from the Indigenous languages of the region via Spanish. An alternative is to use the photograph on Slide 3, but the actual objects will make the activity more vivid.

Secure enough digital devices for each student group of 3 to have a device for research.

Activator: “Finding” the Maya (10 minutes)**LEARN MORE**

Explore the resource "[The Maya: History, civilization & gods](#)" from LiveScience, which discusses recent archaeological findings involving the Maya. Additionally, National Geographic's video "[Ancient Maya 101](#)" (3:52) is an accessible and compact introduction. To explore at greater depth, or to plan experiential learning extensions for your students, visit the [Magnificent Maya](#) page at Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology.

Slide 2: Review the timeline of major complex societies in Mesoamerica again.

- Remind students that they have now studied two early and influential Mesoamerican civilizations that both lasted a very long time: the Olmec (800 years) and Teotihuacan (750 years).
- Explain to students that today we will learn about a third complex society that overlapped in time with Teotihuacan: the Maya (in yellow).

Slide 3: Project maps of the Maya area of Mesoamerica. Ask student volunteers to point out the two main geographic areas the Maya inhabited: the highlands near the Pacific Coast and the lowlands in the northern and southern parts of the Yucatan Peninsula.

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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Then ask: *Can you identify any modern-day countries?* Invite student volunteers to share country names in an organized manner.

Then, together as a class, fill out the blank map on Slide 3 by asking for student volunteers to identify modern-day countries that were part of the Maya world (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador).

Ask: *What do you remember about the distinctive topography and vegetation of this region?* Possible responses:

- It is a dense tropical rainforest.
- There are a lot of hills and low mountains in the highlands.

Explain to students that it is important to note that the Maya people never actually left this region.

- Six to eight million descendants still live in the original Maya homelands.
- Waves of depopulation and eventually conquest swept over different parts of the Maya world.
- The Classic Maya cities became overgrown by tropical forests to the point where many structures seemed to disappear.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Explain to students that the term “Maya” is used as both a noun and an adjective to describe the Maya. The term “Mayan” refers specifically to a family of languages spoken by the Maya and should be reserved for language-related meanings.

Additionally, to bridge knowledge from the previous cluster, explain that Teo began its decline in 750 CE through some combination of internal strife and power struggles. We can see this mainly through its sacked and burned monuments of the time.



Launching the Question (10 minutes)

SPARK CURIOSITY

Slide 4: Hold up a laser pointer and a pack of chewing gum (see Advance Preparation above). If you don’t have these objects, simply show images instead.

Explain to students that these objects have direct connections to finding Maya ruins.

Ask students to turn to a partner and propose theories of what the connections might be.

Then ask: *How do you think these objects (gum and lasers) might connect to finding Maya ruins in the rainforest?*

Possible responses:

- The Maya may have harvested a product for gum to either chew on or hold objects together.
- Lasers may help archaeologists view inside ancient buildings.

Slide 5: When you are ready to reveal the answers, project Slide 5, and read the text about gum aloud.

Slide 6: Then play a clip from the National Geographic video, “Lost World of the Maya” (0:00–2:46) to show students how lasers can “peel back” the forest cover to reveal the ruins below.

The Maya experienced and continue to experience unique challenges. Ask: *What challenges has the modern Maya community faced? How are they working today to preserve or reclaim their culture?*

Invite student volunteers to share out a few insights.

Slide 7: Project an image of La Danta pyramid at El Mirador.

- Explain to students that these findings revealed that the Maya reached high levels of sophistication at early dates, for instance, at El Mirador, a site built between 500 and 200 BCE.
- Explain as well that the La Danta pyramid is larger than the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt and is much larger than later Maya pyramids like those of Tikal.

Explain to students that in upcoming lessons, they will study the Maya and explore how the early complex society fit into the larger Mesoamerican world.

INTRODUCE THE SUPPORTING QUESTION AND ELICIT INITIAL THINKING

Slide 8: Introduce the Cluster 4 Supporting Question:

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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TEACHING TIP

Students likely will not know about laser scanning of the forest, which is the approach represented by the laser pointer. The pace of discoveries is speeding up thanks to LiDAR, or “Light Detection and Ranging” technology.

**How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?**

Slide 9: Introduce students to the [Cluster 4 Inquiry Chart](#) document.

- Remind students that the Inquiry Chart will continue to help them keep track of their ongoing learning and questions throughout the unit.
- Explain that historians ask many questions to understand and make sense of history and how it connects to the present day.
- Asking good questions starts with considering what they already know, which then helps them identify what they still need to explore and learn.

DEVELOP THE INQUIRY CHART

Ask: *What do you already know about this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to recall and share what they know about this topic from their initial work with the Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart in Lesson 1 as well as previous learnings (Grade 6, Units 1–3, their lives, and/or other classes and resources).
- Possible responses: The Maya built pyramids and temples to honor their gods and hold religious ceremonies. They believed in many gods and performed rituals like dancing, offerings, and even sacrifices to keep the gods happy. Maya priests used calendars and astronomy to choose special days for important ceremonies.

Ask: *Which of the questions we brainstormed in our Wonder column of the Know and Wonder Chart might relate to this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Student responses will vary based on their Wonder questions.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their inquiry.

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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Ask: What other related questions can help us answer this Supporting Question?

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Possible responses: Why did the Maya make sacrifices, and who or what were they sacrificing to? What kinds of gods did the Maya believe in, and how did they honor them? How did the Maya decide when to hold important ceremonies or festivals?

Invite students to share their questions with the whole class.

- Consolidate or synthesize questions related to the Supporting Question as needed so there are three to four representative questions.
- Add these three to four questions to the “What questions will we ask?” section of the class’s Inquiry Chart.
- Prompt students to record the questions on their own Inquiry Chart handouts.

PREVIEW THE LEARNING AHEAD

Share with students that in this cluster, they will use photographs, maps, videos, and readings to explore ancient complex Maya society, focusing on how certain rituals and practices were central to their unique culture.

You will return to this Inquiry Chart document in Lesson 22 and throughout the unit, so it is essential that you continue to preserve students' thinking here and have a separate chart for each class period.

Meeting the Maya: Observations and Questions *(30 minutes)*



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

This activity invites students to explore cultural practices in both ancient and modern Central American communities, using “windows and mirrors” to build cultural competency. It reinforces the respectful message that Indigenous communities continue to thrive on their ancestral lands throughout the Americas.

Slide 10: Explain to students that to begin their study of Maya civilization and culture, students will first hear from a young person of Maya ancestry and identity today (from Guatemala).

Before screening the video clip, have students read two questions from the slide, then listen for answers as they watch.

- *What are two parts of Maya culture that make the speaker proud?*
- *What is one tragedy of Maya history she mentions?*

Play the “The Maya People” video (2:55) by The National Museum of the American Indian.

After screening, ask students to turn and share ideas with a partner. Then invite student volunteers to share their insights. Possible responses:

- The speaker is proud of her community’s traditional clothing and weaving.
- She is proud that she can speak the ancient language of the Maya.
- Many Maya people were killed during the Guatemalan Civil War.
- She says that their culture and language were almost lost because of discrimination.

Slide 11: Ask: *What are cultural practices? Who has cultural practices?*



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Highlight that modern Maya communities live and think differently from their ancestors though their past still influences them. This idea will be revisited in later lessons on ritual bloodletting.

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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Ask for student volunteers to share their general ideas about this concept. Then ask students to apply the concept in a brief brainstorm (full class or in pairs):

- Identify several cultural practices from the film (something many Maya people today still make or do, according to the narrator).
- Describe several cultural practices engaged in by their families and themselves (ways that they make or do things with a group). If students need a prompt, ask how people acquire and prepare food, how they welcome a new baby, etc.
- Clarify that absolutely every person—past, present, and future—has cultural practices.

Slide 12: Explain that students will explore both ancient and present-day Maya culture using the interactive site from the National Museum of the American Indian.

- Organize students into groups of 3, and ensure each group has a digital device.
- Distribute the [The Maya World Note Catcher](#) (Sentence Starters) handout and [Lessons 15–20 Glossary](#).



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [The Maya World Note Catcher \(Sentence Starters\)](#) handout for this activity.

Read the directions aloud, and explain the goals of the activity:

- Observe visual and written details
- Infer cultural practices and beliefs
- Describe challenges faced by the Maya population and possible belief systems that developed as a result
- Wonder and generate questions about the ancient and current inhabitants of this region and their cultural practices

Explain that in the next class, they will share with another group the places they visited and the practices they analyzed, then record their best questions for display to the whole class.

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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Explain that each group member will:

- Explore one ancient archaeological site: Choose from Copán, Quiriguá, Tikal, Palenque, Uxmal, or Chichén Itzá. (Advise students to skip Zaculeu and Bonampak.)
- Explore one present-day town: Choose from Chichicastenango, Zunil, Zinacantán, or Santa Elena & San Simón. (Advise students to skip Lake Atitlán.)

For each site/town, students will:

- View the image slideshow
- Read the captions beneath the images
- Record the name of the place
- Record their observations
- Record their inferences (What do you think this says about their beliefs or values?)

As a group, students should brainstorm and record their question(s)—what they wonder about or wish to understand better about the place(s) they visited.

Briefly model the activity with “Copán.”

- Read the first caption aloud.
- Pause at unfamiliar words (e.g., “solar”) and reference the glossary.
- Demonstrate sample entries: Observation: “They built a large stepped pyramid.” Inference: “They practiced religion there.” or “They wanted to track the sun.”
- Show how to find more information (scan for “18-Rabbit” in the left-hand panel).

Prompt students to begin working in their groups. Remind students that they will work through the end of the class period and continue in the next class.

As they work, circulate around the room to support student pacing and comprehension. You can refer to [The Maya World Note Catcher \(Teacher Version\)](#) for this.

To close out, debrief the activity by asking students to reflect on the sources they studied today. Ask: *Which materials today are direct pieces of evidence from Maya communities*



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

More proficient readers, and those in need of extra challenge, can also read the longer captions at left. For ML students, refer to the guidance in the Plan for English Learner Success box at the top of the lesson.

Lesson 15: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 1)

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or people, and which are written or created later to help explain the Maya? How do you know?

Invite several student volunteers to share their insights.

Possible responses:

- “The Maya People” video by the National Museum of the American Indian provides evidence of modern-day Maya culture, which reflects ancient and traditional Maya culture. This material gives us insight into the passed-down Maya culture, rituals, and beliefs.
- The image of La Danta pyramid at El Mirador provides direct evidence of ancient Maya architecture, structure, and way of life. This ancient architecture gives historians firsthand insights into how the Maya lived.

The Maya World Note Catcher (Teacher Version)

Directions: Visit the Smithsonian website, *The Maya World*. Follow the steps below, recording notes in each Graphic Organizer.

Step 1: Visit one archaeological site and one current town.

Choose one site:

- Copán (Coh-PAHN)
- Quiriguá (keed-ee-GWA)
- Tikal (tee-KAHL)
- Palenque (pah-LEHN-kay)
- Uxmal (oosh-MAHL)
- Chichén Itzá (Chee-CHEN Eet-ZAH)

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

Site name	Observations What do you notice about the structures and spaces they built and the environment around them?	Observations What do you notice about something they made or did? (physical details, size, location, decorations, materials, etc.)	Inferences What do these observations say about what they valued or cared about?
Copán	Large stone temples and pyramids with detailed carvings Open plazas and stairways surrounded by dense jungle Structures made of stone, some decorated with hieroglyphs and sculptures	Carvings show rulers and gods, suggesting ceremonies or rituals Ball courts for playing the Mesoamerican ball game Use of stone monuments to record history and honor leaders	The Maya valued religion and honored their gods through temples. Sports like the ball game had cultural and possibly religious significance. They cared about recording their history and leaders in stone.
Quiriguá	Open plazas with carved monuments and smaller buildings	Giant stelae and altars decorated with figures and writing	They valued storytelling through art and kept records of important events.

Site name	Observations What do you notice about the structures and spaces they built and the environment around them?	Observations What do you notice about something they made or did? (physical details, size, location, decorations, materials, etc.)	Inferences What do these observations say about what they valued or cared about?
Tikal	Tall pyramids visible above the jungle canopy Large plazas with altars and temples	Ceremonial centers used for worship and government Use of stelae (stone monuments) with inscriptions and images	Maya rulers had political and religious power. Astronomy and calendar knowledge were important.
Palenque	Palaces with many rooms, carved walls, tombs of rulers	Detailed carvings of kings, gods, and myths	Leadership, family heritage, and the gods were important. They built to last.
Uxmal	Large pyramid (Pyramid of the Magician), rounded corners, open courtyards	Decorations show snakes and rain gods (Chac).	The Maya paid attention to architecture and weather. Rain and farming were central to their beliefs.
Chichén Itzá	Enormous pyramid (El Castillo), ball court, sacred cenote (water hole)	Temples for worship and sacrifices; carved skulls and warriors	Religion, water, and the afterlife were powerful parts of their culture. They worshipped many gods.

Choose one town:

- Zunil
- Zinacantán
- Santa Elena & San Simón
- Chichicastenango

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

Town name	Observations What do you notice about the structures and spaces they built and the environment around them?	Observations What do you notice about something they made or did? (physical details, size, location, decorations, materials, etc.)	Inferences What do these observations say about what they valued or cared about?
Zunil	Mountain village with colorful houses and farming fields	Women wear traditional woven skirts and blouses (huipiles).	They take pride in their clothing and farming traditions. Culture is passed down through family.
Zinacantán	Colorful houses made from traditional materials like wood and clay Town located in a mountainous, green environment Public plazas and churches as community centers	Traditional weaving and embroidery with bright colors Religious festivals mixing Maya and Catholic traditions Use of traditional clothing in daily life and ceremonies	The community values their cultural heritage and traditions. Religious beliefs combine ancient Maya and newer influences. Artisanship like weaving is important for identity and economy.
Santa Elena & San Simón	Towns near ancient ruins; mix of old and modern buildings	Offerings and shrines made for San Simón (folk saint)	They blend traditional beliefs with Catholic practices. Religion remains meaningful and personal.

Town name	Observations What do you notice about the structures and spaces they built and the environment around them?	Observations What do you notice about something they made or did? (physical details, size, location, decorations, materials, etc.)	Inferences What do these observations say about what they valued or cared about?
Chichicastenango	Large market spaces with stalls selling handmade goods Churches located near market plazas Mountainous terrain with lush vegetation	Traditional markets where Maya textiles and crafts are sold Use of traditional masks and dances in festivals Spiritual ceremonies often held in or near churches	Commerce and craft are vital parts of daily life. Religious practices combine Maya and Catholic elements. Community life revolves around markets and festivals.

Step 2: Reflect on challenges faced by the Maya and their beliefs.

Describe one challenge faced by the Maya population and a related belief or belief system that may have developed as a result.

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

- Challenge: Growing crops in poor or thin soil. Belief system: They believed in honoring agricultural gods, like the maize god, through ceremonies and offerings to ensure good harvests.
- Challenge: Dealing with natural disasters like droughts or hurricanes. Belief system: The Maya performed rituals and sacrifices to please the gods and keep nature in balance, believing that disasters happened when the gods were angry.

Step 3: Generate two questions about these places and their cultural practices.

What else do you wonder about? What makes you most curious?

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

- How did the Maya build such tall pyramids without modern tools?
- How did Maya people know so much about the stars without modern tools?

LESSON 16

The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 2)

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Generate and evaluate questions about Maya beliefs and practices using visual and textual sources to make inferences about how rituals reflected their values and responses to challenges.	Summarize conclusions about Mayan values and beliefs, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students work in small groups to continue their inquiry into Maya civilization using various resources and handouts from the previous class. Each student creates a thoughtful question based on their observations and together, groups choose 3–5 of their most meaningful questions to showcase on a poster. These posters are then displayed in the classroom as a visual guide for the unit. After presentations, students engage in a class debrief by identifying key observations and inferences about Maya places, beliefs, and values, using these to revisit the Cluster 4 Supporting Question: *How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?* Finally, students complete an Exit Ticket to consider how their beliefs helped the Maya respond to challenges.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.8
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 16 Slide Deck
☐ Lesson 16 Exit Ticket
☐ Lesson 16 Exit Ticket (Teacher Version)
☐ Lesson 15: The Maya World Note Catcher
☐ Lesson 15: The Maya World Note Catcher (Teacher Version)
☐ Lesson 15: Lessons 15-20 Glossary

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Meeting the Maya: Observations and Questions (Continued)	35
Class Discussion	10
Exit Ticket	5

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- **Lesson 15: The Maya World Note Catcher (Sentence Starters)** Supports note-taking and written responses
- [Lesson 16 Exit Ticket \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports written response to prompt

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Ensure students are given suitable tasks in their group. Encourage students to use their Note Catcher when completing the Exit Ticket.
- Look Fors: Appropriate words or short phrases may be copied from their Note Catcher. Students will be unlikely to contribute to the class discussion. Responses will be mostly translated and/or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Encourage students to use their Note Catcher when completing the Exit Ticket.
- Look Fors: Complete sentences should use the sentence starters provided and may be taken from the Note Catcher. Students may need support to contribute to class discussions.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this activity mostly independently. Students can reference and create sentences from information on their Note Catcher.
- Look Fors: Sentences should include more details. Students should contribute to class discussions.

Lesson 16: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 2)

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Secure enough digital devices for each student group of 3 to have a device for research.

Collect poster-making materials (chart paper, markers, rulers, etc.) prior to the lesson to distribute to each group.

✦ Meeting the Maya: Observations and Questions (Continued) *(35 minutes)*

Slide 2: Give students about 5–10 minutes to continue their work from the prior class period in the same groupings, using their **The Maya World Note Catcher** and the interactive site from the National Museum of the American Indian.

Then transition students to a poster-making activity and set up groups. Explain that they will continue working with the same groups and materials from the previous lesson.

Distribute poster-making materials (chart paper, markers, rulers, etc.) to each group.

Slides 3–4: Explain that students should work in their groups to review their individual note catchers and any saved observations from the digital sources.

Step 1: Ask each student to generate one meaningful question based on their observations. The questions should reflect curiosity and highlight something the student wants to understand better about Maya beliefs, rituals, or values.

Step 2: Ask each student in the group to share their question aloud. Together, the group selects three to five of their strongest, most thought-provoking questions to feature on their poster.

Step 3: Ask student groups to create a poster collaboratively. Poster should include:

- A title
- Their selected questions (written clearly and legibly)
- Optional: small illustrations or symbols that relate to the questions (e.g., temples, gods, nature)

**TEACHING TIP**

The term “Maya” is used as both a noun and an adjective to describe the Maya. The term “Mayan” refers specifically to a family of languages spoken by the Maya and should be reserved for language-related meanings.

Lesson 16: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 2)

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Step 4: Once posters are complete, display them on the classroom walls.

- Invite students to do a short Gallery Walk to view other groups' questions.
- Briefly explain to students that these posters will serve as visual "wonder walls" that the class will return to throughout the unit. Many of their questions will be explored more deeply in future lessons.

Class Discussion (10 minutes)

Slide 5: Facilitate an open conversation using the discussion questions below. Encourage students to reference specific sources or images from the lesson. Use a Think-Pair-Share structure if needed to support participation. Ask:

- *Why might rituals have been so important to the Maya, even when facing environmental or social challenges?*
- *What can we learn about a society's beliefs by studying how they celebrate or honor the dead, the gods, or the natural world?*
- *If archaeologists or historians studied our society's rituals 1,000 years from now, what do you think they would say we believed in?*

Possible responses:

- The Maya used rituals to ask their gods for help, like when there was not enough rain for their crops.
- Rituals helped the Maya stay hopeful during hard times because they believed the gods could protect or guide them.
- Practicing the same rituals together helped the Maya feel more united as a community, especially when life was difficult.
- How the Maya treated nature tells us if they believed the earth or animals had power or were sacred.

Lesson 16: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 2)

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Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

Slide 6: Distribute the [Lesson 16 Exit Ticket](#).

Explain to students that this is a chance to reflect on what they noticed, what it means, and how the Maya responded to challenges.

Read the directions and the question students will answer: Based on what we explored today, what is one belief or value the Maya held that helped them respond to a challenge?

Prompt students to begin, referencing their **The Maya World Note Catcher** as needed.

Student responses should cite at least one belief or value and how it helped the Maya respond to a challenge. Possible responses:

- The Maya believed in working with nature, like building cities around sacred caves and using astronomy. That helped them track time and survive droughts. (Challenge: climate or agriculture/Value: harmony with nature)
- The Maya valued tradition, which helped their culture continue for thousands of years—even today, they still practice ceremonies. (Challenge: colonization or change over time/Value: cultural resilience)
- Their belief in gods and rituals helped keep their community organized and connected. Everyone had a role in the ceremonies. (Challenge: organizing large societies/Value: religion and community leadership)



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Lesson 16 Exit Ticket \(Sentence Frames\)](#). Encourage students to use the sentence frames provided. They can refer to their [Lessons 15–20 Glossary](#) handout for vocabulary support.

Lesson 16: The Maya in the Mesoamerican World (Part 2)

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Lesson 16 Exit Ticket (Teacher Version)

Directions: Respond to the question below. You can use your The Maya World Note Catcher to support your response.

Based on what we explored today, what is one belief or value the Maya held that helped them respond to a challenge?

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

- Belief in sacred places and nature
 - The Maya built cities near caves and used natural features as sacred spaces.
 - This belief helped them stay connected to nature and choose locations that were important for their religion and survival.
- Importance of astronomy and tracking time
 - The Maya studied the stars to create calendars and plan farming.
 - This helped them respond to challenges like droughts by knowing the best time to plant crops.
- Value of community and shared rituals
 - The Maya practiced rituals as a group to honor gods and ask for help with things like rain or harvest.
 - Doing this together helped their society stay united and gave people a sense of purpose during hard times.
- Belief in honoring ancestors and tradition
 - The Maya held ceremonies to honor their ancestors and continued these practices for generations.
 - This helped their culture remain strong, even after major changes or outside threats like colonization.
- Respect for order and leadership
 - Maya rituals had specific roles for priests and leaders, showing a strong belief in social organization.
 - This helped them manage large cities and keep society stable, even during times of stress.

LESSON 17

Sacred Places and the Meaning of a Myth

- EQ** How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
- SQ** How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Analyze a Maya creation myth to identify connections between mythology, nature, geography, and spiritual values.	Interpret and summarize the connections between mythology, nature, geography, and spiritual values, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

Building on the previous two lessons, students will now explore Maya beliefs through the lens of mythology. They begin by activating prior knowledge of ancient creation myths, then closely examine the Maya creation story from the Popol Vuh as a foundational text. This myth helps students understand how the Maya viewed themselves and the structure of the universe. Students interpret key excerpts to uncover themes of cosmology, nature, and daily life, which are elements deeply interconnected in Maya culture. This analysis also deepens connections between geography, natural resources, and spiritual beliefs.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5c.1
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 17 Slide Deck
☐ Connecting Beliefs to Spaces and Places Student Slide Deck
☐ Creation Myth Analysis
☐ Creation Myth Analysis (Teacher Version)
☐ "Creation Story of the Maya" (Transcript)
☐ Lesson 15: Lessons 15-20 Glossary

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Creation Stories	5
Investigating Sources: Unpacking the Maya Story of Creation	30
Connecting Beliefs to “Spaces and Places”	15

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Creation Myth Analysis \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Assists and supports students during the Investigating Sources routine
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports written language for expressing learning

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially during the reading and source analysis. Allow students to translate the instructions and sentence starters. Allow students at this level to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Consider giving them a translated copy of the transcript.
- [Look Fors](#): Simple sentences using sentence starters provided should include Tier 1 and 2 words like *made* and *people*. Responses will most likely be translated and/or cocreated with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students may need some support from their peers during the video and reading. Allow them to use subtitles and translation as necessary.
- [Look Fors](#): Phrases and simple to compound sentences using the sentence starters should include Tier 2 vocabulary like *ritual* and *deities*. Responses should be a combination of words from the video, reading, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- [Look Fors](#): More detailed sentences should use Tier 2 and 3 academic vocabulary. Student responses, both written and oral, should be in their own words.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

In preparation for the final activity, gather enough blank sheets of paper for each student to draw a sketch associated with the Maya.

Determine if you want students to access the ["Creation Story of the Maya" \(Transcript\)](#) material digitally or in printed form.

Secure digital devices for students to access the [Connecting Beliefs to Spaces and Places Student Slide Deck](#). We suggest printing out several copies ahead of time to distribute among partners for the final activity.

Lesson 17: Sacred Places and the Meaning of a Myth

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**LEARN MORE**

A resource students may enjoy that corresponds to the content of this lesson is the graphic novel [*The Hero Twins: Against the Lords of Death*](#) by Dan Jolley and David Witt, created in consultation with an expert on Mesoamerican lore.

Activator: Creation Stories (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity.

- Prompt students to recall other creation myths studied over the course of the year (Atum, Genesis, Gilgamesh).
- Ask students to independently brainstorm an example of a creation myth they have studied, or perhaps one that they know about from their own faiths or traditions (or ELA classes).

Then ask students to turn to a classmate and reflect on these questions:

- *What is one thing this creation story tries to explain?*
- *What is one thing it tells us about its culture's beliefs or values?*

Invite a few student volunteers to share examples, and write their responses on the board.

Emphasize how creation stories explain natural phenomena and reflect cultural values (for example, Genesis emphasizes the power of words). Just like so many other cultures, the Maya had their own creation stories.

**MAKE CONNECTIONS**

Students should recall the Egyptian story of creation by the god Atum and the biblical story of Genesis. They may also remember that in Gilgamesh, the world is created after the flood. Students will also learn a Taíno creation story later in this unit.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Encourage MLs to utilize the sentence frames on Slide 2 as they discuss creation myths they know of with a classmate.

Lesson 17: Sacred Places and the Meaning of a Myth

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Explain that today we will read an action-packed story that comes to us from a book called the Popol Vuh (poe-pul-VOO). The real wonder is that it comes to us at all, for the Spanish tried hard to bury all memory of it.



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

For more support with pronunciation, you can visit [How to pronounce Popol Vuh](#).



Investigating Sources: Unpacking the Maya Story of Creation (30 minutes)



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

For the creation myth text, define words as needed. Students will have encountered them before, but a review of some words may be helpful (e.g., maize, deities, worship, cacao, etc.).

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Share with students that during the Spanish conquest of the Yucatan, beginning in 1518 or 1519, hundreds or perhaps thousands of books written by the Maya were intentionally burned. It was an act of war and cultural destruction.

- In response, in the mid-1550s, the Quiché Maya of the Guatemalan highlands decided to try to preserve their history and mythology by writing a new book they called the Popol Vuh, or “Council Book.”
- This book survived and is the most important source of Maya mythology and ideas—ideas that we now know date back 2,500 years—that we have today.
- The book provided moral lessons and helped Maya people to make sense of natural events in their everyday lives.

Slide 3: Distribute the [Creation Myth Analysis](#), and share the link or distribute printouts of the ["Creation Story of the Maya" \(Transcript\)](#).



LEARN MORE

The storyline of the Popol Vuh is complicated, and we will use a much simplified version of it in this lesson. For background, see the video "[Popol Vuh: Invitation to World Literature](#)" from Annenberg Learner.

Lesson 17: Sacred Places and the Meaning of a Myth

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Read the directions aloud, pointing out that they will follow the Investigating Sources steps as they engage with the text.

OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Explain that you will play “The Creation Story of the Maya” video (2:56) from the National Museum of the American Indian one time to orient students. They will then engage in a close reading of the text and respond to the prompts on their handouts.

READ THE DOCUMENT

Slides 4–6: Prompt students to use their [“Creation Story of the Maya” \(Transcript\)](#) to reread the story, and then begin answering the questions on their [Creation Myth Analysis](#) handouts.

Move around the room as students work, checking in on comprehension and pacing. You can refer to the [Creation Myth Analysis \(Teacher Version\)](#) as needed.

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION

After about 25 minutes of work time, bring students back together to discuss their responses in the whole-group setting. Encourage students to add to their handouts as they hear new ideas from their peers.

Connecting Beliefs to “Spaces and Places”

(15 minutes)

Slide 7: Explain to students that just like the Teotihuacanos, the Maya expressed their religious beliefs, like worship of the maize god or rain god, through their buildings, carvings, and artwork. Emphasize that, just as other Mesoamerican groups, the Maya practiced a pantheistic form of religion.

Distribute blank paper and printed copies of the [Connecting Beliefs to Spaces and Places Student Slide Deck](#). These are visual resources students will study for this final activity.

Direct students to:



TEACHING TIP

Pronunciations of proper nouns in Mayan languages can be tricky. Don't let a focus on this interfere with the flow and meaning. The key things to know are that “x” is pronounced “sh” and “j” is silent.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide MLs with a scaffolded version of the handout with sentence starters: [Creation Myth Analysis \(Sentence Starters\)](#). Encourage students to reference their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to help guide their answers.

Lesson 17: Sacred Places and the Meaning of a Myth

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Cluster 4: Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya

- Select two visual examples from the deck (a temple, carving, pyramid, stele, or ceremonial ball court).
- Label each example directly on the printed slide, writing a brief explanation of what Maya belief or value the space or symbol represents.
- Use evidence from class discussions or previous lessons to support their thinking.

Circulate and support students as needed by referencing previous lessons or visuals from earlier in the unit.

If time allows, invite students to share their work with a partner or small group.

Lesson 17: Sacred Places and the Meaning of a Myth

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Name: _____ Date: _____

Creation Myth Analysis (Teacher Version)

Directions: As you engage in the Investigating Sources routine and read the “Creation Story of the Maya,” answer the prompts below.

Observe: Scan the text.

1. What kind of source is this: primary or secondary? How do you know?

- It is a secondary source. It is a retelling or translation of the Popol Vuh, the sacred Maya creation story, written down after Spanish conquest. The story was passed down orally, and this version is an interpretation or summary.

2. What about this source might be helpful in understanding the Supporting Question:
How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

- The story helps us see what the Maya believed about creation, gods, humans, and the natural world.
- It gives insight into the importance of maize (corn), animals, and the gods, all of which influenced real-world practices and rituals.

Student responses will vary. Look for specific information from the text in their writing. Possible responses:

Read: Read the text closely.

3. What Maya rituals or practices are included in the text?

- Offerings or sacrifices to the gods
- Respect and connection to maize as sacred food
- A focus on oral storytelling and passing knowledge through generations
- Rituals honoring the gods for their role in creating people and the earth

4. What purpose might this text have?

- To explain how the Maya believed the world and humans were created
- To pass on cultural values and beliefs
- To teach about the sacred role of nature, gods, and balance in Maya life
- To preserve and share Maya heritage and worldview

Connect: Think about how the text connects to the Supporting Question.

5. *How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?* Be sure to cite specific information from the text.

- The Maya believed they were made from maize, so they honored it in rituals, showing how important it was to their identity and survival.
- Their respect for animals and the gods in the creation story shows a belief that everything in nature had a purpose and should be treated with care.
- The fact that earlier versions of people (made from mud or wood) failed because they didn't respect the gods suggests that Maya rituals were about giving thanks and staying connected to spiritual forces.
- The gods' desire for people to speak, remember, and worship reflects how oral traditions and ceremonies were central to Maya life.

LESSON 18

The Maya: Timekeepers of the Cosmos

- EQ** How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
- SQ** How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Analyze how and why the ancient Maya observed celestial phenomena by explaining the cultural significance of skywatching in Maya society.	Explain why Maya society observed celestial phenomena, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore the celestial realm of Maya cosmology, building on previous lessons about their rituals and beliefs surrounding the Earth. The activity begins with a calm and immersive observation of night sky imagery, prompting students to recall personal experiences and natural events they’ve seen in the sky. The lesson emphasizes the importance of predictable sky events in Maya society and introduces students to ancient Maya astronomy through murals and astronomical tables. Students then read short articles to understand how the Maya used skywatching for agricultural and political purposes. Finally, they compare insights with peers to deepen their understanding of the significance of astronomy in Maya life.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1, SLCA.6-8.5
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

☐ [Lesson 18 Slide Deck](#)

☐ [Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings](#)

☐ [Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings \(Teacher Version\)](#)

☐ Lesson 15: Lessons 15-20 Glossary

VOCABULARY

astronomy

cyclical

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Looking Up: Noticing the Nightly Show in the Sky	20
Readings: Ancient Astronomy and Calendars	30

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports written language for expressing learning

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer, if possible, especially during the reading. Allow students at this level to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles, or consider giving them a translated copy of the transcript with the key words/phrases bolded. Provide students with a few sentence starters from the Summarize LLB, and allow them to translate the questions and sentence frames. Students at this level will likely need a shortened version of the readings with information related to the questions highlighted or a translated version.
- Look Fors: Responses may use the sentence starters provided and words from the glossary when appropriate and should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words. Responses will likely be mostly translated or cocreated with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students at this level to watch the video with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Students can use sentence starters from the Summarize LLB. Students at this level may need support with the readings and will benefit from having information related to the questions highlighted and from a 3–5 sentence summary of the main points. They may need help from a peer to complete notes about the other reading during the discussion.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound sentences using the sentence starters should include more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the reading and/or glossary, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- Look Fors: Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail.

Looking Up: Noticing the Nightly Show in the Sky (20 minutes)

Begin by asking students to briefly recap key takeaways from the past few lessons. Possible responses:

Lesson 18: The Maya: Timekeepers of the Cosmos

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- The creation myth focused on events in the underworld/underground.
- Virtual visits to Maya cities focused on life on earth.

Inform students that they are now going to think about celestial space, the world of the sky or heavens. All of these levels—underworld, earth, and sky—correspond to the three levels of Maya cosmology.

Slide 2: Introduce a crucial new vocabulary word that will be used throughout this unit: *astronomy*.

- Say the word: *astronomy*.
- Use the word in context: *Ancient populations used astronomy to help them decide when to plant crops.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *scientific study of stars, planets, and other objects in space.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Slides 3–7: Turn off the lights and darken the room.

- Project the slides of night skies in slow progression.
- Ask students to be calm and still and imagine that they are looking up at bright night skies like these, with no light pollution to block the view.
- There are different features to notice in different slides, which students may point out.

Slide 8: After setting the scene, ask: *Have you ever seen something special in the night sky?* Invite 3–4 student volunteers to share. Possible responses:

- I have seen shooting stars.
- I witnessed an eclipse.
- I have seen different constellations.

Lesson 18: The Maya: Timekeepers of the Cosmos

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Slide 9: Introduce another new vocabulary term that will be used throughout this lesson: *cyclical*.

- Say the word: *cyclical*.
- Use the word in context: *The moon goes through a cyclical cycle of phases, from new moon to full moon and back again.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *happening again and again in the same order; happening in cycles.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Emphasize to students that with careful observation, many sky events are predictable because they are cyclical.

- Explain further that these predictable events include the daily rising and setting of the sun, visibility of certain constellations at certain times of year, planetary orbits, phases of the moon, and eclipses.
- The sky can be studied to accurately predict its less common events, and ancient astronomers figured this out.

Slides 10–11: Share examples of Maya stargazing and astronomy. Explain that the first image is of an ancient mural of Maya “astronomers” in Xultún, Guatemala, from 814 CE. Then explain the second image is of astronomical tables painted on the wall, used to predict events 7000+ years in the future.

Slide 12: Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share:

- *Why would ancient people like the Maya watch the sky so carefully?*
- *What could this knowledge be used for?*

Invite a few student volunteers to share their theories, prompting them to consider who might value the information offered by the skies.



TEACHING TIP

In Grade 6 science, Massachusetts students learn about the Earth-Moon-Sun system, including causes of lunar phases and eclipses of the Sun and Moon. They also learn about our solar system as one of many within the Milky Way Galaxy and the broader universe. They may draw on knowledge from their science curriculum to answer here.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

As they engage in a Think-Pair-Share activity, encourage ML students to utilize the sentence starters on Slide 12 as they discuss Maya’s fascination with the sky.

Lesson 18: The Maya: Timekeepers of the Cosmos

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Slide 13: Play the “Connecting Earth and Sky” video (3:46) by the National Museum of the American Indian.

Slide 14: Then ask: *What challenges did the Maya face, and what opportunities did studying the sky give them?* Possible responses:

- A challenge was growing crops at the right time. An opportunity was to use the cycle of the sun and weather patterns to create a planting cycle when it worked best for the crops.
- A challenge was the dry spells. An opportunity was to use the knowledge of the seasonal cycle to prepare the plants for this and any late rainfall.

**MAKE CONNECTIONS**

Students may recall that Egyptian astronomers monitored the skies to accurately predict when the Nile would flood each year.

**LEARN MORE**

If you would like to share more about this topic with students, see this helpful [Meaning of the Days](#) guide from the National Museum of the American Indian.

✦ Readings: Ancient Astronomy and Calendars (30 minutes)

Explain to students that the Maya organized their society around the cyclical nature of time, believing that events occurred and repeated. They devoted much attention to understanding the cycles of time through astronomy. Independent of societies in other parts of the world, they became experts in skywatching and timekeeping.

Lesson 18: The Maya: Timekeepers of the Cosmos

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Distribute the [Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings](#), and explain that half the class will read the first article, and half the class will read the second article. They will then come together and share their learnings with one another.

Read the directions aloud, and prompt students to begin working. Move around the room to support pacing and comprehension. You can refer to the [Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings \(Teacher Version\)](#) for this.

Slide 15: After about 15 minutes, bring students back together, and pair them with a peer who read a different article.

- Explain that students will now share their key learnings and responses to the questions with one another.
- The partner who is not sharing is responsible for taking notes on their handout.

If time allows, you can bring students back together once more to recap their learnings in the whole-group setting.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings \(Sentence Starters\)](#) handout for this activity. Encourage students to utilize the sentence starters provided and to reference their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#).

In addition, they can refer to the [Lessons 15–20 Glossary](#) to support their comprehension of vocabulary in the text.

Lesson 18: The Maya: Timekeepers of the Cosmos

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Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings (Teacher Version)

Directions: Read the following article, and then answer the questions below.

Astronomy

Stellar (star-related) orientations of Maya architecture

The ancient Maya were very interested in the movement of the sun, planets, and stars in the sky. Many doorways or windows in their buildings frame the rising of the sun, planets such as Venus, or constellations on certain days of the year. In this way, the building could be used as a kind of calendar. The events in the sky identified important days in the year. They incorporated this scientific knowledge into their daily lives and their city planning.

Why did they watch the stars?

Many of these astronomical patterns were important for religious reasons. They were reflections on earth of divine events. They might reflect the creation of the universe or actions of the gods and mythic heroes. Celestial bodies were the visual signs of spiritual and moral beliefs. This is similar to the ancient Greeks, whose gods and mythic heroes gave their names to modern-day constellations.

Today when architects construct a building, they take many factors into consideration. But they rarely consult the stars or find out where the sun will hit the building on the solar equinox or solstice. Maya buildings often incorporated celestial matters into the form and position of the buildings. Maya cities also functioned as astronomical observatories. They function as a landscape that marks the days of the year and the natural cycles of the Earth.

Modern investigations into ancient celestial planning

The use of Mesoamerican buildings as calendars or observatories continues to fascinate people. On the equinox and solstice, many people gather at some sites to see the sun's effects on the pyramids and temples. Shadows on some of the buildings create beautiful patterns or animal shapes. The sun shines directly into temples. It lights up specific features such as altars or thrones. For example, on the winter solstice at Palenque, Mexico, the sun sets directly into the center of the Temple of the Inscriptions. This was the location of Palenque's famous sun king K'inich Pakal. At Chichén Itzá on the spring and autumn equinoxes, the sun creates a diamond rattlesnake pattern on the pyramid's main stairway.



Temple of the Inscriptions. Image by Bernard DUPONT via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Student responses will vary. Look for specific information from the text in their writing. Possible responses:

1. What information from the text can be helpful in answering the Supporting Question:
How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

- The Maya watched the stars because they believed the sky showed divine events.
- They thought celestial events (like the sun rising) were connected to the gods or the creation of the universe.
- Buildings were designed to match important days like the equinox or solstice.
- Their cities were built to function like calendars and observatories, showing their belief in the spiritual power of the sky.

2. According to the article, what challenges did the Maya face? How did they address them?

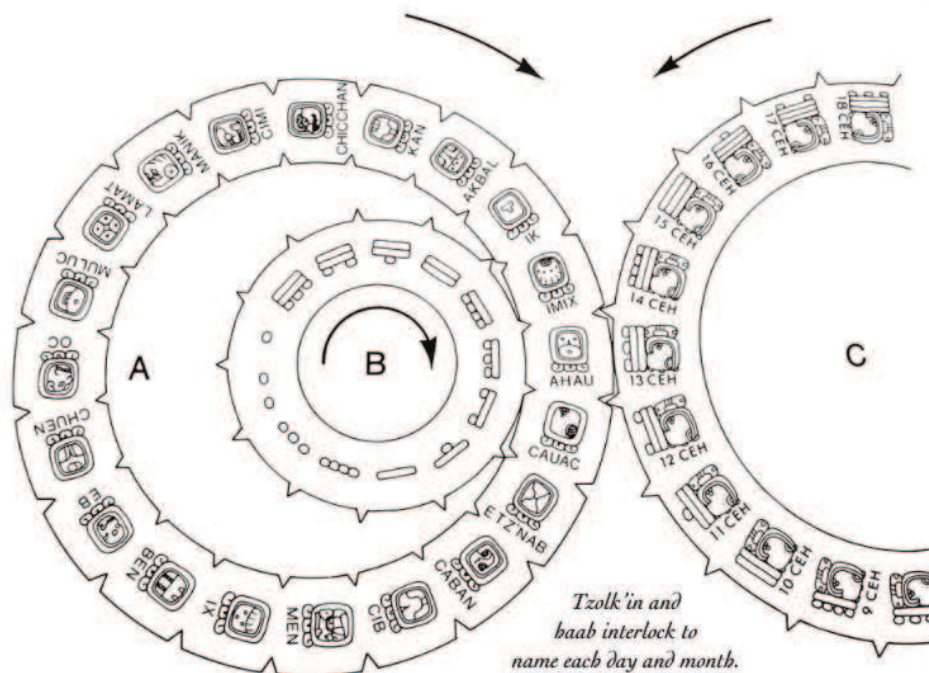
- The Maya wanted to understand the movements of the stars and sun.
- They needed to know when special days happened during the year.
- They solved this by building structures that matched the sky and acted like calendars.
- Their buildings helped track time and plan religious events.

Text source: Adapted for grade level by Primary Source from [Casa K'inich: A Teacher's Guidebook](#), Santa Barbara, CA: The Copan Foundation, 2005, p. 37. Used with permission of The Copan Foundation, Catherine Docter, Dorie Reents Budet, Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle (Copyright 2005).

Directions: Read the following article, and then answer the questions below.

Ancient Maya Calendar

The Maya had very complex calendar systems, which were as precise as modern calendars. They put a lot of effort into creating calendars and measuring time! This was related to their belief that time moved in cycles, which eventually started back at the beginning.



The Maya counted time with three interlocking calendars. One calendar, which everyone in ancient Mesoamerica used, was a cycle of 260 days (Circle A). Although its origin is unknown, 260 days is the number of days between the conception and birth of a child. Perhaps this calendar was based on this natural human cycle.

Another calendar was a 365-day cycle similar to our solar year, but months were divided differently. The Maya had 18 months of 20 days each (Circle C).

Linking together these two cycles resulted in a larger cycle of 52 years before the same combination of days from both calendars occurred again. This 52-year cycle was called the Calendar Round.

The ancient Maya used the two shorter calendars for the planning of important events. They guided the best time to plant crops, hunt certain animals, or cure sickness. They suggested when to ascend to the throne of kingship or wage a battle against enemies. The Calendar Round was also used to plan religious rituals and perhaps predict the future. But it was not very useful for recording history beyond 52 years.

The Maya recorded their history for hundreds of years. Their astronomers needed to keep track of celestial events for equally long periods of time. So they used a third calendar system, which we call the Long Count. This system probably came to them from the Olmec. It counts forward from a specific ancient day, one place for each year. Thus, the ancient Maya had a historical timeline to count backward into the past or forward into the future.

Student responses will vary. Look for specific information from the text in their writing. Possible responses:

1. What information from the text can be helpful in answering the Supporting Question:
How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

- The Maya believed time moved in cycles, and their calendars showed this idea.
- They used the Calendar Round to choose the best days for planting, war, and rituals.
- They believed calendars could help them know the future and connect to the gods.
- Their use of calendars in daily life showed their spiritual beliefs were tied to time.

2. According to the article, what challenges did the Maya face? How did they address them?

- A challenge was how to track long periods of time, including history and astronomy.
- They solved this by creating the Long Count calendar, which allowed them to count forward and backward in time.
- Another challenge was knowing the right time for important activities, which they solved using their 260-day and 365-day calendars.
- These systems helped them make decisions about religion, agriculture, and leadership.

Text and image source: Adapted for grade level by Primary Source from [Casa K'inich: A Teacher's Guidebook](#), Santa Barbara, CA: The Copan Foundation, 2005, p. 37. Used with permission of The Copan Foundation, Catherine Docter, Dorie Reents Budet, Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle (Copyright 2005).

LESSON 19

The Maya Ball Game

- EQ

How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
- SQ

How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Use sources to identify how the Maya ball game reflected and reinforced Maya values and beliefs.	Explain how the Maya ball game reflected and reinforced Maya values and beliefs, orally.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson introduces students to the cultural and religious significance of the ancient Maya ball game by building background knowledge through contemporary comparisons and guided exploration. It begins with an Activator activity that connects modern spectator sports, such as the Super Bowl or World Cup, to community rituals, emphasizing how shared practices reflect values such as teamwork and celebration. Students are then introduced to the complex concept of ritual sacrifice in Maya culture, including how sacrifices were understood as offerings to the gods, often reenacting myths like the Popol Vuh. This context prepares students to explore how the Maya ball game functioned as both a sport and a sacred ritual. Through video clips, images, discussion, and guided research using digital and print resources, students investigate the rules, significance, and participants of the game. The lesson fosters historical understanding, cultural empathy, and media literacy in preparation for an interactive quiz game that reinforces content knowledge.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.8
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 19 Slide Deck ☐ Teacher Guidance for Talking About Sacrifice ☐ Lesson 19 Exit Ticket ☐ Lesson 15: Lessons 15-20 Glossary
VOCABULARY
sacrifice

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Spectator Sports and Rituals	5
Introducing Human Sacrifice	10
The Maya Ball Game	30
Exit Ticket	5
Optional Extension: Comprehension Competition	20

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Lesson 19 Exit Ticket \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports oral language for expressing learning

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Consider allowing students to translate questions and sentence starters. Students at this level will either need a shortened version of the reading with information related to the questions highlighted or be allowed to read it in their home language online. They will need to work with peers to complete the Exit Ticket.
- [Look Fors](#): Students may copy from the readings to create their sentences, which should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases and will likely be mostly translated or cocreated with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially for the reading activities. Students may need support finding all of the information for the Exit Ticket. Encourage students to contribute during discussions, and allow them to use translation as necessary to create their responses.
- [Look Fors](#): Simple and compound sentences using the sentence frames should include more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the readings, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to read, discuss, and write their own sentences independently. Encourage students to contribute to and take additional notes during the discussions.
- [Look Fors](#): Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write multiple sentences for each part of the Exit Ticket.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Thoroughly and carefully read the document [Teacher Guidance for Talking About Sacrifice](#) written by the Education Staff at the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture and made available by request for use in this curriculum. This is essential background and preparation for facilitating a conversation and handling student questions about human sacrifice and gift giving to the gods, a practice in ancient Mesoamerica and most ancient human societies throughout the world.

Secure digital devices for student groups to conduct research and access online articles.

Activator: Spectator Sports and Rituals (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Project this fact about sports and spectatorship: Over 90 million people in the US watch the Super Bowl each year.

Ask: *What are some rituals that fans, players, and coaches participate in? Why do you think these rituals matter?*

Possible responses:

- Attending watch parties and eating certain foods
- Spectator cheers and chants, playing of the national anthem
- Players' personal good luck rituals
- Rituals bring communities together
- Rituals show shared values like excellence, teamwork, and celebration

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

If your class has a large population of immigrant students, consider using the Olympics or the World Cup as your example instead.

**BUILD LITERACY**

Share with students that the root “spect” means “to see, to watch.” Ask them to come up with other examples of words with this root. Examples could include inspect, suspect, respect, spectacles, specimen, or other [Words with the Morpheme "Spect, Spec."](#)

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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Introducing Human Sacrifice (10 minutes)

Slide 3: Prepare students to understand sacrifice in ancient Maya culture. Explain to students that later in this class, they are going to be reading and looking at images to learn about the Maya ball game. Introduce a new vocabulary word that will be used throughout this unit: *sacrifice*.

- Say the word: *sacrifice*.
- Use the word in context: *The Maya believed that a sacrifice could help bring rain for their crops.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: *the act of killing a person or animal in a religious ceremony as an offering to please a god.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Explain to students that we will study images and texts about ritual sacrifice in Maya culture. Emphasize:

- These were ancient practices, not continued today.
- Maya believed sacrifices were a way to repay the gods, often reenacting their creation myth.
- A sacrifice is an offering to the gods.
- Sometimes a sacrifice included bloodletting (sacrificed animals, human lives, or drops of human blood) or the death of a person.
- Sacrifice is often tied to beliefs about life, nature, and their gods.
- We are studying this today because the Maya sometimes sacrificed ball players, as you will soon read.

Invite students to ask questions, then connect this to the Popol Vuh story from a previous lesson in the cluster. Share with students that:

- The Maya ball game was sometimes played as a ritual to act out the creation myth from the Popol Vuh.
- In this story, the Hero Twins battled the gods through a ball game in the underworld.



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The Maya saw sacrifice as both the giving of gifts and repaying of debts to the gods who had given them life using their own blood (mixed with corn). The Maya “gave back gifts” through offerings of animals, droplets of their blood, and, on certain occasions, a person or people. They sacrificed things of great value to them. Tying this practice to the creation myth they studied in an earlier lesson is a good connection to what students have just learned, and helps to explain the ancient Maya perspective.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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- At the end of acting out this special ritual ball game, the Maya sometimes offered up a person, usually the captain of the losing team.

The Maya Ball Game (30 minutes)

Slide 4: Explain to students that just like football is a big part of American culture today, the Maya ball game was a major event in Mesoamerica. The Maya called it *pitz*, and others called it *pok-ta-pok*. It wasn't just a sport to the Maya, it was a big part of their religion and daily life.

Historians have learned details about this game through archaeology and art:

- Archaeology: Most Maya cities had ball courts near temples, showing the game's importance.
- Art: Carved and painted depictions of the ball game show us how the game looked and what it meant.

Slides 5–6: Introduce a video clip of a modern recreation of the Maya ball game. Ask students to watch closely to try to figure out the goal and rules. Choose one clip to show:

- “Pok-ta-pok, - the Maya Ball Game” video (1:05) by mypapalote.
- “Reviving a 3,000-year-old Ancient Ballgame” video (3:40) by Great Big Story.

Explain that archaeologists have found ceramic figures of women in ball game gear from as early as 1200 BCE, so the game was not just for men.

Slide 7: Arrange students into small groups or pairs. Provide each group with at least one device to complete research about how and why the game was played.



TEACHING TIP

The former clip is concise and shows a team scoring and people celebrating. The latter has the benefit of close-up views and includes women and children playing—as they likely did historically—but it needs to have subtitles read aloud.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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Explain to students that they will now explore two online resources to learn more about the Maya ball game:

- [Maya Ball](#) packet, pp. 1–6 only (Penn Museum)
- [Games in Xibalba](#) interactive visual tour (Google Arts & Culture)

As they read the resources, they will focus on two questions:

- *What kind of sources did you explore, and how did they help you understand Maya rituals and beliefs?*
- *What challenges did the Maya face, and how did the ball game address these challenges?*

Review some brief instructions before providing time for students to conduct research:

- Take turns reading aloud to one another.
- Pause often to discuss and make sure everyone understands.
- Summarize key points to each other.

Prompt students to begin their reading and discussion in their groups. With about 5–10 minutes left in class, bring students back together for a whole group debrief discussion.

Ask: *What kind of sources did you explore, and how did they help you understand Maya rituals and beliefs?*

Prompt students to talk with an elbow partner, and then ask for a few volunteers to share with the group. Possible responses:

- A Penn Museum article (secondary source) that included images of artifacts from the game (primary sources). These sources helped explain that the Maya believed keeping the gods happy was very important.
- A Google Arts & Culture resource that included text (secondary source) and images (primary sources). These sources helped me understand that Maya beliefs about life, death, and agriculture were all tied to the ball game.

Ask: *What challenges did the Maya face, and how did the ball game address these challenges?*



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to use their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) as they read and discuss these two sources with their groups. You can also guide them to focus on the Penn Museum text as it is mostly accessible.



LEARN MORE

For additional information and resources on the Mesoamerican ball game, see "[The Mesoamerican Ballgame](#)" from the Metropolitan Museum or pp. 46–49 of [Casa K'inich: A Teacher's Guidebook](#). There is also an excellent Wikipedia article on the subject: "[Mesoamerican ballgame](#)." See also these pictures of "[Maya Ballplayers](#)" from Latin American Studies.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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Cluster 4: Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya

Again, prompt students to talk with an elbow partner, and then ask for a few volunteers to share with the group.

Possible responses:

- The Maya believed in a constant battle between good and evil. The ball game served the purpose of keeping the gods happy by sacrificing healthy people.
- The Maya faced the challenge of understanding the natural world and wanting their civilization to be successful. They developed the ball game that was tied to their beliefs and rituals to help address these challenges.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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**Exit Ticket** (5 minutes)

Slide 8: Distribute the [Lesson 19 Exit Ticket](#) handout. Review the directions and prompts briefly:

- *What is one thing you learned about how the Maya ball game reflected or reinforced Maya values or beliefs?*
- *Which source helped you learn this? Why was it helpful?*

Student responses should name a specific learning about the Maya ball game and explain why a source was useful. Possible responses:

- The Maya ball game reflected their religious beliefs because it was sometimes used as a ritual to honor the gods.
- The Maya believed the ball game reenacted the struggle between life and death, a central idea in their worldview.
- The Penn Museum article was useful because it explained the religious importance of the ball game and showed artifacts that proved its significance.
- Google Arts & Culture's interactive showed pictures of real ball courts and sculptures, which helped me understand how the game was tied to temples and gods.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide ML students with the [Lesson 19 Exit Ticket \(Sentence Starters\)](#) for this activity.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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Optional Extension: Comprehension Competition *(20 minutes)*

Slides 9–10: Explain to students that now that they have researched the game, they will showcase their comprehension in a competitive exercise. Explain the parts and expectations to students:

- Each team will stand in a different part of the room.
- The questioner rotates, asking a question to each group. (If it won't derail your students, the questioner could toss them a round Nerf ball to indicate it's their turn "on the court," and they could toss it back after answering.)
- Teams have 20 seconds to answer. Correct = 1 point, incorrect = 0.

Assign one student to be the questioner, one to be the timer, and give yourself the role of assigning points for correct answers and keeping score on the board.

- You can do this using Maya numbers if you like (available at ["Ancient History Math Mystery"](#)); you won't need to count very high.
- Have the questioner use the handout [Extension: Maya Ball Questions and Answers](#) as a guide.

Play three to four rounds, making sure all teams answer the same number of questions. Declare a winner based on the highest point total, possibly awarding that team a distinctly Maya prize like chocolate bars or chewing gum.

Lesson 19: The Maya Ball Game

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Teacher Guidance for Talking About Sacrifice

Maya Sacrifice: People as a “Gift” to the Gods

Guidance for Teachers in Talking about Sacrifice with Students
from the Education Staff of the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture

Conceptual Framework

When students ask a question about human sacrifice...

- Validate the question.
- Provide context on sacrifice as a practice of most human societies.
- Provide vocabulary to help build historical understanding of human life sacrifice.
- Provide information from origin stories that create a world view of historical Maya.
- Move on—involved time spent on this unbalances the history of the Maya and creates mischaracterization of ancient religions.

Tips

- Give information in small chunks. Don't volunteer it all at once. Wait for further questions from students so you can gauge understanding or overreactions in the classroom.
- Be matter of fact. Avoid passing judgment on peoples we do not fully understand.
- Most, if not all, civilizations (Greece, Rome, Egypt, Dynastic China, Japan, Korea, Israel, Mesopotamia, Cahokia, Ashanti, peoples from Germany, France, England etc.) employed sacrifice of people as part of their religious practice at some point in time. This is not unique to Mesoamerican societies. It was found in all parts of the world. The commonality should be stressed to avoid students of Central American or Mexican heritage being targeted.

Christianity is also built on the concept of the ultimate sacrifice of a human—Jesus the son of god was left to die on the cross in order to save mankind. Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice his son Jacob. Martyrdom is a tradition of Christian faith. While this knowledge helps adult explainers of the concept avoid overemphasizing the dramatic aspect of sacrifice, we have found it to be unhelpful in conversation in museums. Typically museum staff don't draw the connection to Christianity with kids because it can be transmitted back home in incomplete ways that cause parental concern. But we only see them for an hour a year, and your classroom may be more open to these kinds of discussions.

Note: 2022 suggestions from Education Staff at the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture with review by Harvard University Professor David Carrasco, Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America.

If teachers can absorb the examples from more familiar religious traditions, it helps you to modulate your discussion and helps students to understand human sacrifice from the point of view of the ancient believer.

Conversation

Question: “Didn’t the Maya/Aztec sacrifice humans?”

Answer: Yes, as did most societies around the world at this time. This was not only a Maya practice at all. And the Maya had other ways to communicate with their gods—not all of them, in fact relatively few of them, relied on humans as offerings. And today no religious group or people sacrifices humans, not the Maya, not anybody. Let’s take a minute to think about this together.

I’m so glad you asked this question! A sacrifice as we are talking about it is when the life of someone is taken in order to maintain a relationship with a god or gods. It’s important to understand the whole picture, the way these people organized their reality or view of the world.

First of all, more often than not, the ancient Maya were doing what most cultures around the world were doing: they offered up animals as sacrifices, including birds, deer, and even jaguars. Blood was believed to have special life force required by gods. We have archaeological evidence of animal sacrifices in caches or special hiding places dug underneath monuments like pyramids.

Second, by far the most common sacrifice ritual in the ancient Maya world was bloodletting. Royal kings and queens would take drops of their own blood from different parts of their body (lip, tongue, earlobe, etc.) with sharp stingray spines and offer it to the gods on sacred bark paper during very important events. The paper would be burned, and the smoke with the blood drops would rise into the sky where the gods lived. We see images of this in sculpture, on wall paintings, and on pottery. The practice of bloodletting served to commemorate and purify important events such as births, petitions for good harvests, or rain.

Third, the offering up of people was actually rare and was saved for only very important occasions such as when a king took the throne.

Note: 2022 suggestions from Education Staff at the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture with review by Harvard University Professor David Carrasco, Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America.

The idea of a sacrifice, a communication with the holy, still exists, although it does not involve the taking of human life. Here is one example, and you may be able to think of others: When I was a kid, people would sit down to dinner and say a prayer before the meal. The meal was often meat—something killed for food. The prayer to thank god for the bounty, to bless the eaters, to remind the people of their belief and love of god, was a kind of sacrifice. It required that hungry people wait before eating.

Let's try and understand blood sacrifice from an ancient Maya perspective.

To understand the ancient Maya, let's try out a different word as we talk about your question. Instead of sacrifice let's try the term "gift." The Maya saw it as giving the most precious thing there is—a human life—as a gift to the gods.

So how did people decide that it would be a good idea to offer up a PERSON as a gift to the gods? Well, for this to make sense, we have to try to understand the way they saw the world.

The ancient Maya believed that the gods demanded and deserved blood because of the initial creation of people. Do you know this Maya story about how humans were created? This story is part of the Popol Vuh, the book of history, religious, and cultural beliefs of the K'iche' Maya. In the origin story, the gods spilled their own holy blood and mixed it with cornmeal to mold people and give them life. (See Basics of Maya Creation Story below.)

The Maya believed that they owed the gods the same thing in return. Since the gods gave THEIR blood to give people life, people needed to give blood back to the gods. It was a payment of a debt, an exchange between a god and a people.

Let's move on and look at the Maya...(writing systems, architecture, astronomy...)

Question: I heard that the losing team was killed when they lost the ball game pok a tok or pitz. Is that true?

Sacrifice in the Maya Ball Game

There's a lot of misinformation about human sacrifice in the ball game, especially that the entire losing team was always killed. Can you imagine if we did that in baseball, if we killed the entire losing team every time? Who would be left at the end of the year? Would any of you want to become baseball players?

Note: 2022 suggestions from Education Staff at the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture with review by Harvard University Professor David Carrasco, Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America.

SOMETIMES, people WERE offered up as part of the ball game, but not always. It would depend on the REASON the ball game was being played.

Sometimes a ritual version of the ballgame was played that was almost like religious theater. It would be a reenactment of a story from the Popol Vuh, where the Hero Twins go down into the underworld and battle the gods of the underworld for control of reality. This battle took the form of a ball game. In the story, the hero twins are killed, but they're magical, so they come back to life. They play again and defeat the gods of the underworld, who are killed.

We can imagine the Maya reenacting this story as a religious play, dressed up in the characters' costumes, with priests chanting and music and drums and incense and fire.

Other times, the ball game was used to settle a political dispute between two kingdoms. Rather than have thousands of warriors go to battle and risk death and injury, teams of just 5 to 10 people would be at risk. And even then it was often only the CAPTAIN of the losing team who was offered to the gods as a gift.

Basics of Maya Creation Story

The ancient Maya believed that the gods created the world and humanity five times. They tried creating people using different materials, but each time there was something wrong, so they wiped everything out and started all over again.

First, the gods tried creating people out of dirt, but when it rained, they all turned to mud and melted away. So then they tried using sticks, but the people just lumbered around and couldn't speak and worship them properly, so the gods wiped them out and tried again.

It wasn't until the fifth time that the gods finally got it right: they mixed ground-up cornmeal with drops of their own life-giving, godly blood. So since the gods sacrificed their blood for the people, the people needed to sacrifice their blood in payment of this debt to the gods.

Note: 2022 suggestions from Education Staff at the Harvard Museums of Science & Culture with review by Harvard University Professor David Carrasco, Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America.

LESSON 20

Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

- EQ** How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
- SQ** How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Analyze ancient murals to determine important aspects of Maya culture and experiences.	Determine important aspects of Maya culture and experiences orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore additional aspects of Maya rituals, practices, and beliefs through the vivid murals of Bonampak. The lesson begins by drawing students into the world of the ancient Maya through the image of a stele and a short video tour of the site. Students are reminded of the term “city-state” from earlier units and make connections across civilizations. They then analyze richly detailed murals as primary sources to uncover the rituals and practices of the Maya.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5c.1
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 20 Slide Deck
☐ Maya Rulers of Bonampak (Teacher Version)
☐ Maya Rulers of Bonampak
☐ Bonampak Murals
☐ Lesson 15: Lessons 15-20 Glossary
VOCABULARY
tribute

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Activator: Rulership in the Ancient World	5
Investigating Sources: Analyzing Murals: The Roles of Maya Royalty	45
Optional Extension: Markets and Trade in the Maya World	50

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Maya Rulers of Bonampak \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists and supports students in the first two steps of the Investigating Sources routine

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially during the stations activity. Consider allowing students at this level to translate questions and sentence frames. Students will need support from their peers to complete the readings and answer the questions. Consider providing short summaries of the information with key information for them to reference.
- [Look Fors](#): Students may copy from the texts to create their sentences, which should use of relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases. Responses will likely be mostly translated or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students will likely need some support from their peers to complete the readings and answer the questions. Consider providing summaries of the information with key information for them to reference.
- [Look Fors](#): Simple and compound sentences should use more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the texts, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students can use sentence frames as a guide if necessary but should be able to write their own sentences independently. Encourage students to contribute to and add to their responses during the discussions.
- [Look Fors](#): Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write multiple sentences for each part of the activity.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Organize the [Bonampak Murals](#) pages by station for easy distribution during class: Relations with Neighbors (pages 1–2); War (pages 3–4); Orchestra and Dancers (pages 5–6); and Royal Dance Ceremony (pages 7–8).

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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**LEARN MORE**

To learn more about the Bonampak murals, see Yale University's "[The Splendid Maya Murals of Bonampak, Mexico, with Prof. Mary Miller](#)" (Dr. Miller analyzes the murals starting at 25:00.) Or view 3D models of the [Bonampak](#) rooms in Sketchfab. The 2-minute Peabody Museum video "[Maya Music](#)" explains more about the musicians in the murals. See here for "[The Murals of Bonampak, Chiapas Mexico](#)" from ThoughtCo.

**TEACHING TIP**

This lesson uses 2-D images, but there are also resources available for viewing 3-D images of Maya rulers that you may substitute or add if your technology makes this a practical option. See, for instance, [Quiriguá 3D](#) on Sketchfab for 3-dimensional models of Quiriguá Archaeological Park and Ruins in Guatemala.

Activator: Rulership in the Ancient World (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Set the scene for students. Tell students: *Imagine that you were wandering in the ruins of an ancient Maya city, and you came upon a stele (a tall stone carving)..*

Ask students: *What do you see in this image?* Possible responses:

- A headdress
- Glyphs
- A person

Explain to students that this is King Chan Muwaan II, a Maya ruler seen as nearly divine.

Slide 3: Explain that these steles (tall stone carvings) are found in the ancient Maya city of Bonampak. Play the "Bonampak - Murals on the Walls" video (1:59) by chichcalan.

**TEACHING TIP**

Bonampak is the city-state where the murals in this lesson were painted. The video orients them to the location of the stele shown on Slide 2 and to the small 3-room building holding the murals.

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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Investigating Sources: Analyzing Murals: The Roles of Maya Royalty

(45 minutes)



TEACHING TIP

What makes the murals especially poignant is that this glory was not to last; before the murals were even completed, Maya lowland cities like Bonampak “collapsed” and were abandoned.

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Slide 4: Display a map of Maya city-states, and review the term city-state, making connections to Mesopotamia, Phoenicia, and Swahili. More than 100 Maya city-states were ruled as their own independent small states.

During the Classic Period of Maya history, from 250 CE to 900 CE, kings (and occasionally queens) ruled the Maya city-states.

Explain to students that today, they will act as historians to examine ancient Maya murals that reveal how rulers lived and ruled.

- These images are primary sources painted on the walls of Bonampak, a Maya city-state.
- As we move through this activity, students will look closely at what they tell us about Maya kings, their courts, and the ceremonies they held.
- They will compare these Maya rulers to rulers in two other societies they have studied previously. They will then consider why certain similarities might have existed.

Slide 5: Introduce a new vocabulary word that will be used throughout this lesson: *tribute*.

- Say the word: *tribute*.
- Use the word in context: *The conquered region was forced to send gold and spices as tribute to the emperor.*



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Students will likely recall the term “city-states” from their study of Phoenician, Mesopotamian, or Swahili city-states. If they need a quick review, remind them that the term refers to “an independent city and its surrounding landscape, which has its own government.” It may be helpful to explain that there are still city-states in the world today, such as Singapore in Southeast Asia or Monaco in Europe.

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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- Share the student-friendly definition: *money or goods that a ruler or country is expected or required to give to another ruler or country, especially for protection.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*

Slide 6: Explain to students that they will study a series of detailed wall paintings (murals) showing the splendor of the Classic period Maya city-state of Bonampak in the year 791 CE.

Explain the significance of the murals as primary sources. Students will rotate through four stations, each focused on a different subtopic:

- Relations with neighbors
- War
- Orchestra and dancers
- Royal dance ceremony

At each station, students examine the images and text closely and then discuss the following questions in their group: *What do these images reveal about Maya life and values?*

OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Slide 7: First, model this process using the first image in Station 1.

Direct students to take a close look at the image before reading any captions. Ask:

- *What do you notice right away?*
- *Who created this mural? When might it have been made? Who was it for?*
- *What are people doing, wearing, or holding?*
- *What objects or symbols stand out?*
- *What does the setting tell us?*

Possible responses:



LEARN MORE

When these were first seen by outside eyes in 1946, historians were thrilled because the murals revealed so much about life in a royal court. The murals are one of the most relevant sources we have for learning about great ceremonies, conquests, and especially the lives of kings and royal families.

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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- I notice people holding tools and working together in a village or farming area.
- The mural looks like it was made by Indigenous artists to show daily life or traditions. It may be used to teach or remember important history.
- There are carvings, animals, and plants that seem important, possibly showing a connection to nature or religion.

Explain that students will then read the captions and text on the images at each station and record their observations and learnings on a handout.

READ THE DOCUMENT

Distribute the [Maya Rulers of Bonampak](#), and organize students into groups of 4 or 5. Read the directions aloud.

Depending on how you organize the stations, you can have students start at different stations or provide multiple copies of each station. Then prompt them to begin.

Direct students to begin working through the stations and recording their ideas on their handout. Rotate students through stations every 8 minutes.

- Circulate and support students as needed while referencing the [Maya Rulers of Bonampak \(Teacher Version\)](#).
- Consider fewer stations for classes needing more time.

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION

With about 5-10 minutes left in class, bring students back together as a whole group. Pose the Connect question from the handout: *How do these sources help you answer the Supporting Question: How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?*

Prompt students to turn and talk with an elbow partner and then write their ideas on their handout.

Ask for a few student pairs to share out their ideas with the group. Encourage students to add to their handouts as needed. You can refer to the Teacher Version for supporting this discussion.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Maya Rulers of Bonampak \(Sentence Frames\)](#), and encourage them to utilize the [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#). In addition, these are packed images, and some students may need more time to read the text and absorb the images. In that event, consider having students analyze two or three stations instead of all four.

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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Optional Extension: Markets and Trade in the Maya World *(50 minutes)*

In preparation for this lesson, print and cut out the first two pages of [Extension: Dominance Game Cards](#) on cardstock for each student in your class. Print and cut out only one set of the “Unfortunate Events” cards found on the final page. Combine them into one large deck, and shuffle well.

Slides 8–9: Begin by reminding students what happens at a market (buying and selling of goods).

Then ask them to examine this artist’s reconstruction of a market to answer: *What do you notice about this depiction of a Maya market?* Possible responses:

- The traders are using backpacks.
- There are trade goods like pottery, squash, and other foods.
- Both men and women are trading.
- There are permanent and temporary structures in the market.

Then ask students to predict what kinds of goods they think were most commonly exchanged in the markets of most cities and towns.

- Note their responses, and keep probing until they deduce that the goods needed for daily life would have made up most of the goods in the market stalls.
- Explain that these practical products that are needed to stay alive are called subsistence goods.
- Then explain that the Maya—especially the rulers—also wanted certain items that were rare, exotic, and expensive. We call these prestige goods.

Slides 10–11: Distribute the [Extension: Origins and Purposes of Trade Products](#) handout, and explain that today they are going to first learn the purpose of the goods and their origin (where they came from) so they understand why the Maya needed to engage in cross-regional trade to get them.

Explain that they can work with a partner or independently to match each picture to the letter of its description.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Remind students about the difference between “needs” and “wants” that they studied in their Africa unit. These correlate to “subsistence goods” and “prestige goods.” To make connections to their lives, ask students for examples of prestige goods in our culture.

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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You can refer to the [Extension: Origins and Purposes of Trade Products \(Teacher Version\)](#) to support students' work.

Once students have completed the handout and familiarized themselves with the trade products, distribute the [Extension: Dominance Game Cards](#), and explain that they will now play a game called Dominance.

Provide background to the game, and explain to students that successful rulers used prestige goods to build their power.

- They would often give gifts to lesser lords in exchange for loyalty.
- They also offered tribute to their allies.
- In order to do this, they worked to gain access to a variety of prestige goods that came from many different places.

In order to win the game, students will need one card for each of the eight products they just saw in the matching exercise.

Slide 12: However, there's a catch. In life, things do not always work out as planned. Bad luck, poor management of resources, and unforeseen events can ruin plans.

- Explain that this actually happened to most of the lowland Maya cities, which were abandoned by their populations between 750 CE and 900 CE.
- In the game, this is reflected in "Unfortunate Event" cards.

Use the images on the slide to illustrate the major reasons that Maya cities declined or collapsed:

- Excessive warfare between city-states
- Drought
- Overpopulation and deforestation
- Disruption of land-based trade by sea routes

Anyone holding even one of these bad cards at the end automatically loses.

Slide 13: Distribute the prepared [Extension: Dominance Game Cards](#), giving each student eight cards from the total



LEARN MORE

["The Classic Maya Collapse: New Evidence on a Great Mystery"](#) from Penn Museum offers background information on the decline of the lowland Maya between 750 CE and 900 CE.

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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Cluster 4: Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya

stack. These should be pre-shuffled so they receive random assortments.

Prompt students to arrange their cards so they are private, fanned out and facing only them.

Then ask students to pull one card from another student's deck, letting another player do the same to theirs. Once everybody has selected one card, have them move around the room and select a card from another classmate, and then another, and so on. The goal is to acquire every prestige item and avoid unfortunate events.

If this does not produce a winner in 10 minutes of play, allow students to propose and conduct trades of cards to gain the prestige items they seek.

When someone has all eight prestige item cards, they shout "Dominance!"

Lesson 20: Divine Rulers of the Classic City-States

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Extension: Origins and Purposes of Trade Products (Teacher Version)

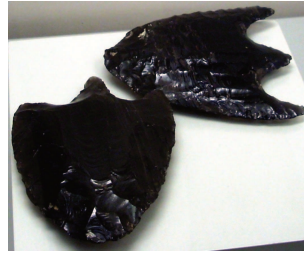
Directions: For each image, write the letter of the product's origin and its purpose for the Maya.

**Jade**___ **B** ___**Jaguar pelts**___ **H** ___**Finely woven cloth**___ **F** ___**Honey**___ **D** ___**Quetzal and other feathers**___ **E** ___**Spiny oyster (Spondylus) and other shells**___ **C** ___



**Cacao pods and
beans
(chocolate)**

___ **A** ___



Obsidian

___ **G** ___

- A.** Grown mainly in Guatemala, the pods were dried, and the beans were traded throughout Mesoamerica and used as a sort of currency. Since it is obviously very expensive to eat money, only rulers could afford to drink the frothy chocolate beverages.
- B.** A hard stone carved to make jewelry and religious offerings for nobles. The main source was the Motagua River in Guatemala (near the city of Quiriguá).
- C.** Traded, worn, and used in rituals by rulers and nobles, the Maya especially loved these colorful sea products found in only one spot on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Marine items have been found far inland, including conches for trumpets and many types for jewelry and decorations.
- D.** This is found wherever there are bees. It may have been something only noble families were allowed to produce and then traded directly from one ruling family to another.
- E.** Used to make costumes for rituals, these came from birds living in the “cloud forests” of the Guatemalan highlands. Other valued bird species lived across the Maya region.
- F.** Created all over the Maya world from cotton, only the most skilled weavers could create the wonderful products desired by rulers (and often given as tribute, as shown here).
- G.** Found only in certain places in volcanic regions of the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico and Guatemala, and near Teotihuacan, this hard material was used for weapons, body decorations, and rituals.
- H.** These striking animal products were used to make ritual wear. The animals live in the jungles and forests of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras. They are shy, nocturnal, and very fierce.

Text source: Adapted by Primary Source from [Empire - A Game of Maya Trade and Conquest](#), created by Jessica A. Deckard for the Middle American Research Institute & the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane University, 2002, pp 9 & 11.

Image sources:

Left to right, top to bottom:

- Jade head ornament. Image by Cleveland Museum of Art via Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0.
- Standing jaguar. Image by USFWS via Wikimedia Commons is in the public domain.
- Cylinder vase (rollout view). Image © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- Close up of capped and uncapped honeycomb. Image by Einebillion via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0.
- Resplendent quetzal. Image by Charlie Jackson via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.
- Spondylus crassisquama. Image by Kevin Walsh via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.
- Cacao pods. Image by Medicaster via Wikimedia Commons is in the public domain.
- Obsidian spearheads from Palenque. Image by Simon Burchell via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Maya Rulers of Bonampak (Teacher Version)

Directions: As you visit the four stations of Maya ancient murals, follow the steps below to engage in the Investigating Sources routine.

Student responses will vary. Look for specific information from the images and text in student writing. Possible responses:

Observe: Look closely at the image.

Ask yourself the following questions as you visit each station:

- What do I notice right away?
- Who created this mural? When might it have been made? Who was it for?
- What are people doing, wearing, or holding?
- What objects or symbols stand out?
- What does the setting tell me?

Station 1: Relations with Neighbors

- People are wearing headdresses and capes.
- I notice they seem to be speaking to one another.
- People are making offerings to one another.

Station 2: War

- People are wearing different types of headdresses or armor.
- They are holding weapons and attacking one another.
- More offerings are being made, and one person is kneeling before another person.

Station 3: Orchestra and Dancers

- People are holding instruments and lined up behind one another.
- People are wearing very similar clothing.

Station 4: Royal Dance Ceremony

- People seem to be getting ready/getting dressed together.
- I notice people performing a dance.

Read: Read the captions and descriptions included with each mural.

Ask yourself the following questions as you visit each station:

- What's happening in this scene? What rituals or cultural practices are being shown?
- What does this mural suggest about Maya beliefs, society, or leadership?

- What can I infer about the challenges or opportunities the Maya faced?

Station 1: Relations with Neighbors

- Maya messengers were sent from their rulers to bring gifts to other Maya rulers.
- They would gather to witness special events of their neighbors.
- They had the opportunity to connect with one another through gift-giving.

Station 2: War

- Wars involved rituals like banners, animal-like headdresses, and weapons.
- Kings fought in battles alongside soldiers.
- Kings received captives and precious items like jade beads and quetzal feathers after a battle.
- War and battles were opportunities for kings to gain wealth and power.

Station 3: Orchestra and Dancers

- The orchestra was organized, they wore uniforms, and people processed in a certain order
- Connected with gods through rituals, as one dressed as a wind god

Station 4: Royal Dance Ceremony

- The Maya participated in dance ceremonies, wearing special costumes and dancing to trumpets.
- A ritual was a dance ceremony at the time of solar events.

Connect: How do these sources help you answer the Supporting Question: *How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?* Be sure to cite specific evidence or examples from the murals you just studied.

- The Maya showed their beliefs through rituals such as dance ceremonies and paying tribute to one another. The murals help us understand that the Maya believed in their connection to the earth and timed dance ceremonies with solar events. They also held the practice of offering treasured items from nature (like cacao) to one another as tribute.

LESSON 21

Formative Assessment

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Synthesize knowledge about how Maya rituals and practices reflected their beliefs and values.	Explain how Maya rituals and practices reflected their beliefs and values, in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson serves as the culminating activity for Cluster 4, guiding students through a Formative Assessment that synthesizes their learning about Maya civilization. Throughout the cluster, students explored a wide range of sources, from creation myths to astronomical practices, to investigate how Maya rituals and innovations reflected their spiritual beliefs and societal values. In this lesson, students review key takeaways using their Inquiry and Know and Wonder Charts and complete a Formative Assessment Task that challenges them to make evidence-based claims about Maya religious practices and innovations.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 7, 6.T5c.1, WCA.6-8.1b
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 21 Slide Deck
☐ Cluster 4 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)
☐ Cluster 4 Formative Assessment Task
☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart
☐ Lesson 15: Unit 4 Cluster 4 Inquiry Chart

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Putting it Together	20
Formative Assessment	30

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Cluster 4 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Supports students' summaries of the cluster, what they did, and how it helps answer the Supporting Question

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Consider allowing students at this level to work with a peer and/or use translation for the Formative Assessment Task and to translate questions and sentence frames.
- [Look Fors](#): Students may copy from their notes to create their sentences, which should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases. Responses will likely be mostly translated or cocreated with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially in discussion activities. Students should use the Sentence Frames scaffold and may need support finding all of the information for the Formative Assessment Task.
- [Look Fors](#): Complete simple and compound sentences should use more relevant Tier 2 words, words from their notes, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students can use the sentence frames as a guide if necessary but should be able to write their own sentences independently. Encourage students to contribute to and take additional notes during the discussions.
- [Look Fors](#): Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write multiple sentences for each part of the Formative Assessment Task.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Have each class period's Unit 4 Cluster 4 Inquiry Chart and Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart easily accessible.

Ensure students have their handouts from the previous lesson easily accessible.

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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Putting it Together (20 minutes)

Slides 2–3: Present the **Unit 4 Cluster 4 Inquiry Chart** that the class created. Remind students of the Cluster 4 Supporting Question:



How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?

SUMMARIZE OUR LEARNING AND SHARE OUR INITIAL THINKING

Ask: *What resources did we use in Lessons 15–20?*

Have students discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format, and call on a few students to share their responses. Possible responses:

- **The Maya World Note Catcher handout**
- **Creation Myth Analysis handout**
- **"Creation Story of the Maya" (Transcript) handout**
- **Maya Astronomy and Timekeeping Readings handout**
- **Maya Rulers of Bonampak handout**

Review the activities from the cluster's lessons in the "What did we do?" column. After reading each lesson's summary, ask students to turn and talk about what they learned in that lesson.

SYNTHESIZE OUR IDEAS AND ANSWER THE SUPPORTING QUESTION

Ask: *What did we learn that helps us answer our Supporting Question?* Give students time to discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format once more.

Guide them to support their assertions with specific evidence and examples. Ask probing questions to help students reach key takeaways of the cluster. Possible responses:

- We learned that Maya rulers performed rituals and acted as intermediaries between the gods and the people.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

The [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) can be used to support students' summaries of the cluster, what they did, and how it helps answer the Supporting Question.

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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- We learned about a Maya creation myth and how it reflects the beliefs and values of Maya society.
- We learned that the Maya developed complex systems of knowledge, including astronomy, writing, and calendar systems.

When student groups share with the whole class, record their responses in the “What did we learn?” column of the Inquiry Chart. Prompt students to record this information on their own handouts.

RETURN TO THE INQUIRY CHART

Finally, revisit the questions students added under the Supporting Question in Lesson 15 as part of their Launching the Question routine as well as questions from the Wonder column of the **Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart** from Lesson 1.

Ask: Have any of these questions been answered? Have any new questions come up?

Give students a few minutes to share their thinking and ideas with the whole group.

Slide 4: Explain to students that they will reflect on the deeper meaning behind Maya rituals and practices in the Formative Assessment Task. Over the course of the cluster, students have studied a series of rituals, beliefs, and challenges that provide historians with a more accurate understanding of this ancient complex society.

Facilitate a Think-Pair-Share activity to help students practice making connections before they begin the assessment.

- **Think:** Ask students to choose one ritual or practice from the cluster and reflect on how it connects to a belief and a challenge the Maya faced.
- **Pair:** Have students discuss their ideas with a partner.
- **Share:** Debrief as a class, highlighting a range of topics and connections across the cluster.

Questions to spark conversation:

- *How did Maya rulers use rituals to reinforce their power and manage city-states?*

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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Cluster 4: Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya

- *What does the Popol Vuh (creation myth) reveal about Maya values?*
- *How did Maya knowledge of astronomy shape religious practices or city construction?*
- *How did the ball game relate to both spiritual beliefs and political conflict?*

Key ideas to emphasize in the discussion:

- Rituals reinforced political, cosmic, and agricultural balance.
- Beliefs were deeply connected to timekeeping, creation, and the gods' role in daily life.
- Challenges like maintaining unity, facing environmental demands, or legitimizing rule were addressed through ceremonial practices.
- Practices were often symbolic and tied to cosmic cycles and sacred knowledge.

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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STAMP THE KEY LEARNING

**Formative Assessment** (30 minutes)

Slide 5: Let students know that they will now participate in the final step of the Putting It Together routine by completing a Formative Assessment Task. In this task, students will draw from everything they learned in Cluster 4 to make connections between rituals or practices, beliefs, and challenges faced by the Maya.

Distribute the [Cluster 4 Formative Assessment Task](#) handout.

Explain that this Formative Assessment Task will ask students to match a ritual or practice with a belief and a challenge faced by the Maya. They are encouraged to refer to their handouts and other materials from the cluster as they work.

Preview the three parts of the assessment with students, and read the directions aloud:

- Part 1: Review a chart of Maya rituals or practices, beliefs, and challenges, and then select one example from each column that they believe are connected.
- Part 2: Answer three questions to explain how their choices connect. Encourage students to utilize their notes from Cluster 4.
- Part 3: Answer the Supporting Question: *How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?* Remind students to use specific examples to support their answer.

Prompt the students to begin, and remind them to refer to their materials from the cluster to help them.

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide ML students with the [Cluster 4 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#). Also, encourage them to utilize the [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) to assist in making connections as they write.

Lesson 21: Formative Assessment

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Cluster 4 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)

Part 1: Match a Ritual or Practice with a Belief and Challenge

Directions: Choose one example from each column below that you studied. You’ll explain how they connect in Part 2.

Student answers will vary. Possible response:

Ritual or Practice	Belief	Challenge
- Bloodletting rituals - Calendar ceremonies - Murals and carvings - Temple building - Offerings/sacrifices to gods	- Gods control nature. - Celestial events shape human destiny. - Kings are sacred intermediaries. - Life is connected to the cosmos. - Balance must be kept in the world.	- Drought and crop failure - Predicting weather or harvest - Maintaining leadership and order - Harsh geography and dense jungle - Conflict with rival city-states

Part 2: Explain the Connections

Directions: Answer the questions below to show the connections between your choices. Circle one topic from the table above, and use it to answer the questions below. Be sure to cite specific information in your responses.

1. What ritual or practice did you choose? What was it, and what did it look like or involve?

Student responses will vary. Possible response:

- I chose the ritual of calendar ceremonies.
- This ritual involved celebrating special dates linked to the Maya calendar.
- It looked like festivals and offerings that happened on certain days.

2. What belief was connected to this ritual or practice? What did the Maya believe, and why?

Student responses will vary. Possible response:

- The Maya believed that celestial events shape human destiny.
- They thought this because the movements of the sun and planets affected when to plant or harvest.
- This belief was important because it helped them decide when to do religious rituals and farming.

3. What challenge did the Maya face that this ritual or belief helped address?

Student responses will vary. Possible response:

- One challenge the Maya faced was predicting weather or harvest.
- This ritual or belief helped them by giving them a calendar to plan ahead.
- It helped the Maya deal with choosing the best times for planting and ceremonies.

Part 3: Final Reflection

Directions: Answer the Supporting Question using your match above: *How did Maya rituals and practices showcase their beliefs?* Use specific examples from your chart and explanation.

Student responses will vary. Possible response:

- The Maya used calendar ceremonies to show their belief in the power of celestial events. This practice helped them respond to the challenge of predicting the best time to plant crops. This practice shows that Maya rituals were closely connected to their religious beliefs and the natural world.
- Maya rituals and practices around advanced astronomy and observatories showcase their beliefs about the importance of nature and the world around them. They dedicated time and energy to tracking the cyclical changes of the Earth and sky, which reflected their religious beliefs and their understanding that different gods inhabited various parts of the world.

Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

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Unit Synthesis

Overview

This brief cluster, built around the Supporting Question above, centers the culture and history of the Taíno—the region’s predominant Indigenous group—that settled in the Caribbean more than 2,000 years ago. By the 1st millennium CE, historians describe the ancient Caribbean as a bustling highway of movement and exchange, where skillful mariners connected island societies to one another and to other peoples and cultures of the Americas, including the Maya. An important element of this cluster is the culturally affirming recognition that Indigenous people have endured, and that knowing their history matters to them as it matters to all people.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this cluster, students should be able to...

- Analyze primary and secondary sources to explain the importance of migration, cultural exchange, and interaction with the natural world in the Caribbean.
- Describe features of the unique culture of the Taíno people.
- Explain in discussion and writing how legacies of early Taíno culture survive today.
- Construct social studies explanations that introduce and contextualize phenomena or events and establish perspective for communicating outcomes, consequences, or documentation of reasoning (WIDA ELD-SS.6-8.Explain.Expressive).

Vocabulary

TIER 2

legacy

Cluster Focus Standards

Practice Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
PS 3: Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.	22-26
PS 5: Determine the credibility of sources using distinctions among fact and opinion as well as information regarding maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.	26
PS 7: Explain different strategies and approaches students and others could take in working alone and together to address local, regional, and global problems, and pred	26

Content Standards

STANDARD	LESSON(S)
6.T5a.1: On a physical map of the world, use cardinal directions, map scales, key/legend, and title to locate Central America, the Caribbean Sea. On a map of the region, identify important physical features of the region (e.g. Gulf of Mexico, Yucatan Peninsula, the Panama Canal).	22-25
6.T5a.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, climate, major physical characteristics and natural resources influenced settlement, population size, and the economies of regions and countries in Central America and the Caribbean Islands.	22-26
6.T5a.4: Describe the culture and way of life of the indigenous populations of the region (e.g., Carib [Antilles and South America], Taino [Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico], Lenca [Honduras], Miskito [Nicaragua], Huatares and Chorotegas [Costa Rica], Lokono, also known as Arawak [Trinidad and Tobago]).	22-26
6.T5b.3: Explain how absolute and relative locations, major physical characteristics, climate and natural resources in this region have influenced settlement patterns, population size, and economies of the countries in South America.	26

6.T5c.1: Research and report on one of the major ancient societies that existed in Central America (Maya, Teotihuacán, and other civilizations such as the Olmec, Toltec, and Zapotec), or one of the major pre-Columbian Andean civilizations (Chavín, Moche, Nazca), their locations, and their cultural characteristics.

26

Unit 4, Cluster 5 Inquiry Chart (Teacher Version)

Unit EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
Cluster SQ	How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?
What questions will we ask?	

What did we do?	What did we learn that helps us answer our question(s)?
Lesson 22: We analyzed Taíno artifacts in a Gallery Walk to explore how geography and migration shaped ancient Caribbean cultures.	The Caribbean's many islands and surrounding waters made travel difficult, but also connected communities through boats and sea routes. Artifacts show us how the Taíno people adapted their tools, homes, and food practices to their island environments.
Lesson 23: We explored sources to understand how migration and geography shaped Taíno culture and daily life.	The Taíno are descendants of Arawak-speaking peoples who migrated from South America through multiple waves to the Caribbean islands. Primary and secondary sources reveal how migration and island geography combined to shape the unique culture and enduring legacy of the Taíno people.
Lesson 24: We learned how Taíno culture survives today by analyzing a video and discussing how traditions like music, farming, and language continue to shape identity in the Caribbean.	The Taíno culture was deeply affected by colonization, but continues to survive through stories, practices, and genetics passed down across generations. Despite historical attempts to erase the Taíno, their legacy lives on through stories, identity, and cultural pride in the Caribbean and beyond.

LESSON 22

Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Analyze cultural artifacts from the ancient Caribbean to make inferences about how geography and migration shaped Taíno daily life and culture.	Explain how geography and migration shaped Taíno daily life and culture, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students begin exploring how geography and migration shaped ancient Caribbean cultures by acting as “culture detectives” in a Gallery Walk. Working in pairs or trios, they analyze four Taíno artifacts, recording observations and inferences about daily life and the influence of island geography. This hands-on activity builds on prior knowledge, sparks curiosity about the Taíno, and introduces the cluster’s Supporting Question: *How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?* Students begin generating inquiry questions, which they will track on a class Inquiry Chart throughout the unit.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5a.4
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 22 Slide Deck
☐ Cultural Artifacts Gallery Walk
☐ Gallery Walk Note Catcher (Teacher Version)
☐ Gallery Walk Note Catcher
☐ Cluster 5 Inquiry Chart
☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Gallery Walk: Exploring Cultural Artifacts	30
Launching the Question	20

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Gallery Walk Note Catcher \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports note-taking skills
- [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists and supports students during the Inquiry Chart activity

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially during the Gallery Walk. Allow students to translate the questions. Suggest a couple of examples from the Question LLB for students to use on the Inquiry Chart.
- Look Fors: Phrases or short, simple sentences using the sentence starters provided should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words. Answers will most likely be translated or cocreated with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students can choose sentence starters from Question LLB to use when working on the Inquiry Chart. Encourage students to work with peers who can support them during the Gallery Walk as necessary.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound questions and sentences should use Tier 2 words and phrases. Answers may be co-created with peers.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete the activity independently.
- Look Fors: More detailed sentences should use Tier 2 and 3 academic vocabulary. Students should contribute to the class discussions.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Prepare the Gallery Walk activity. Print out at least one copy of four artifacts featured on [Cultural Artifacts Gallery Walk](#) (in color if possible). Post these images around the classroom for students to access easily.

Determine if you want to work with the Inquiry Chart on chart paper or digitally. You will need separate class copies for each class period. Students will also need to have their own copies to work with throughout the cluster, either digitally or printed.

Have each class period's Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart from Lesson 1 easily accessible.

Lesson 22: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

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🚩 Gallery Walk: Exploring Cultural Artifacts *(30 minutes)*

SPARK CURIOSITY

Slides 2–3: Share with students that they will be shifting their focus from Mesoamerica to the Caribbean. Use the maps on the slide to orient students to the fact that the Caribbean islands are separated from the mainland Americas by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

Then activate students' prior knowledge of how migration and geography affected human activity in earlier clusters and units while setting the stage for comparative thinking in this cluster.

Explain to students that today they will act as “culture detectives.”

- Students will start an investigation into the lives of a remarkable group of people who once lived in the Caribbean: the Taíno.
- Together they will explore clues from their world to figure out how geography and migration helped shape a powerful and lasting culture.

Slide 4: Facilitate a brief Think-Pair-Share activity to activate students' prior knowledge of the challenges of migration, applied to the unique region of the Caribbean.

Organize students into pairs or trios, and draw their attention to the map on the slide. Ask them to discuss the following:

- *What do you notice about where each language group lived?*
- *What do you notice about the geography of the Caribbean?*
- *What would make it challenging or possible to travel between these islands and the mainland?*

Then ask a few students to share out their ideas with the whole group. Possible responses:

- Language groups lived on different islands or areas separated by water.

Lesson 22: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

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- The Caribbean has many islands far apart, so boats would be needed to travel.
- Traveling between islands was difficult because of storms and ocean currents, but close islands made it easier.

Share with students that now that they have thought about how people got to the islands and what might have shaped their lives, they will participate in a Gallery Walk and look at some real objects left behind by the Taíno. As they move through the Gallery Walk, they will consider: *How might geography and migration have influenced how these people lived?*

Slide 5: Direct students' attention to the four artifacts posted around the classroom (see advanced preparation).

Distribute the [Gallery Walk Note Catcher](#) handout to pairs (or trios) of students. Ask students to discuss the following prompts at each artifact:

- *What do you see?*
- *What might this object tell us about how people lived?*
- *How does geography connect to this object?*

Ask students to record their observations and insights from their discussion on their handouts.

Provide 3–5 minutes per station, then ask students to rotate to visit another artifact.

Circulate the room and assist students where necessary. Reference the [Gallery Walk Note Catcher \(Teacher Version\)](#) to guide students in their observations and inferences.

After about 20 minutes, bring students together to debrief the Gallery Walk activity. Ask volunteers to share their thinking and reasoning with the group, and encourage students to add to their handouts as needed.

Explain to students that throughout this cluster, they will collect evidence about how the Taíno shaped Caribbean culture and why their legacy still matters.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Gallery Walk Note Catcher \(Sentence Starters\)](#) handout. Encourage students to reference the sentence starters to use for their discussions and written recordings.

Lesson 22: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

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Launching the Question (20 minutes)

INTRODUCE THE SUPPORTING QUESTION AND ELICIT INITIAL THINKING

Slide 6: Introduce the Cluster 5 Supporting Question:



How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

Slide 7: Introduce students to the [Cluster 5 Inquiry Chart](#) document.

- Remind students that the Inquiry Chart will continue to help them keep track of their ongoing learning and questions throughout the unit.
- Explain that historians ask many questions to understand and make sense of history and how it connects to the present day.
- Asking good questions starts with considering what they already know, which then helps them identify what they still need to explore and learn.

DEVELOP THE INQUIRY CHART

Ask: *What do you already know about this Supporting Question?*

- Prompt students to recall and share what they know about this topic from their initial work with the Unit 1 Know and Wonder Chart in Lesson 1 as well as previous learnings (Grade 6, Units 1–3, their lives, and/or other classes and resources).
- Possible responses: People have migrated across regions for thousands of years and brought their cultures and practices with them. Geography, such as islands, mountains, and rivers, can affect how people live, what they eat, and how they travel. Indigenous people adapted to their environments using local resources, and their culture often reflects their environment.

Ask: *Which of the questions we brainstormed in our Wonder column of the Know and Wonder Chart might relate to this Supporting Question?*



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Migration was a vocabulary word introduced in Unit 6.1, but it may be helpful to review that it means “movement from one place to another.”



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to utilize the [Question Language and Literacy Builder](#) to aid in their inquiry.

Lesson 22: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

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- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Student responses will vary based on their Wonder questions.

Ask: What other related questions can help us answer this Supporting Question?

- Prompt students to share their ideas in a Think-Pair-Share format.
- Possible responses: How did people travel to the Caribbean islands long ago? What tools or technology did they use to live in different environments? How did island geography affect their homes, food, and traditions? Why did different cultures develop in different places?

Invite students to share their questions with the whole class.

- Consolidate or synthesize questions related to the Supporting Question as needed so there are three to four representative questions.
- Add these three to four questions to the “What questions will we ask?” section of the class’s Inquiry Chart.
- Prompt students to record the questions on their own Inquiry Chart handouts.

PREVIEW THE LEARNING AHEAD

Share with students that in this cluster, they will use photographs, maps, videos, and readings to explore how unique cultures emerged in the Caribbean and draw conclusions about how geography and migration have impacted the population of this region.

Lesson 22: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

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Gallery Walk Note Catcher (Teacher Version)

Directions: As you participate in the Gallery Walk, examine each artifact carefully. For each artifact, record your observations (what you see directly) and your inferences (what you think the artifact might tell us about how people lived in the ancient Caribbean).

Artifact	Observations What do you see?	Inferences What might this object tell us about how people lived? How do you think geography (islands, water, landforms) might be related?
1	- Long, hollowed-out wooden canoe - Large enough for many people	- People may have used canoes for transportation, fishing, and trade between islands. - The geography of the Caribbean (islands, ocean) might have made water travel essential.
2	- Large open space outlined with stones - Set up in a rectangle	- Communities may have gathered for rituals, games, or ceremonies. - Public gathering spaces may have been important for social life. - Geography may have allowed flat land to be cleared for communal use.
3	- Small, carved object shaped like a rodent - Looks similar to a rattle	- People may have used the object in music or ceremonies, storytelling, or celebrations. - Access to natural materials like gourds or clay may have enabled making objects like this.
4	- Ring/circle-shaped carved stone - Decorative details	- People may have used this for a game or other ritual. - Geography may be related because there might be a cultural connection to sports across island and mainland geography.

LESSON 23

How Movement Shaped the Caribbean

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Analyze how migration and geography shaped Taíno culture by examining language, artifacts, and daily life practices using primary and secondary sources.	Explain how migration and geography shaped Taino culture, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore how migration and geography shaped life in the ancient Caribbean, focusing on the Taíno, one of the region’s major Indigenous groups. Students then delve deeper by analyzing primary and secondary sources in a digital learning activity, investigating how Taíno beliefs, governance, rituals, and social structures were influenced by their migration patterns and the Caribbean’s physical geography.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5a.4
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 23 Slide Deck ☐ Taíno History, Beliefs, and Way of Life Student Slide Deck ☐ Taíno Note Catcher ☐ Taino Note Catcher (Teacher Version)

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Migration Review	5
Investigating Sources: Taíno History, Beliefs, and Way of Life	45

Lesson 23: How Movement Shaped the Caribbean

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Taíno Note Catcher \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports the collection of evidence, note-taking, and written responses
- [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) Assists and supports students with the Connect section of their work on the Note Catcher

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- When modeling the activity, be sure to write sample answers on the board so students can copy them down and use them as a guide. Consider giving students a copy of the slides with keywords/phrases highlighted for them to write in their notes. Allow students at this level to watch the video on Topic 6 with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Students may not complete all six topics, so encourage them to add to their notes during class discussion with help from a peer.
- Look Fors: Appropriate words or short phrases that are copied from the video or slides in their notes. Students will be unlikely to contribute to the class discussion, but with support should add key words to their notes. Answers will be mostly translated or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Allow students at this level to watch the video on Topic 6 with headphones to slow down and use subtitles. Students at this level may not complete all six topics, so encourage them to add to their notes during class discussion.
- Look Fors: Notes using the sentence frames provided should include Tier 2 vocabulary. Some words may be copied from the slides. Students may need support to contribute to class discussions.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this activity mostly independently.
- Look Fors: Notes should include more detail. Students should use a combination of words from the slides and their own words. Students should contribute to class discussions.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Secure digital devices for students to use to access the [Taíno History, Beliefs, and Way of Life Student Slide Deck](#).

Lesson 23: How Movement Shaped the Caribbean

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Migration Review (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Review the concept of migration, and reintroduce the Taíno.

- Explain to students that today they will investigate the Caribbean region of both the ancient past and the present day.
- We will focus especially on *one* Indigenous group (of several) that inhabited the Caribbean islands beginning around 300 BCE: the Taíno.
- Like the Maya, this Indigenous community experienced great hardship and struggle when the Spanish came. But their cultural traditions continue today in parts of the Caribbean and in the many places that Caribbean people have migrated to in the US, including our state of Massachusetts.
- Explain that we will first learn about Taíno culture by studying a variety of resources in order to better understand aspects of their way of life.



MAKE CONNECTIONS

Migration was a vocabulary word introduced in Unit 6.1, but it may be helpful to review that it means “movement from one place to another.”



Investigating Sources: Taíno History, Beliefs, and Way of Life (45 minutes)

INTRODUCE PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Explain to students that they will work to learn more about the Taíno in this next activity using a Student Slide Deck and a note catcher.

Distribute the [Taíno Note Catcher](#).

Slide 3: Introduce the directions briefly. As students work through the Student Slide Deck, they will follow the Investigating Sources routine prompts.

- Observe: Scan the source and take notes on the type (primary/secondary) and any document features.
- Read: Read closely and record notes on the main ideas of the text.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [Taíno Note Catcher \(Sentence Frames\)](#).

Lesson 23: How Movement Shaped the Caribbean

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OBSERVE THE DOCUMENT'S FEATURES

Slides 4–6: Share that you will model the first topic for the group. Have students locate the Origins section on their note catcher. Then ask: *What type of source is this? What document features are there?*

Have students record their ideas on their handout. Possible responses:

- The text and map are secondary sources.
- There is a header, text, and a map image.

READ THE DOCUMENT

Continue modeling by reading the text on **Slide 4** aloud. Then ask: *What are some of the main ideas of the text?*

Again, have students record their ideas on their handout. Possible responses:

- There were many waves of migration to the Caribbean islands, both from North America and South America.
- The Taino people are descendants of Arawak-speaking people from South America.

Explain that students should use short phrases rather than full sentences.

- Provide students with the option to work in pairs or independently.
- Ensure students have digital access to the [Taíno History, Beliefs, and Way of Life Student Slide Deck](#).

Prompt students to begin their research either independently or in pairs using the Student Slide Deck to complete their note catcher handout.

Circulate the room to support students' comprehension and pacing as needed. You can refer to the [Taino Note Catcher \(Teacher Version\)](#) to support this.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

An option for differentiating this lesson is to further limit the required topics. Or you may pair or group students according to class needs.

CONNECT TO OUR QUESTION

Slide 7: With about 10 minutes left in class, bring students back together as a whole group. Direct students to the Part 2 section of the handout.

Ask students to draw conclusions based on what they saw and read, and connect to the Supporting Question by asking: *What do these sources reveal about how migration or geography shaped Taíno culture?*

Give students a few minutes to talk out their ideas with an elbow partner and record their ideas for each source on their handout.

Ask for a few volunteers to share out their ideas with the whole group, and encourage students to add to their handouts as needed. You can refer to the Teacher Version to support this.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage students to use the [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) as they complete the “Connect” section of their note catcher.

Taino Note Catcher (Teacher Version)

Part 1 Directions: Use the Taíno History, Beliefs, and Way of Life Student Slide Deck to help you learn about Taíno history, beliefs, and ways of life. As you read and analyze a series of sources, collect evidence and information in the Graphic Organizer below.

- **Observe:** Scan the source and take notes on the type (primary or secondary) and any document features.
- **Read:** Read closely and record notes on the main ideas of the text. Be sure to look at any included images for more information.

Topic # and name	Observe: Take notes on the type of source and document features.	Read: Take notes on the main ideas.
1. Origins	Source type: Secondary Document features: • Historical summary with illustrations • Map showing migration routes • Captions describe Taíno origins and cultural influences	• Tools and farming techniques • Beliefs and spiritual practices • Language and oral traditions • Knowledge of canoe building and sea navigation
2. Technology	Source type: Primary (excerpt from Columbus's journal) and secondary (analysis/explanation) Document features: • Quote from Columbus • Sketch of a Taíno canoe • Explanatory text	• Columbus described them as large and skillfully made with some capable of carrying dozens of people. • He was impressed by their speed and craftsmanship. • The Taíno used wood from local trees to build canoes. • They skillfully adapted to island life by using natural resources for travel, trade, and fishing.
3. Villages, homes, and daily life	Source type: Secondary Document features: • Text describing the structure of a Taíno village • Photograph of a reconstructed bohío	• Homes were made from palm leaves, wood, and other natural materials found in the environment. • Structures were built to withstand tropical storms and heat. • Their round houses (bohíos) used tree trunks and woven palm for walls and roofs, showing advanced use of available materials.

Topic # and name	Observe: Take notes on the type of source and document features.	Read: Take notes on the main ideas.
4. Government and leadership	Source type: Secondary Document features: - Text describing political structure - Photograph of a <i>duho</i>, ceremonial wooden stool	- Chiefs (called caciques) were often chosen from powerful families and inherited leadership. - Their role was to organize food distribution, manage conflict, lead ceremonies, and make decisions for the village. - Smaller, independent islands benefited from local leadership suited to their unique environments and needs.
5. Batey and play	Source type: Secondary Document features: - Text explanation of the ancient game - Photographs of batey fields - Artifact photos with carvings	- Cultural exchange may have occurred through trade or migration. - Similar geographic features and social practices may have inspired similar games. - The game may have had ceremonial or religious importance in both cultures. - Rectangular or oval playing fields marked with stones; patterns carved into stones or posts; Images of animals, humans, or spirits may be seen in decorations. - Ballparks were made of stone, clay, and packed earth; there were wood and carvings for markers or symbols. - Bateyes were not just for fun—they were ceremonial spaces. - They reflected values like teamwork, spirituality, and honoring ancestors.
6. Beliefs and stories	Source type: Secondary Document features: Video clip	- The story includes caves, oceans, islands, and natural elements common to the Caribbean. - It shows how the Taíno saw nature (like the sun and water) as sacred and central to life.

Part 2 Directions: Review your notes from each section above and use them to connect your learnings to the Supporting Question.

Topic # and name	Connect: What do these sources reveal about how migration or geography shaped Taíno culture?
1. Origins	Migrants brought essential knowledge and cultural traditions with them. These practices helped form the foundation of Taíno life and show how ideas and technology spread across regions through movement.
2. Technology	The Taíno adapted to their island geography by mastering canoe building, using their environment for transportation and trade. This highlights how geography shaped their technology and daily needs.
3. Villages, homes, and daily life	Taíno homes were directly shaped by their environment—they made smart architectural choices that responded to the tropical climate and materials available to them.
4. Government and leadership	Their decentralized leadership reflected island geography—each community could be self-governing, showing how isolation shaped political structures.
5. Batey and play	Similar games across Mesoamerica suggest the movement of people and ideas. Shared geography and beliefs may have led to similar traditions developing across regions. The design and decoration of bateyes show they were more than sports arenas—they were spiritual and cultural gathering spaces, showing how culture and beliefs were tied to place.
6. Beliefs and stories	Their origin stories were rooted in local geography, reflecting how the environment influenced their beliefs. The land and sea were central to their identity and spiritual worldview.

LESSON 24

Legacies of Taíno Culture Today

EQ How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

SQ How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Analyze how elements of Taíno culture have survived and continue to shape identity and traditions in the Caribbean today.

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE

Summarize how elements of Taíno culture have survived and continue to shape identity and traditions in the Caribbean today, orally and in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students explore how Taíno culture endures in the modern Caribbean and continues to shape language, identity, and tradition despite centuries of colonial oppression. Building on previous lessons about cultural continuity, students engage with a video clip by Taína folklorist Irka Mateo that highlights surviving cultural elements such as farming practices, music, and language. Through class discussion and a concentric circles activity, students analyze contemporary expressions of Taíno heritage and connect these ideas to their own experiences of legacy. This lesson helps students challenge narratives of cultural erasure, recognize the resilience of Indigenous communities, and develop a deeper understanding of how history lives on in everyday life.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5a.4

See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 24 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Taíno Word Cards](#)
- ☐ [Taíno Legacies Today](#)
- ☐ [Taíno Legacies Today \(Teacher Version\)](#)
- ☐ [Taíno Words: Clues to the Past](#)
- ☐ [Taíno Words: Clues to the Past \(Teacher Version\)](#)

VOCABULARY

legacy

Lesson 24: Legacies of Taíno Culture Today

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LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Words as a Window into Taíno Culture	10
We Are Still Here: Taíno Legacies Today	25
Concentric Circle Activity: Reflecting on Legacy	15

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Taíno Legacies Today \(Sentence Starters\)](#) Supports written responses to prompts
- [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) Helps make connections to the cluster's Supporting Question

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Consider giving them a translated copy of the transcript of the video with the key words/phrases bolded and italicized. Allow students to work with a peer to complete responses about the video and Parts 2 and 3. For the Concentric Circles activity, consider giving students sample answers in the form of simple sentences for them to read aloud, or have them work with a peer on their answers before the activity begins.
- Look Fors: Student responses should include relevant Tier 1 and 2 words and words from the video and texts. Students can read their sentences during the Concentric Circles. Answers will likely be mostly translated or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students at this level may need support with the video questions and would benefit from having a transcript and working with a peer. Encourage students to use the sentence starters for the Concentric Circles activity.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound sentences should include more relevant Tier 2 words, words from the video, and their own words.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to complete this task mostly independently.
- Look Fors: Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail.

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**ADVANCE PREPARATION**

Print and cut apart several copies of the [Taíno Word Cards](#) resource. There are ten cards with words and ten cards with icons; separate these and hold the picture pack aside as the activity begins. Print enough for students to work in pairs or trios with a flashcard pack for each group.

Be sure to preview the film that you will screen in this lesson, "[How Taíno Culture Affects Us Today](#)" from Pero Like. It was made specifically for youth audiences. It reinforces, in a lively manner, some points learned in previous lessons on cultural continuity.

Be aware that the speaker addresses atrocities against the Taíno people. The speaker opens and closes briefly using Spanish (with English subtitles). It's recommended you include one or both of these segments since her use of Spanish is an important clue for students about the message and purpose of the film.

Words as a Window into Taíno Culture (10 minutes)

Explain to students that we will continue to learn about Taíno culture by studying some of their words and their deeper meanings.

**MAKE CONNECTIONS**

Words are more than just words. Social scientists know that language reveals much about a community's history, beliefs, and experiences. Historians often study how words move between languages, which can reflect patterns of migration. Vocabulary and expressions also show what people valued, feared, or paid attention to in their environment.

Divide students into pairs or trios. Distribute the [Taíno Words: Clues to the Past](#) handout to the groups along with the ten Taíno words cards from the [Taíno Word Cards](#) set.

Explain to students that they will have 2 minutes to guess the English meaning of as many of these words as they can and record their guesses on their handout.

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Then distribute the 10 image cards from the [Taíno Word Cards](#) set to each group. Explain that they will have 3 minutes to verify or revise their guesses. Set a timer for 3 minutes.

Bring student groups back together to discuss word meanings as a class. Quickly go over each word and its meaning using the [Taíno Words: Clues to the Past \(Teacher Version\)](#).

Slide 2: Then explain to students that they will think about what each word could reveal about the Taino in the ancient past. Model an example:

Canoa

English meaning: canoe

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past: The Taino might have used the Caribbean Sea that surrounded them, and the canoe could have been their form of transportation.

Give students about 5 minutes to discuss their ideas with an elbow partner and work on recording their responses on their handouts.

Close by asking a few students to share their sentences. Push students to critically think about what larger story these words tell us. Again, you can refer to the [Taíno Words: Clues to the Past \(Teacher Version\)](#) to support students' thinking.

At your discretion, have students tackle the “challenge question” at the bottom of the page.

**TEACHING TIP**

If needed, provide this hint: Many are similar to words we use in Spanish and English today though a few have no obvious relationship to English words.

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We Are Still Here: Taíno Legacies Today

(25 minutes)



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The Taíno were devastated by Spanish colonization through Spanish diseases, violence, cruelty, and oppression. For centuries, historians and government leaders thought that the Taíno were extinct. But this proved to be untrue. Spanish and Taíno people produced children, most often through force and violence, but this intermingling carried the population forward. Over time, across the Caribbean and its many islands, some Caribbean people kept the stories and practices of their Indigenous culture alive.

Recently, several genetic researchers have used DNA to prove what many suspected: that a large portion of the people who live today on the Caribbean islands still have Taíno ancestry. This has led to more interest and pride in Taíno culture today, especially among a new generation of Caribbean people who have ties to this heritage.

Slide 3: Explain to students that today, they will explore the present-day cultural legacies that Taíno people have carried forward from their history. Share with students that this is a new vocabulary word for this lesson: *legacy*.

- Say the word: *legacy*.
- Use the word in context: *The Taíno people left a legacy of farming and language that is still part of Caribbean life today.*
- Share the student-friendly definition: (*noun*) *something that is passed down from the past to the present.*
- Engage with the word: *Some options include inviting students to provide additional examples, restate the definition in their own words, or answer a question using the word. Encourage multilingual learners to translate the word into their home language.*
- Highlight the word's features: *Legacy is a noun. Legacies is the plural of legacy.*

Lesson 24: Legacies of Taíno Culture Today

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**LEARN MORE**

For further context on Taíno ancestry, see the article "[Meet the Survivors of a 'Paper Genocide'](#)" from National Geographic.

Slide 4: Prior to showing a video clip, explain who Irka Mateo is (a Taína folklorist and musician) and what students will see: a timeline from the origins of the Taíno to Spanish conquest to modern cultural legacies.

Distribute the [Taíno Legacies Today](#) handout to all students. Briefly review the directions for Part 1.

Play the video, "How Taíno Culture Affects Us Today," (5:44) by Pero Like.

Pause to check in with students at the following points:

- 2:24
- 3:06
- 5:44

At the 2:24 pausing point, ask: *What did the Spanish try to take away and destroy?* Have students respond popcorn-style or as a Turn and Talk. Possible responses:

- The Spanish tried to take away not only people's lives and freedom but also their daily life practices, religion, and languages.
- They also tried to erase the Taíno people's culture and stop them from passing their traditions to future generations.

At the 3:06 pausing point, ask: *What Taíno cultural elements survived?* Again, have students respond popcorn-style or as a Turn and Talk. Possible responses:

- Language
- Farming
- Music
- Instruments
- Canoes
- Housing style

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide MLs with a scaffolded version of the [Taíno Legacies Today \(Sentence Starters\)](#) handout prior to playing the video clip. Encourage students to utilize the sentence starters provided.

Lesson 24: Legacies of Taíno Culture Today

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- Ways of living with nature
- Identity

At the 5:44 pausing point, ask: *Why did Irka Mateo create this video? Who is the audience, and what message is she trying to share?* Again, have students respond popcorn-style or as a Turn and Talk. Possible responses:

- She has a strong sense of identity and pride for her culture.
- She wants to spread her knowledge of the Taíno people.
- The video aims to educate both islanders and a broader audience about Taíno heritage.

Prompt students to complete Part 2 of the handout.

- Provide time for students to complete this activity independently or with a classmate.
- Review the answers briefly, and allow students to correct their work.

Finally, prompt students to complete Part 3 of the handout involving the same set of sources and the Supporting Question.

- Provide time for students to complete this activity independently or with a classmate.
- Review the answers briefly, and allow students to correct their work.

Slide 5: Display a quote from Jarina de Marco. Explain that she is a young Caribbean-American (Dominican) musician who has worked hard to learn Taíno traditions from her mother, Irka Mateo.

Slide 6: In pairs or table groups, ask students to discuss the following prompts:

- *Why does Jarina care about her Taíno heritage?*
- *What metaphor does she use, and what does it tell us about her feelings?*



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to utilize their [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) to help make connections to the cluster's Supporting Question.



TEACHING TIP

To make the quote more vivid, you can play a short segment (1:20 to 2:25) of the BESE film about this mother-daughter pair, "[Honoring Taíno Traditions with Jarina de Marco](#)," from which the quote is taken.

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Possible responses:

- Jarina cares because she wants to keep her family's culture alive.
- She feels proud of her Taíno roots and wants to share them with others.
- The metaphor she uses shows that Taíno culture is like a seed that grows stronger over time.
- Her feelings show that the culture is important for her identity and connection to her family.

Concentric Circle Activity: Reflecting on Legacy *(15 minutes)*

Slide 7: To debrief the legacies of Taíno culture today, facilitate the concentric circles discussion.

Review the directions with students prior to forming the physical circles of students within the classroom:

- Stand in two concentric circles. The students' inside and outside circles should face one another so that each student is standing across from a partner.
- Each set of partners will receive a question to discuss for 5 minutes. Both students share and listen.
- Once the timer goes off, students in the inner circle move one spot to their right.
- We will repeat this style of discussion for another two rounds to learn about various global issues and your proposed solutions.

Help to facilitate this movement in an efficient manner so that each of the two circles has an even (or close to even) number of students.

- Explain that students in the outside circle will face those who are standing in the inner circle. Students should face another classmate. (In the case of an uneven number, designate one "area" of the classroom that will require three students to discuss.)
- Each set of partners will answer discussion questions displayed one at a time on the board. You may want to designate an amount of time for each discussion question.

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- Encourage students to refer to their notes to provide textual evidence to support their answers.

Slide 8: Prompt students to discuss the question on the board with their partner: *What is one Taíno legacy that stood out to you, and how might it have been influenced by geography or migration?* Possible responses:

- The canoe is a Taíno legacy that shows how they traveled between islands. Because the Caribbean is made up of many islands, they needed boats to migrate and share culture.
- Farming is a Taíno legacy that was shaped by the land and climate. They grew crops that fit the environment of the Caribbean islands.
- The Taíno word for “barbecue” is still used in English today, showing how language can survive over time.
- The revival of Taíno ceremonies and identity shows that Indigenous cultures continue to resist erasure.

General guidance:

- Ask students to cite examples from the video, article, or class notes.
- Encourage partners to explain why the legacy matters to them or what they found surprising.

Consider using a timer to manage student progression through and engagement with the discussion questions.

When the time is up for each question, have students in the inner circle move one position to their right.

Slide 9: Students should now be paired up with a new classmate.

Repeat the process for the next question: *What is something your family or community has passed down that feels like a legacy to you?* Possible responses:

- A traditional food or recipe that’s cooked on holidays or family gatherings
- A cultural tradition, story, or saying passed down from grandparents or ancestors



TEACHING TIP

To ensure ML students are successful during the concentric circles discussion, explicitly preview the sentence frames on each slide before each round begins. Encourage students to refer to the slide during each round. For additional support, consider partnering multilingual learners with peers who speak the same home language or with strong modeling skills.

Lesson 24: Legacies of Taíno Culture Today

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General guidance:

- Encourage students to make connections between their lives and what they've learned about cultural survival.
- Validate diverse forms of legacy—whether cultural, linguistic, spiritual, or otherwise.

Slide 10: Ask students to rotate one last time and to pair up with a new classmate.

Repeat the process for the final question: *Why do you think it's important to keep learning and talking about the legacies of Indigenous cultures today?* Possible responses:

- It helps us understand the resilience of Indigenous peoples and challenges the myth that they "disappeared."
- Learning these stories promotes respect, justice, and visibility for Indigenous communities.

General guidance:

- Ask students to reflect on how Indigenous stories and legacies are often left out of mainstream history.
- Challenge students to consider their role in recognizing and honoring these stories.

Lesson 24: Legacies of Taíno Culture Today

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Taíno Legacies Today (Teacher Version)

Part 1 Directions: As you watch Pero Like's video, "How Taíno Culture Affects Us Today," listen for important examples of how Taíno culture lives on today.

1. What did the Spanish try to take away and destroy? (2:24)

- Their land and freedom (enslaved, mistreated, abused)
- Their rights
- Their religion and spiritual beliefs
- Their language and daily traditions

2. What Taíno cultural elements survived? (3:06)

- Words in Spanish from Taíno language (e.g., hurricane, barbecue, canoe)
- Traditional farming practices and foods like cassava/yuca and maize
- Musical instruments like maracas and güiro
- Use of canoes and other transportation methods
- Housing styles such as bohíos
- Deep respect for nature in their way of life
- Strong cultural identity and pride among descendants

3. Why did Irka Mateo create this video? Who is the audience, and what message is she trying to share? (5:44)

- Irka Mateo is proud of her Taíno identity and wants to share that with others.
- She is a Taína folklorist, musician, singer, and songwriter.
- She created the video to share and preserve the cultural legacy of the Taíno people.
- Her message is for both Caribbean islanders and a broader audience—she wants everyone to understand that the Taíno people and their culture are still alive today.
- She wants young people, especially those with Caribbean heritage, to feel proud of their roots and understand that Taíno culture is still alive today.

Part 2 Directions: Identify different types of sources that help us learn about the past. There are two main types of sources:

- **Primary source:** a firsthand account from the time or person involved
- **Secondary source:** a retelling or explanation by someone who was not there

Look at each item below. Decide if it is a primary source (P) or secondary source (S) by circling the correct letter.

Description of source	Is it primary (P) or secondary (S)?
A video made by Irka Mateo, who is Taína	P / S (She is part of the culture and shares firsthand knowledge.)
A history textbook about the Spanish conquest	P / S (It's written by historians, not someone who lived through the event.)
A Taíno musical performance recorded last year	P / S (It's a firsthand performance showing living cultural traditions.)
An article from <i>National Geographic</i> about DNA research	P / S (It's a summary of scientific research, not a firsthand account.)
An old tool made of obsidian used by the Taíno people	P / S (It is a physical artifact from the time of the Taíno.)

Part 3 Directions: Looking at the same sources, which sources would be most helpful to answer the Supporting Question: *How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?*

Description of source	Would this source be helpful to understand how migration and geography shaped ancient Caribbean cultures like the Taíno? Why or why not?
A video made by Irka Mateo, who is Taína	Yes / No because... This video shows how Taíno culture was shaped by island life, nature, and movement across the Caribbean.
A history textbook about the Spanish conquest	Yes / No because... This textbook focuses on Spanish actions, not how the Taíno culture was shaped before that.
A Taíno musical performance recorded last year	Yes / No because... The music helps us see how traditions passed through generations and were shaped by their surroundings.
An article from <i>National Geographic</i> about DNA research	Yes / No because... The article explains where the Taíno people came from and how they moved through the islands.
An old tool made of obsidian used by the Taíno people	Yes / No because... The tool shows how people used natural materials from the land to live and survive.

Taíno Words: Clues to the Past (Teacher Version)

Directions: For each Taíno word, write your guess for what it means in English. Match up the words and pictures on the cards to determine the actual English words. Then explain what the word tells us about where or how the Taíno people lived in the ancient past.

barbacoa

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- barbeque

What this word might tell us about the Taíno in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have cooked food this way.

bohio

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- house

What this word might tell us about the Taíno in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have built homes using natural materials, reflecting their adaptation to the tropical island environment.

cacique

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- chief

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have had an organized system of leadership and government, with chiefs overseeing communities.

canoa

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- canoe

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have used the Caribbean Sea that surrounded them, and the canoe could have been their form of transportation.

hamaca

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- hammock

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have used hammocks and other woven materials to create furniture suited to the warm climate.

hurucán

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- hurricane

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have experienced powerful storms and named them, reflecting their close connection to and understanding of nature.

iguana

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- iguana

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have shared their environment with unique animals, and their names for these creatures were passed on to others.

mahiz

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- Maize (corn)

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taino might have used maize as a major crop and food source, showing the importance of farming in Taíno society.

manatí

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- manatee

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have been familiar with sea creatures and may have relied on them for food or had stories about them in their culture.

zavana

English meaning guess:

- Student responses will vary.

Actual English meaning:

- savanna (grassy plain)

What this word might tell us about the Taino in the ancient past:

- The Taíno might have lived in areas with open grasslands and knew how to survive in different types of natural environments.

Challenge question: What are some ideas you have about why or how these words became a part of English-speaking vocabulary?

Student responses will vary. Possible response:

- These words entered English because the Spanish borrowed them from the Taíno when they arrived in the Caribbean. Later, English speakers adopted the words as they also explored or colonized the region. The words describe plants, animals, weather, tools, and traditions that Europeans hadn't encountered before, so they kept the original Taíno terms.

LESSON 25

Formative Assessment

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Synthesize information about how migration and geography shaped the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean.	Explain how migration and geography shaped the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean, in writing.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students synthesize their learning from Cluster 5 to respond to the Supporting Question: *How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?* The lesson begins with students gathering key materials they have used throughout the cluster to serve as reference tools. Students then revisit the Inquiry Chart created in previous lessons to summarize their learning through discussion and reflection. Using a Think-Pair-Share format, they recall key ideas and identify evidence from their materials that help answer the Supporting Question. The lesson culminates in a Formative Assessment Task in which students select two sources, explain their usefulness, and write a paragraph citing text evidence to demonstrate how migration and geography influenced ancient Caribbean cultures.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, 6.T5a.1, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5a.4
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 25 Slide Deck ☐ Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task ☐ Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version) ☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart ☐ Lesson 22: Unit 4 Cluster 5 Inquiry Chart

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Materials and Resource Organization	5
Putting it Together	15
Formative Assessment	30

Lesson 25: Formative Assessment

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Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports the collection of evidence and written responses
- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Support students during the Putting It Together routine

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible. Consider allowing students to work with a peer and/or use translation for the Formative Assessment Task. Consider allowing students at this level to translate questions and sentence frames and have a word bank, especially for the picture analysis.
- Look Fors: Simple sentences should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases. Students may copy from their notes to create their sentences. Answers will likely be mostly translated or co-created with a peer.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible, especially in discussion activities. Students should use the Sentence Frames scaffold. Students may need support finding all of the information for the Formative Assessment Task.
- Look Fors: Simple and compound sentences should use more relevant Tier 2 words, words from their notes, and their own words. Students should be able to write at least five sentences for their paragraph.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students can use the sentence frames as a guide if necessary but should be able to write their own sentences independently. Encourage students to contribute to and take additional notes during the discussions.
- Look Fors: Compound and complex sentences should include more precise academic Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary and a greater level of detail. Students should be able to write multiple sentences for each part of the Formative Assessment Task, including a well-organized paragraph of at least seven sentences.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Have each class period's Unit 4 Cluster 5 Inquiry Chart and Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart easily accessible.

Ensure students have their handouts from the cluster's previous lessons easily accessible.

Lesson 25: Formative Assessment

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Materials and Resource Organization (5 minutes)

Slide 2: Begin the lesson by having students collect and organize their materials and resources from the cluster to use as a reference during the Putting It Together and Formative Assessment Tasks. These materials include:

- **Gallery Walk Note Catcher handout**
- **Taino Note Catcher handout**
- **Taino Words: Clues to the Past handout**
- **Taino Legacies Today handout**

Tell students they are encouraged to use all of these reference tools to support their work in today's lesson.



Putting it Together (15 minutes)

Explain that today, students are going to return to the Cluster 5 Supporting Question and “put together” what they have learned so far about the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean.

Slides 3–4: Display the **Unit 4 Cluster 5 Inquiry Chart** that the class created in Lesson 22, and remind students of the Cluster 5 Supporting Question:



How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

SUMMARIZE OUR LEARNING AND SHARE OUR INITIAL THINKING

Ask: *What resources did we use in Lessons 22–24?*

Have students discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format, and then call on a few students to share their responses. Possible responses:

- **Gallery Walk Note Catcher handout**
- **Taino Note Catcher handout**
- **Taino Words: Clues to the Past handout**



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to refer to their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) handout to support this step of the Putting It Together routine.

Lesson 25: Formative Assessment

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- **Taino Legacies Today handout**

Review the activities from the cluster's lessons in the "What did we do?" column. After reading each lesson's summary, ask students to turn and talk about what they learned in that lesson.

SYNTHESIZE OUR IDEAS AND ANSWER THE SUPPORTING QUESTION

Ask: What did we learn that helps us answer our Supporting Question?

Give students time to discuss in a Think-Pair-Share format once more. Possible responses:

- The Taíno migrated from South America to the Caribbean islands. This movement helped spread their language, farming, and beliefs to different islands like Puerto Rico and Hispaniola.
- The Caribbean's geography—its islands, forests, and oceans—influenced how the Taíno lived. They built canoes for travel, fished in the ocean, and used natural resources like palm trees and stones to build homes and tools.
- Migration led to the blending of cultures. As the Taíno moved and met other groups, they shared ideas, food, and words, which helped shape a unique island culture.

When student groups share with the whole class, record their responses in the "What did we learn?" column of the Inquiry Chart. Prompt students to record this information on their own handouts.

RETURN TO THE INQUIRY CHART

Finally, revisit the questions students added to the Inquiry Chart in Lesson 22 as part of their Launching the Question routine as well as questions from the Wonder column of the **Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart** from Lesson 1.

Ask: Have any of these questions been answered? Have any new questions come up?

Give students a few minutes to share their thinking and ideas with the whole group.

Lesson 25: Formative Assessment

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STAMP THE KEY LEARNING

**Formative Assessment** (30 minutes)

Slide 5: Explain to students that they will now engage in the final step of the Putting It Together routine by engaging in a Formative Assessment Task and working to determine which sources help us best understand the influence of geography and migration on ancient Caribbean cultures.

- Distribute the [Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task](#) handout. Explain that this Formative Assessment will consolidate our learning from the unit's fifth cluster, assessing our sourcing and analysis skills.
- Explain that they will utilize our past resources to make a claim about ancient Caribbean society.

Preview the two parts of the assessment with students, and read the directions aloud:

- Part 1: Analyze two images related to the Taino people, and answer the corresponding questions. Students have previously viewed the first artifact, but the second artifact will be brand new to them.
- Part 2: Cite evidence from the artifacts as they answer our Supporting Question: *How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?*

Prompt students to begin working. Be sure to move around the room to support students as needed. You can refer to the [Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task \(Teacher Version\)](#) handout.

Lesson 25: Formative Assessment

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**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

Provide ML students with the [Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task \(Sentence Frames\)](#). Also, encourage them to utilize the [Connect Language and Literacy Builder](#) to assist in making connections.

Lesson 25: Formative Assessment

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Cluster 5 Formative Assessment Task (Teacher Version)

Part 1: Artifact Analysis

Directions: Analyze the two images below, and answer the corresponding questions.



Taino canoe. Image by Unknown author via The Louverture Project is in the public domain.

1. What do you see in this image? Describe what the people are doing.

People are paddling a canoe together across water. They look like they are traveling or working as a group.

2. What materials do you think were used to build this?

The canoe was likely made from a large hollowed-out tree trunk or wood. The Taíno people may have used stone tools to carve it.

3. Why might canoes have been important to the Taíno people who lived on islands?

Canoes helped the Taíno travel between islands, trade, fish, and explore. Since they lived on islands, canoes were necessary for survival and communication.

4. How does this artifact connect to the migration of Indigenous people in the Caribbean?

It shows how the Taíno and other Indigenous groups moved between islands. Canoes helped them spread their culture and settle in new areas.



Deity Figure (Zemí). Image courtesy of The Met is in the public domain.

1. What material is this zemí (spiritual figure) made of?

It is carved from stone most likely. The figure may also have included other natural materials like shell or wood.

2. Why do you think the Taíno created religious or spiritual objects like this?

The Taíno created objects like this to represent spirits, ancestors, or gods that were important in their religion. These objects were used in ceremonies and to protect homes.

3. What can this artifact tell us about Taíno beliefs or daily life?

The Taíno had a strong belief system based on nature and spiritual forces. Religion was part of daily life and connected to the environment.

4. How might the natural resources of the Caribbean islands have influenced how this figure was made?

The Taíno used stone and other local materials that were easy to find on the islands. Their tools and environment shaped how they carved spiritual figures.

Part 2: Reflecting on the History Behind Artifacts

Directions: Write a paragraph response to the Supporting Question: *How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?*

In your response:

- Use evidence from both artifacts (the sketching and the sandstone figure).
- Explain how the geography of the Caribbean (such as islands, ocean, and forests) and the movement of people influenced Taíno culture.

Student answers will vary. Possible response:

- Migration and geography played a major role in shaping the culture of the ancient Taíno people. The Taíno built canoes from large tree trunks, which allowed them to travel across the sea, connect with other islands, and expand their communities. Living on separate islands made water travel essential for trade, communication, and survival. The zemí, a carved stone figure representing a spiritual being, shows how the Taíno used local resources to express their religious beliefs. Together these artifacts demonstrate how the natural environment of the Caribbean (forests, islands, and ocean) directly influenced how the Taíno lived, moved, and created cultural traditions.

Key points to look for:

- Evidence from both artifacts (canoe and zemí)
- Mention of islands, ocean, natural materials, or migration
- Explanation of how geography and movement influenced culture, beliefs, or daily life

LESSON 26

Unit Synthesis

EQ	How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?
SQ	How did migration and geography shape the unique cultures of the ancient Caribbean?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE	LANGUAGE OBJECTIVE
Use the Know and Wonder and Inquiry Charts to identify important takeaway learnings from each cluster of the unit.	Synthesize important takeaway learnings of the unit, orally.

LESSON OVERVIEW

In the synthesis lesson, students reflect on their learnings throughout the unit. They first revisit their Unit 4 Inquiry Charts in order to discuss and identify one big takeaway per cluster. They then revisit the Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart. Students consider the Essential Question, *How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?* and discuss what questions from the Wonder column they can now answer. The lesson closes with an optional Content Assessment or flexible review time.

LESSON STANDARDS

PS 3, PS 5, PS 7, 6.T5a.3, 6.T5a.4, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1
See full text of standards in the Cluster Overview.

MATERIALS
☐ Lesson 26 Slide Deck
☐ The Americas Content Assessment (Teacher Version)
☐ The Americas Content Assessment
☐ The Americas Content Assessment (Sentence Frames)
☐ Unit 4 Clusters 1–5 Inquiry Charts
☐ Lesson 1: Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Component	Time
Revisit the Unit’s Charts	20
Flexible Review or Assessment Time	30

Lesson 26: Unit Synthesis

Plan for English Learner Success

The following scaffolds can support all students in achieving the lesson objectives:

- [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) Support students' summaries of unit learnings
- [The Americas Content Assessment \(Sentence Frames\)](#) Supports the collection of evidence and written responses

The following strategies can help students at different proficiency levels achieve the lesson objectives:

English Proficiency Levels 1-2:

- Pair students with a language-proficient peer if possible during the activities and discussions. Allow students to prepare and read simple sentences in the discussions.
- [Look Fors](#): Responses should use relevant Tier 1 and 2 words or phrases from the materials and the sentence starters provided on the Summarize LLB. Responses will likely be mostly translated.

English Proficiency Levels 3-4:

- Students can use peer support as appropriate when reviewing unit materials and discussing.
- [Look Fors](#): Simple and compound sentences using the sentence starters on the Summarize LLB should include more relevant Tier 2 words from the materials.

English Proficiency Levels 5-6:

- Students should be able to contribute to their group and the discussion about the unit.
- [Look Fors](#): Compound and complex sentences should use more precise academic Tier 3 vocabulary. Oral responses should include a greater level of detail.



ADVANCE PREPARATION

Ensure that each class period's Unit 4 Inquiry Charts and Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart are easily accessible.

Revisit the Unit's Charts (20 minutes)

Slide 2: Review the Unit's Essential Question.

- Remind students of the Unit's Essential Question: *How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?*

Lesson 26: Unit Synthesis

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- Inform students that they will be working to answer this question in today's unit synthesis discussion and later in the unit's Summative Assessment Task.

Facilitate a reflection of what students have learned through the unit.

- Prompt students to take out their **Inquiry Charts** from Clusters 1–5 and organize them in pairs.
- Facilitate a rapid Think-Pair-Share about each cluster's Inquiry Chart to identify a big takeaway.
- For each cluster ask: *What's one big takeaway from this cluster?*

For each cluster, invite a couple of student pairs to share their responses. Student responses for each cluster's takeaway should reflect key information from the Enduring Understandings. If they don't, prompt students to build on each other's thinking.

Possible responses:

- Cluster 1: Geographic features can create both opportunities and challenges for the people who live in a given region. The development of megacities requires populations to develop ways to grow sustainably, responsibly, and inclusively.
- Cluster 2: Natural resources can be used by societies to innovate, address challenges, and enhance daily life.
- Cluster 3: A city's design and features can reveal the values and beliefs of the people who created it. It can also reflect the exchange of ideas between societies through trade systems.
- Cluster 4: Creation myths can reveal how people in a society viewed themselves and the world around them. A society's rituals often reflect its core values and beliefs.
- Cluster 5: Migration and cultural exchange shape societies over time. A society's legacy and impact can endure over centuries.

Slide 3: Present the **Unit 4 Know and Wonder Chart** from the Unit Kickoff, and give students a few minutes to review it.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Prompt ML students to use their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) during this discussion to support their summaries of unit learnings.

Lesson 26: Unit Synthesis

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- Ask: *Which questions in the Wonder column can we now answer?*
- Invite volunteers to answer the questions using what they learned in the unit.
- Validate how much students have learned since the start of the unit!

Prompt students to put their unit materials away in preparation for the next activity.

Flexible Review or Assessment Time (30 minutes)

Use the rest of the class time to wrap up the unit and/or begin the assessment. This may include:

- Extending the discussion from the first half of class to support a deeper and more complex synthesis of ideas around the Essential Question
- Providing students with guided review time to organize their notes and begin preparing for the Summative Assessment
- Administering a portion of the [The Americas Content Assessment](#); please note that this is not sufficient time to administer the entire Content Assessment. If you have not used any portions of the Content Assessment as supplemental Formative Assessments throughout the unit, either narrow the focus to certain sections, or administer the entire 50-minute assessment on a separate day.
- Note: The [The Americas Content Assessment \(Teacher Version\)](#) has scoring guidance for each section.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

If you do have students work on the Content Assessment, provide ML students with the [The Americas Content Assessment \(Sentence Frames\)](#) handout.

At the end of class, let students know that in the next couple of classes, they will engage in a Summative Assessment of the unit.

Lesson 26: Unit Synthesis

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The Americas Content Assessment (Teacher Version)

Section 1: Geography

Label the following regions of Latin America on the map below: South America, Central America, and the Caribbean.



Blank map of North and South America. Image by Milenioscuro via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Write the letter of the following features:

 C South America A Central America B the Caribbean

Map Analysis Questions:

1. Choose one region that you labeled. How has its geography influenced ancient settlement patterns in the Americas?

Student answers will vary. Possible responses:

Ancient people settled in places with good land, fresh water, and access to the sea.

- Central America’s terrain and access to both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans allowed early populations to farm fertile land near volcanoes and develop trade routes. The geography encouraged the growth of agricultural societies.
- In the Caribbean, people lived on islands with access to fish, fresh water, and flat coastal land that made small-scale agriculture and trade possible.
- In South America, groups like the Inca adapted to the Andes Mountains by building terraces for farming and settling in valleys with rivers that provided water and transportation.

Andes Mountains	Yucatán Peninsula
 Locator map of the Andes. Image by Vardion via Wikimedia Commons is in the public domain.	 Yucatan Peninsula. Image by Kaldari via Wikimedia Commons, CC0 1.0

2. Based on the map and your knowledge from the unit, where would you expect to find ancient cities with advanced urban planning such as pyramids and ceremonial centers: along the Andes Mountains or the Yucatán Peninsula? Why?

I would expect to find ancient cities with advanced planning along the Yucatán Peninsula. The Maya settled there because the natural flat limestone supported large ceremonial cities. Their understanding of astronomy shaped how they designed these cities, aligning structures with celestial events like solstices and equinoxes.

Section 2: Vocabulary

1. Which two examples best show the **cultural practices** of ancient American societies? Circle two.
 - A. Holding festivals and ceremonies to honor the gods
 - B. Developing farming techniques suited to mountain terraces
 - C. Using local materials like limestone to build temples
 - D. Passing down traditional stories and dances through generations

2. Which of these best describes an **egalitarian** society?
 - A. A society where leaders live in large palaces far from others
 - B. A society where power and wealth are shared more equally
 - C. A society ruled entirely by one religious group
 - D. A society that focuses mostly on warfare and conquest

3. Who were the **Olmec**, and why are they important in Mesoamerican history?
 - A. Farmers who invented new tools for planting maize
 - B. Builders who created the first floating cities on lakes
 - C. A group of warriors who conquered lands across South America
 - D. An early civilization that influenced later cultures through art, religion, and city design

4. What are **megacities**, and why are they important to study?
 - A. Large farms that provide food for the surrounding villages
 - B. Powerful leaders who controlled trade routes
 - C. Cities with more than 10 million people that impact the environment and society
 - D. Temples that were built on mountaintops for religious ceremonies

5. What is a **legacy** of the Taíno people that is still seen today?
 - A. Tools used to build Spanish-style forts
 - B. Foods brought from Europe, like wheat and olives
 - C. Words, customs, and traditions that have been passed down over time
 - D. Symbols used only during the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean

Section 3: Paragraph Answer

Answer the following question in a paragraph that has:

- A specific and accurate claim
- Specific factual evidence from the unit
- Clear reasoning

You can use this source to help remind you of some important ideas about Maya society, but you can also use other information from the unit that you remember.

"The ancient Maya were accomplished observers of the sky. This image shows Maya animal constellations found in the Paris Codex. Using their knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, the ancient Maya developed one of the most accurate calendar systems in human history. The ancient Maya had a fascination with cycles of time. The most commonly known Maya cyclical calendars are the Haab, the Tzolk'in, and the Calendar Round. Aside from these, the Maya also developed the Long Count calendar to chronologically date mythical and historical events. The 13 baktun cycle of the Maya Long Count calendar measures 1,872,000 days or 5,125.366 tropical years. This is one of the longest cycles found in the Maya calendar system. This cycle ended on the winter solstice, December 21, 2012."

Text source: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. "[Living Maya Time](#)."

What is one way that beliefs and values shaped Maya cities, and why did this matter to their society and culture?

Student answers will vary. Look for brief context, a specific claim, reference to evidence, and clear reasoning in student responses. Possible response:

- The beliefs and values of the Maya had a major influence on the design and organization of their cities. Religious practices and the observation of the stars were so important that temples and pyramids were built to align with astronomical events. These structures were not just religious, but provided a way to track time and mark important moments in the calendar. This connection between religion, science, and city planning reveals how central spiritual beliefs were to Maya society.

Section 4: Applied Historical Inquiry

Read the following scenario and the quotes by ancient American leaders or cultural beliefs. Then answer the questions below.

Scenario: A local museum is deciding how to use a grant to highlight the history of Indigenous societies in the Americas. The museum leader is considering three options:

- **Option 1:** Build a Planetarium Exhibit
 - **Goal:** Teach visitors how the Maya and Inca used astronomy to guide farming and religious life
- **Option 2:** Recreate a Mesoamerican Symbol Wall
 - **Goal:** Let visitors touch and learn from replicas of ancient symbols and images, understanding how they preserved stories and beliefs
- **Option 3:** Host a Community Festival
 - **Goal:** Celebrate Indigenous traditions with music, dance, and storytelling from local Indigenous leaders

1. Which of these statements is a **fact**? Circle one.
 - A. The museum will offer tours in both English and Spanish.
 - B. The director hopes the festival will build pride in local culture.
 - C. The wall of symbols and images will be the most exciting part of the exhibit.
 - D. The planetarium will be a beautiful addition to the museum.
2. Which of these statements is an **opinion**? Circle one.
 - A. Indigenous storytelling helps teach values across generations.
 - B. The symbol exhibit will show recorded messages from multiple cultures.
 - C. The festival is a great way to get people excited about history.
 - D. The astronomy display will feature constellations used by the Maya.

“The Maya civilization was at its height between 300 and 900. Inscriptions have been found on monumental sculpture, public buildings, murals, pottery, shell, obsidian, bone, wood, jade, and screenfold books called codices. They were only identified as a writing system by scholars during the 19th century.”

Text source: The British Museum, "[Maya glyphs, a basic introduction](#)," in Smarthistory, April 15, 2018, accessed May 27, 2025.

3. Based on this quote and your learning from the unit, how might the importance of written tradition influence the museum leader’s decision?

The Maya used symbols to record stories, beliefs, and important events. A wall showing these traditional symbols would help visitors learn how ancient societies preserved knowledge and passed it down.

“The great cities of our past were designed as symbolic landscapes that mimicked and enhanced the natural surroundings. My ancestors built monuments in concert with the movements of the Sun, the Moon, and the stars.”

– José Huchim Herrera, Yucatec Maya, Archaeologist and Architect

Text source: Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, “[Creation Story of the Maya](#).”

4. Based on this quote and what you’ve learned, what does it show about the importance of astronomy in ancient American societies? How does this compare to the value of visual storytelling or recorded messages? How could this affect the museum leader’s decision?

Astronomy shaped how people built cities and planned religious events. At the same time, recorded messages in symbols helped preserve knowledge. Both were important—one helped guide behavior, and the other helped preserve ideas for future generations.

5. What do you think the museum director should do? What belief or value makes you think that?

Student answers will vary. Possible response:

- The director should build the planetarium because astronomy was central to the Maya’s religious calendar and farming. It shows how science and spirituality were deeply connected in their culture.

Scoring Guidance

Administration and Grading Guidance

This assessment is intended to have a variety of flexible administration options. Teachers may choose to use portions of it as Formative Assessments or in-class review throughout the unit or to administer some or all of it at the conclusion of the unit, as a content-focused Summative Assessment alongside the Summative Assessment Task. The notes below are intended to help focus teachers' attention and provide feedback to students, and provide one possible way of assigning points to each section of the assessment.

Section 1: Geography (9 points)

- 1 point per correctly labeled map feature
- 2 points for each short-answer question

Section 2: Vocabulary (10 points)

- 2 points per correct answer

Section 3: Paragraph Answer (9 points)

- 3 points for a clear and accurate claim about beliefs shaping cities
- 3 points for factual evidence about architecture or astronomy
- 3 points for reasoning that connects values to urban planning or religious practice

Section 4: Applied Historical Inquiry (7 points)

- 1 point for correctly identifying which statement is a fact
- 1 point for correctly identifying which statement is an opinion
- 3 points for providing a clear and accurate analysis of two quotes and their connection to the importance of astronomy and writing
- 2 points for providing an opinion and reasoning regarding the scenario provided

Total possible: 35 points

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The Americas

ASSESSMENT PACING

Lesson 27

Task 1–2

Lesson 28

Task 3–5

Assessment Overview

In Unit 4, students explored how ancient American cities were designed with intention, reflecting the beliefs, rituals, values, and environmental knowledge of their people. Astronomy, ecology, and daily life were deeply connected in these urban centers, which also served as places of competition and collaboration among neighboring communities.

For the Summative Assessment, students will apply their learning by creating an illustrated codex about a city of their choice from the ancient Americas. Their work will answer this Unit 4 Essential Question:

How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

This codex will serve as a culminating artifact that integrates research, interpretation, and reflection. Students will:

- Identify and analyze a variety of primary and secondary sources to gather meaningful information about their chosen city
- Evaluate the reliability of sources, considering when and where they were created, who made them, and whether they present facts or opinions
- Explain a challenge or problem the city or its people faced, and describe how they addressed it, highlighting human agency in responding to civic, environmental, or regional concerns

This project reinforces not only historical understanding but also civic learning. It builds on students' previous work from earlier units, such as their study of community and belonging in Unit 2 and their research skills and engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals in Unit 3. By communicating their findings to classmates and contributing to a collective learning celebration, students are engaging in civic practice that echoes the meaning of citizenship in ancient cities and today.

Assessment at a Glance

- Task 1: Select your city
- Task 2: Research and take notes
- Task 3: Draft your points
- Task 4: Create your codex
- Task 5: Present your codex

Assessment Focus Standards

Practice Standards: PS 3, PS 5, PS 7

Content Standards: 6.T5a.3, 6.T5b.3, 6.T5c.1

Grading and Providing Feedback

Task 1–6

Use the [The Americas Rubric](#) to evaluate students' work on the codex project.

LESSON 27

Summative Assessment, Day 1

Teacher Notes

Be sure to decide how students will choose cities—e.g., rank top three, teacher assigns, or choose in small groups. Also, decide if the projects will be individual, partner, or group-based.

You will need to secure digital devices for students to use in this lesson.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 27 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [The Americas Summative Assessment Packet](#)
- ☐ [The Americas Summative Assessment Packet \(Word Banks\)](#)
- ☐ [Summative Assessment Partner Survey](#)

Activator: Community Survey (10 minutes)

Slide 2: Review the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities), previously seen in Lesson 4.

- Ask: *What values and beliefs do the people of the United Nations bring to designing and improving cities?*
- Ask for 2 to 3 student volunteers to share their thoughts.

Key values to highlight:

- Safe: keeping spaces clean and healthy, making sure everyone is housed
- Sustainable: environmentally conscious for present and future citizens
- Appreciative of the arts: all people have the opportunity to appreciate the arts and culture
- Inclusive: all cultures are included

Slide 3: Distribute the [Summative Assessment Partner Survey](#) handout. In pairs (or trios if needed), students will

interview each other about their community's values.

- Explain to students that city leaders often use surveys to learn what residents want (e.g., composting programs).
- Provide students with about 5 minutes to conduct their interviews.

Slide 4: Debrief the activity as a class. Ask: *How do your community's values compare to those of ancient American cities? How are they similar? How are they different?*

Encourage connections between past and present communities.

Ask students to keep in mind that as part of their project analysis, they will be using lessons from their ancient city (the past) to inform their present communities.

Task 1 (10 minutes)

Slide 5: Remind students of the unit's Essential Question:



How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?

Explain that students will reflect on this question through a final project by creating a codex.

Introduce the Summative Assessment Task, and distribute the [The Americas Summative Assessment Packet](#). Read the text below and ask students to follow along. Highlight or underline key elements of the task to support student understanding.

Slide 6: Remind students of Maya codices. Show an example.

- Optional: Let students handle a printed example (screen-fold style).
- Explain to students that their final codex will include images, symbols, a map, and four written points about their city.

Slide 7: Review the description for the Summative Assessment Task, and ensure students understand the main



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Encourage ML students to utilize the sentence frames on Slide 4 to aid in the class debrief.



SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS

Provide ML students with the [The Americas Summative Assessment Packet \(Word Banks\)](#). Encourage students to reference both their [Observe Language and Literacy Builder](#) and [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to guide their note-taking and drafting of points..

research question.

- In this assessment, you will research one of the cities of the ancient Americas. You will represent your ancient city in a codex (ancient book) that fully explains your city's important features.
- Your goal is to answer this main research question:
How does this ancient city reflect the values of the people who lived there?

Slide 8: Walk through Task 1 and its directions. Provide digital devices and access to the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#). Give students time to look through the slide deck and choose the city they want to research further. Prompt them to record their chosen city on their handout.

Task 2 (30 minutes)

Slide 9: Then point out Task 2 on their handout, and read the directions aloud. Explain that the Graphic Organizer will be used to record relevant information about the city being researched.

Remind them that their notes should:

- Explain how their city reflects the values of the people
- Include a picture or symbol

Let them know they should also be collecting symbols and images for their codex, and there's space in the handout to sketch or copy these visuals.

Prompt students to begin researching using the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#) and recording their information on the Task 2 section of their handouts.

LESSON 28

Summative Assessment, Day 2

Teacher Notes

You will need to secure digital devices for students to use in this lesson.

MATERIALS

- ☐ [Lesson 28 Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ [Sample Codex and Template Student Slide Deck](#)
- ☐ Lesson 27: The Americas Summative Assessment Packet
- ☐ Lesson 27: The Americas Summative Assessment Packet (Word Banks)

Task 3 (30 minutes)

Slide 2: Prompt students to find the Task 3 section of their **The Americas Summative Assessment Packet**. Explain to students that Task 3 asks them to draft four persuasive points followed by a paragraph reflection.

- Ask students to review their notes and select the strongest information.
- Then direct them to draft four persuasive points that show why or how their city reflects the values of the people who live there.

Each point should include:

- A short headline
- Supporting details in their own words

Explain to students that they will now write a paragraph reflecting on a lesson their city can teach us today.

Slide 3: Model this activity using the Teotihuacan sample reflection on the [Sample Codex and Template Student Slide Deck](#).

Then ask students to write their reflection paragraph on what lesson their ancient city can teach modern society.

**SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS**

As a reminder, ensure that ML students have the option to use the **The Americas Summative Assessment Packet (Word Banks)**.

Encourage students to reference their [Summarize Language and Literacy Builder](#) to guide their answers for Tasks 4–6.

Task 4 (20 minutes)

Slide 4: Introduce the ways students can create their codex. Then ask students to choose their method in the Task 5 section of their packet.

Remind students that their final codex must include:

- Four persuasive points with images and/or symbols
- A reflection paragraph
- Cited sources

Prompt students to begin working on their codex in their chosen format.

Task 5 (10 minutes)

Slide 5: Organize students into small groups to present their codices to one another. Encourage active listening and respectful engagement.

Optional Extension: Task 6 (20 minutes)

After all presentations:

- Students can choose one city they learned about from their classmates' presentations.
- Write a short reflection connecting that city's lessons to their own community or life.

Students will respond to the following question: *What can your community learn from the city of the ancient Americas*

that you saw presented today? and should include:

- A challenge or opportunity faced by the ancient city
- A lesson your community could learn from that city
- A connection to your community's needs, values, or your own life

Name: _____ Date: _____

Summative Assessment Partner Survey

Part 1 Directions: Talk with your partner about your community. As you answer the questions together, think about:

- What do the buildings and places in your community say about what people believe and care about?
- How does your community use nature or the land to help people in everyday life?

For each question, circle a response and write a short explanation.

Survey Question	Response	Explanation
Are there places in your community where people gather (such as parks or community centers)?	Yes / No / Maybe / Not Sure	
Are there buildings for public use (such as libraries, schools, or clinics)?	Yes / No / Maybe / Not Sure	
Does your community take care of nature and the environment?	Yes / No / Maybe / Not Sure	
Do people in your community feel they are treated fairly?	Yes / No / Maybe / Not Sure	
Are there places for art, music, or sports?	Yes / No / Maybe / Not Sure	
Do the buildings and spaces in your community show what people believe in or value?	Yes / No / Maybe / Not Sure	

Part 2 Directions: Answer the following questions in two to three sentences.

Can you think of a problem your community has faced (past or present)? What did people do to try to fix it or make things better?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Americas Summative Assessment Packet (Word Banks)

Directions: In this assessment, you will research one of the cities of the ancient Americas. You will represent your ancient city in a codex (ancient book) that fully explains your city's important features. Your goal is to answer this main research question:

How does this ancient city reflect the values of the people who lived there?

Drawing upon what you have learned in this unit, you will make the strongest case you can that your city was the best for its people based on the criteria in this unit's Essential Question: *How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?*

Day 1

- Tasks 1–2

Day 2

- Tasks 3–5

Task 1: Select Your City

Briefly browse the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#) to see which cities you can choose to research further.

- Click on one or more links for each city, and skim the sites.
- Based on your overview, choose the city you will use for your research project.

Cities to choose from: Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Tiwanaku, Monte Albán/Zapotec, Chavín de Huantar, Palenque, Copán, Tikal

Your selected city:

Task 2: Research and Take Notes

You will use the linked sources in the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#) to learn about the geography and natural resources of your city and the values and beliefs of the city's creators and community members.

- In doing so, you will draw upon what you learned in the unit overall about ancient complex American societies.
- Find out what is unique, admirable, or amazing about your city.
- Make note of any symbols or pictures that represent your city or help to explain its features.

Step 1: Taking Notes

Find your city in the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#). Read or watch each resource provided, and take notes on your handout.

- As you read (or watch) each resource, take notes in the categories below, making sure to cite your source for each cluster of notes.
- If completing the worksheet digitally, you can use the boxes to copy and paste, draw, or link to a picture or symbol that you might want to use to describe your points.
- Remember to take as many relevant notes as you can, knowing you may use some of them, but not all. Later, you can decide which notes to use for your final project.

Word Bank			
Mexico	Peru	Bolivia	Honduras
Guatemala	people	empire	map
city	ancient		

Note-taking Categories

General information	Source	Is this a primary or secondary source?	How do you know this source is reliable?
Name of ancient city:			
Name of modern present-day country:			

General information	Source	Is this a primary or secondary source?	How do you know this source is reliable?
Dates for this ancient city (or when it was at its height):			
Name of people:			
Map:			
Symbol:			

Word Bank			
water	stone	gold	crops
mountains	forest	lake	river
farming	tools	fishing	animals

Natural resources and uses/geography	Source	Is this a primary or secondary source?	How do you know this source is reliable?

Word Bank			
gods	nature	sun	family
ancestors	art	farming	religion
festivals	respect		

City's values and beliefs	Source	Is this a primary or secondary source?	How do you know this source is reliable?

Word Bank			
temples	roads	pyramids	canals
markets	city walls	clean water	design
apartments	housing	plazas	

City design or features	Source	Is this a primary or secondary source?	How do you know this source is reliable?

Word Bank			
special	tallest	first	beautiful
different	biggest	oldest	smart
invention	art		

Anything unique, admirable, or interesting	Source	Is this a primary or secondary source?	How do you know this source is reliable?

Step 2: Select and Analyze Your Best Sources

Directions: Now look back at your notes. Choose two sources that you referenced the most throughout your note-taking. Reflect on each source below:

Source #1 Title:

-
- Is this a primary or secondary source?
-

- How do you know it is reliable?

- What important idea or evidence did this source give you about the city?

Source #2 Title:

- Is this a primary or secondary source?

- How do you know it is reliable?

- What important idea or evidence did this source give you about the city?

Task 3: Draft Your Points & Paragraph Reflection

Read through your notes.

- Highlight the notes you want to use for your four points, as well as any other relevant notes about geography, beliefs and values, and learning from the past.
- Then create four points, using information from your notes in your own words. Make sure your points are persuasive: Your writing should include persuasive points that show why or how your city reflects the values of the people who live there.

Example of Headline:

- “The Best Planned City Around” for Teotihuacan

Sentence Frames for Points:

- *One reason this city is special is ____.*
- *This shows the city cared about ____ and ____.*
- *The people built ____ to help with ____.*

Draft your points:

Point 1: Headline and Point (for example, Teo’s headline was *Teotihuacan: A City Designed for the Gods and the People*)

Point 2: Headline and Point

Point 3: Headline and Point

Point 4: Headline and Point

Now reflect on a lesson that your city could teach us today. You can see a sample codex for Teotihuacan in the [Sample Codex and Template Student Slide Deck](#).

Draft your reflection paragraph below. This paragraph will go on the last page of your codex.

Word Bank		
work together	plan	build
share	respect	protect nature
help others	solve problems	use resources

Sentence Frames:

- One lesson we can learn from this city is ____.
- Today we have similar problems, like ____ and ____.

What can this city teach us today about building spaces and places that reflect people’s values?

Task 4: Create Your Codex

Determine how you will create your codex. Check off the appropriate box, or add your own idea.

- ☐ I will use the [Sample Codex and Template Student Slide Deck](#).
 - ☐ I will create my own codex out of paper or cardboard.
 - ☐ I will use another way to create my codex and will explain it below:
-
-

Insert your drafted points and reflection into your final codex. Add a picture or symbol for each point, and cite the source.

Task 5: Present Your Codex

Present your codex, and actively listen as your classmates share their projects. As you observe the other presentations, pay close attention to how each ancient city responded to challenges and created new opportunities through its design, beliefs, or innovations.

(Optional Extension) Task 6: Reflect on the Unit

Choose one city that your classmates presented that you admire. Think about:

- What challenges did people in that city face, and how did they respond?
- What opportunities did they create for their community?
- How did the values and choices of the people shape their space?
- What lessons could this city offer to your own community today?

Then reflect on your community survey ([Summative Assessment Partner Survey](#)) and what people in your community (or classmates) said they valued and needed in a city or town. Make a personal connection by thinking about how those lessons from the past could apply to your life today.

Respond to the following question:

What can your community learn from the city of the ancient Americas that you saw presented today?

Word Bank			
challenge	fix	build	improve
lesson	today	connect	city
community	help	values	

Sentence Frames:

- *This teaches us to ____.*
- *This connects to my community because ____.*

Write 5–7 thoughtful sentences. Be sure to include:

- A challenge or opportunity faced by the ancient city
- A lesson your community could learn from that city
- A connection to your community's needs, values, or your own life

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Americas Summative Assessment Packet

Directions: In this assessment, you will research one of the cities of the ancient Americas. You will represent your ancient city in a codex (ancient book) that fully explains your city's important features. Your goal is to answer this main research question:

How does this ancient city reflect the values of the people who lived there?

Drawing upon what you have learned in this unit, you will make the strongest case you can that your city was the best for its people based on the criteria in this unit's Essential Question: *How do the spaces and places people build represent their values?*

Day 1

- Tasks 1–2

Day 2

- Tasks 3–5

Task 1: Select Your City

Briefly browse the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#) to see which cities you can choose to research further.

- Click on one or more links for each city, and skim the sites.
- Based on your overview, choose the city you will use for your research project.

Cities to choose from: Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, Tiwanaku, Monte Albán/Zapotec, Chavín de Huantar, Palenque, Copán, Tikal

Your selected city:

Task 2: Research and Take Notes

You will use the linked sources in the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#) to learn about the geography and natural resources of your city and the values and beliefs of the city’s creators and community members.

- In doing so, you will draw upon what you learned in the unit overall about ancient complex American societies.
- Find out what is unique, admirable, or amazing about your city.
- Make note of any symbols or pictures that represent your city or help to explain its features.

Step 1: Taking Notes

Find your city in the [Cities of the Ancient Americas Student Slide Deck](#). Read or watch each resource provided, and take notes on your handout.

- As you read (or watch) each resource, take notes in the categories below, making sure to cite your source for each cluster of notes.
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General information	Your notes
Name of ancient city:	
Name of modern present-day country:	
Dates for this ancient city (or when it was at its height):	
Name of people:	

General information	Your notes
Map:	
Symbol:	

Natural resources and uses/geography	Your notes

City's values and beliefs	Your notes

City design or features	Your notes

Anything unique, admirable, or interesting	Your notes

Step 2: Select and Analyze Your Best Sources

Directions: Now look back at your notes. Choose two sources that you referenced the most throughout your note-taking. Reflect on each source below:

Source #1 Title:

-
- Is this a primary or secondary source?

-
- How do you know it is reliable?
-

-
- What important idea or evidence did this source give you about the city?
-
-

Source #2 Title:

-
- Is this a primary or secondary source?
-

-
- How do you know it is reliable?
-

-
- What important idea or evidence did this source give you about the city?
-
-

Task 3: Draft Your Points & Paragraph Reflection

Read through your notes.

- Highlight the notes you want to use for your four points, as well as any other relevant notes about geography, beliefs and values, and learning from the past.
- Then create four points, using information from your notes in your own words. Make sure your points are persuasive: Your writing should include persuasive points that show why or how your city reflects the values of the people who live there.

Draft your points:

Point 1: Headline and Point (for example, Teo’s headline was *Teotihuacan: A City Designed for the Gods and the People*)

Point 2: Headline and Point

Point 3: Headline and Point

Point 4: Headline and Point

Now reflect on a lesson that your city could teach us today. You can see a sample codex for Teotihuacan in the [Sample Codex and Template Student Slide Deck](#).

Draft your reflection paragraph below. This paragraph will go on the last page of your codex.

What can this city teach us today about building spaces and places that reflect people's values?

Task 4: Create Your Codex

Determine how you will create your codex. Check off the appropriate box, or add your own idea.

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Present your codex, and actively listen as your classmates share their projects. As you observe the other presentations, pay close attention to how each ancient city responded to challenges and created new opportunities through its design, beliefs, or innovations.

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Choose one city that your classmates presented that you admire. Think about:

- What challenges did people in that city face, and how did they respond?
- What opportunities did they create for their community?
- How did the values and choices of the people shape their space?
- What lessons could this city offer to your own community today?

Reflect on your community survey ([*Summative Assessment Partner Survey*](#)) and what people in your community (or classmates) said they valued and needed in a city or town. Make a personal connection by thinking about how those lessons from the past could apply to your life today.

Respond to the following question:

What can your community learn from the city of the ancient Americas that you saw presented today?

Write 5–7 detailed sentences. Be sure to include:

- A challenge or opportunity faced by the ancient city
- A lesson your community could learn from that city
- A connection to your community's needs, values, or your own life

[illegible]

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Americas Rubric

Standard	Exceeding	Meeting	Approaching
Practice Standard 3 Identify various types of primary and secondary sources that could be relevant to a particular inquiry.	The writer selects two or more specific, relevant primary and secondary sources directly connected to the inquiry. In their research, the writer clearly explains how each source informs their understanding of the chosen ancient city and its values.	The writer selects one to two appropriate primary and secondary sources that relate to the inquiry. In their research, the writer explains how each source helps to answer the question about the city's values.	The writer identifies one source, but the connection to the inquiry may be weak or unclear. In their research, the writer's explanation is minimal or missing.
Practice Standard 5 Determine the credibility of sources using distinctions among fact and opinion as well as information regarding maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience.	The writer thoroughly evaluates the credibility of each source using two or more factors (author, date, location, audience, fact vs. opinion) and explains how these factors affect the strength of their evidence.	The writer evaluates the credibility of each source using one or more factors (author, date, location, audience, fact vs. opinion) and explains how this supports their evidence.	The writer attempts to evaluate the credibility of sources but uses limited or unclear reasoning or does not provide any clear factors.
Practice Standard 7 Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced, and opportunities they have created, in addressing local, regional, and global problems at various times and places.	The writer draws two or more clear connections between the values of the ancient city and challenges or opportunities in their own community. The response proposes at least one realistic strategy for applying lessons from the past and thoughtfully predicts both positive and negative outcomes.	The writer connects at least one value or lesson from the ancient city to a modern-day challenge or opportunity. The response proposes at least one solution and predicts possible outcomes.	The writer briefly mentions a connection or strategy but does not explain it clearly or predict outcomes in a meaningful way.

Standard	Exceeding	Meeting	Approaching
Content Standards 6.T5a.3 (Explain how absolute and relative locations, climate, major physical characteristics, and natural resources influenced settlement, population size, and the economies of regions and countries in Central America and the Caribbean islands.) 6.T5c.1 (Research and report on one of the major ancient societies that existed in Central America or one of the major pre-Columbian Andean civilizations, their locations, and their cultural characteristics).	The writer provides a detailed and accurate explanation of how geography and natural resources influenced human settlement and economic activity in the chosen city. The writer provides thorough, accurate, and well-organized information about a chosen ancient Central American society, including key achievements, culture, and long-term influence. The codex is highly informative and persuasive.	The writer explains how geography and natural resources affected settlement and economies in the chosen city with mostly accurate details. The writer provides accurate and organized information about a chosen ancient Central American society with some details about its achievements or culture. The codex is informative.	The writer gives a basic or incomplete explanation of how geography and resources influenced settlement or economies, with some inaccuracies. The writer provides limited or partially accurate information about a chosen Central American society, with unclear or missing details. The codex is lacking clear organization.

Overall Feedback:

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES



Grade 6, Unit 4: The Americas

Resources for Educators

As you prepare to teach this unit, we encourage you to deepen your own understanding of the content you will be covering with students. Throughout the lesson plans, sidebars highlight opportunities for you to learn more about various topics and historical events being covered, including links to a wide range of external resources. This document provides a complete list of these linked resources and a brief description of each to support your continued learning.

Cluster 1: Human Geography and Regional Geographical Systems of the Americas

Author	Resource	Use
Lesson 1		
DESE	<u>Background Brief: The Americas</u>	The Background Brief was designed to support educators in developing content knowledge before teaching this unit.
Lesson 2		
Bodenheimer, Rebecca	<u>What Is Latin America?</u>	Post with key takeaways about Latin America, including how the region is defined, a brief history, and a list of countries
Turner-Trujillo, Emma and Del Toro, Marissa	<u>An Overview of Latino and Latin American Identity</u>	Primer (created to support an exhibition) about the many facets of Latin American and Latino geography, culture, and heritage
Lesson 4		
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs	<u>United Nations Goal 11</u>	Official web page for SDG 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable."

Cluster 3: Mesoamerican Societies: The Teotihuacan

Author	Resource	Use
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Lesson 10

Moran, Barbara	Lessons from Teo	Article and videos about the archaeological ruin of Teotihuacan and its famous attributes
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Smith, Michael E.	In This Ancient City, Even Commoners Lived in Palaces	Article about new archaeological finds at Teotihuacan and what they tell us about the city's class structure
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Lesson 11

Jiménez, Maya	Teotihuacan	Video and article introduction to Teotihuacan
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Cartwright, Mark	Teotihuacan	Encyclopedic entry with information about the religion, architecture, art, destruction, and legacy of Teotihuacan
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Cluster 4: Mesoamerican Societies: The Maya

Author	Resource	Use
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Lesson 17

Annenberg Learner	Popol Vuh: Invitation to World Literature	Informational videos (with transcripts) about Popol Vuh
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Lesson 19

WordExample.com	Words with the Morpheme "Spect, Spec."	List of 922 words that include the morpheme (root) "spect" or "spec"
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Lesson 20

Penn Museum	The Classic Maya Collapse: New Evidence on a Great Mystery	Video about the decline of the lowland Maya between 750 CE and 900 CE
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Yale University	The Splendid Maya Murals of Bonampak, Mexico, with Prof. Mary Miller	Video of an academic lecture about the Bonampak murals
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Mark, Robert	Bonampak	Three-dimensional models of the Bonampak rooms
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Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology	Maya Music	Video about the musicians in the Bonampak murals
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Maestri, Nicoletta	The Murals of Bonampak, Chiapas Mexico	Article with images and descriptions of the Bonampak murals
University of South Florida Libraries	Quiriguá 3D	Three-dimensional models of Quiriguá Archaeological Park and Ruins

Cluster 5: Taíno Culture and the Ancient Caribbean

Author	Resource	Use
Lesson 24		
Estevez, Jorge Baracutei and Stochlic, Nina	Meet the Survivors of a 'Paper Genocide'	Article that gives context about Taíno ancestry