

Film Guide *for Living Maya*

A Teacher's Guide for the Classroom

Synopsis

This series documents life in a Yucatan village, focusing on one family over the course of one year. The first of the four part series introduces the village of Chican and the Colli-Colli family. It also examines the structure of Maya agricultural and village life through the lens of the filmmaker and his crew.

The main visual events in the film focus on the various daily activities of the Colli-Colli family members. There are also several shots of the filmmaker himself, Smith, as he engages in participant observation for his fieldwork.

The main sound events are the conversations Smith has with this host family, which are in Spanish with English subtitles. There is also some "sound" of the every day life. This film does not include music.

The editing choices have been carefully crafted so as to introduce viewers with who the filmmaker is behind the lens. This is useful for introducing students to the subjective side to socio-cultural anthropology. After viewers become well acquainted with Smith and his intellectual pursuits, then viewers are guided into the various pockets of Mayan life.

The film is well done and very informative. It speaks to a variety of audiences and students.

A film by Hubert Smith

Color, 58 mins each, 1985
DVD/VHS

CINE Golden Eagle Award
Margaret Mead Film Festival honoree
Choice Outstanding Nonprint Media Award
PBS national broadcasts

Teaching Guide written by Jennifer Lacroix

Study Guide Design by
Mike Berendsen

Suggested Uses

Grades 6-12: Geography, Social Studies, Anthropology, Sociology,
World History; or, twelve to eighteen year olds.

Subjects in Order of Introduction:

Hubert Smith – Filmmaker
Don Reymundo Colli Colli – Main consultant
Peter Smokler – Camera man
Joaquin Medina – Translator
Rafena – Don Reymundo Colli Colli's wife
Jose & Santos – Two sons
Margarita – Daughter
Teodoro – Brother

Objectives

1. The student will compare and contrast his or her own life, environment, and culture with that of the Maya represented in the film.
2. The student will analyze Maya architecture.
3. The student will explore aspects of archaeology.
4. Maya Art and civilization...maps, writing, and language.
5. The student will evaluate the documentary film for its objectivity, thoroughness, and/or anthropological uses.

Standards

Adapted from the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks

Grade 6

Sixth graders study the world outside of the United States and North America. Particular attention is given to political and physical geography, as well as five major concepts: location, place, human interaction with the environment, movement, and regions. Students systematically learn geography around the world continent-by-continent, similar to the way in which atlases are organized.

Grade 7

Seventh graders study the origins of human beings in Africa and the ancient and classical civilizations that flourished in the Mediterranean area. They study the religions, governments, trade, philosophies, and art of these civilizations, as well as the powerful ideas that arose in the ancient world and profoundly shaped the course of world history.

Grades 8-12

World History I and II: 500 to 2001

In World History I, students study the history of the major empires and political entities that emerged after the fall of the Roman Empire, including the major pre-Columbian civilizations that existed in Central and South America. Students also examine the important political, economic, and religious developments of this period, including the development of democratic, scientific, and secular thought in Europe.

In World History II, students study the rise of the nation state in Europe and the economic and political roots of the modern world, including European imperialism in Africa, Asia, and South America. They also examine the causes and consequences of the great military and economic events of the past century including the rise of nationalism, and the continuing persistence of political, ethnic, and religious conflict in many parts of the world.

Electives in Economics and Government

The grade 12 economics elective examines the allocation of scarce resources and the economic reasoning used by government agencies and by people as consumers, producers, savers, investors, workers, and voters. Key elements include the study of scarcity, supply and demand, market structures, the role of government, national income determination, money and the role of financial institutions, economic stabilization, and trade.

A third grade 12 elective may be a third course in world history if schools choose to divide the world history standards into three sets: World History I from 600 to 1500 AD/CE, World History II from

1500 to 1800, and World History III from 1800 to 2000. Other possible grade 12 electives include Advanced Placement Comparative Government and Politics, Advanced Placement European History, and Advanced Placement World History.

Vocabulary

Agriculture - The science, art, and business of cultivating soil, producing crops, and raising livestock; farming.

Architecture - The art and science of designing and erecting buildings. 2. Buildings and other large structures: *the low, brick-and-adobe architecture of the Southwest*. 3. A style and method of design and construction: *Byzantine architecture*.

Archeology - The science of, or a treatise on, first principles

Hieroglyphic - Of, relating to, or being a system of writing, such as that of ancient Egypt, in which pictorial symbols are used to represent meaning or sounds or a combination of meaning and sound. b. Written with such symbols.

Before the Film

These questions can be discussed with a partner, small group, or the entire class.

1. What do you know or believe to be true about the Maya Indians and how they live? What are some similarities and differences between their lives and yours?

2. Jot down five to ten questions you have about the Maya specifically or Mexico in general. What are some ways in which you could discover the answers to these questions?

3. How would you describe the United States (U.S.) to someone who has never been there? What material items or objects represent your cultural experience of U.S.?

4. If you were going to make a documentary film about a culture other than your own, how would you go about it? How would you represent yourself and your cultural background in the film? Would you? Why or why not?

NOTES	About Hubert	About the Colli-Colli Family	About the Maya people and/or Mexico
What you learn			
What Hubert learns			

During the Film

Students should keep notes during the film and jot down questions as they arise. A graphic organizer, like the one above, is recommended to record students' insights:

While the teacher might choose to stop the tape to discuss some of the following issues, many are not developed or answered until the end of the film. The following questions focus on the higher-order thinking skills included in Bloom's taxonomy, such as application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, rather than recall.

1. We first see Hubert in his home in California. He's standing in his house wearing black clothing and glasses. In the background, one can see books and photographs hanging on the walls. How does this scene set the tone for who the documentary filmmaker is? How does Hubert introduce himself to the camera? What information does he include/exclude about himself and his intentions for making this film? Discuss the small events he does around his house. What do such surface indicators tell you about his lifestyle and/or history? What does he tell you about his lifestyle and/or history? What are your expectations for the rest of the film based on this first scene? The teacher may choose to stop the tape when Hubert appears in the kitchen to discuss this first question.

After watching the rest of the film, address the following questions: How do you look at Hubert when he is in his kitchen in California versus the home of the Colli-Colli family in Mexico? During what occasions does Hubert use English? When does he use Spanish? Does he use Maya? What message is he trying to convey with language in each situation?

2. Based on Hubert's description and the images you see while he speaks, what is your impression of Maya life? What is your impression of Mexico in general? Compare your first impression with the following quotes:

3. What does the Colli-Colli family eat for food? What do you eat for food? Do you eat meat? How intimate are you with the process of harvesting your food? How are the Maya's attitudes toward food and ownership of land similar to or different from your own attitudes? Do you think it would be difficult for the Maya to understand your belief system? Why or why not?

4. Hubert has to convince the Colli-Colli family to act as though he is not there. At first, this seems very difficult for him and for the family. How does this change over time? What does Hubert learn about communicating with the Colli-Colli family? What is unique about the Colli-Colli's young children? The teacher may want to stop the film and have students fill in the T-chart or other graphic organizer.

5. Introduce the stereotype of the noble savage, "an idealized individual who symbolizes the innate goodness of one unexposed to civilization and its corrupting influences" (Encyclopedia Britannica Online). The idea was first developed by Aphra Behn (1668), John Dryden (1672), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1750), and perpetuated by Joseph Thompson (1885), Mary Shelley (1818), and Aldous Huxley (1932). Share the following quote with the students:

* Charles Dickens quote from "The Noble Savage?"

After the Film

These questions can be discussed with a partner, small group, or the entire class.

1. How did your ideas about the Colli-Colli family, Maya, or Mexicans and how they live change by watching this film?
2. What did Hubert learn from living in a Yucatan village? What did he gain from it?
3. What can you learn about the Yucatan and/or Mexico from the Maya?
4. What would you expect to see if you were to visit a Yucatan village?

Extension Activities

1. Objective:

To introduce students to the science of archaeology

Questions to consider:

What is archaeology? How do archaeologists conduct their excavations? Why is archaeology important?

Activities:

Interview an archaeologist. If there is a museum or university in your neighborhood with archaeologists on staff, have your students interview them.

Classification of artifacts. Select a variety of objects made from different materials. Have your students first classify them as organic or inorganic. Further break down the classification according to the materials used: wood, metal, plastic, stone, glass, paper, natural or synthetic fiber, leather, bone, and so on. Discuss which materials would last a long time and compare them with those that would deteriorate quickly. What conditions would best preserve objects? (dry or under water, where there is little oxygen present to break down materials). What conditions would cause rapid deterioration? (damp, hot, humid, exposed to air).

2. Objective:

To gain an understanding of the geography of Mesoamerica and its influence on the Maya way of life

Questions to consider:

Where is the Maya homeland? What is the climate like in Mesoamerica? How did the land support the people?

Activities:

Consult the weather section in your local newspaper and prepare a chart comparing temperatures in the cities of Mesoamerica with those in your own area.

Research the importance of the rain forest in maintaining the world's oxygen supply and on the valuable plants that are used for medicines.

Compare farming techniques in the region closest to your school with those of the Maya. Make a chart to indicate when planting takes place, what the soil is like, how the crops are nourished, and when they are harvested.

3. Objective:

To put the Maya culture into historical perspective

Questions to explore:

How does the timeline of the Maya civilization compare to other

civilizations? What characteristics of the Maya culture make it a great civilization? What were some of the reasons for the collapse of the Classic Maya civilization?

Activity:

If you were asked to choose three objects to be buried in the earth to let future generations know about the Classic Maya civilization, what would you choose?

4. Objective:

To learn about the role of kings, royal symbols, clothing and personal adornment

Questions to explore:

What role do royalty play in the modern world? What role did the Maya kings play: a) in looking after the affairs of state; b) as spiritual leaders? What is a 'symbol'? Ask your students to identify symbols they know and use in their daily lives (examples: their school emblem, their country's flag, the dollar sign for money, road signs, and so on).

Activities:

Ask your students to identify various reasons why people wear clothing (to protect our bodies from the elements or injury; to identify the social group we belong to; to display our wealth and prestige; to identify important stages in our lives e.g. wedding), and to find pictures in magazines that represent these different categories of clothing.

Have your students consider different ways people change their appearance and why they do this. A comparison could be made between cultures. Ask your students whether there is anything they would want to change about their facial features.

Using light cardboard or colored paper, have your students make a headband. Use pictures of Maya nobles for inspiration. Decorate the headband by adding feathers, shells, seeds, cornhusks, imitation jaguar skins, and beads.

5. Objective:

To learn about the way of life of the common Maya

A question to explore:

Help your students visualize a Maya village scene. What were the houses of the common people like?

Activity:

Have your students make a model of a thatched-roof hut using the pictures in the *Mystery of the Maya* Web pages. Possible materials include plastering for the foundation, Popsicle sticks for the walls and roof supports, and straw for the thatched roof.

Ask your students to research recipes for dishes modern Maya people make from corn, beans and squash. Try these recipes out in class or at home.

6. Objective:

To introduce your students to aspects of Maya sciences

Some questions:

Ask your students to guess why the Maya used units of 20. The Maya were one of the first civilizations to use zero in their calculations, symbolized by an oval shell. Do you think this is an appropriate symbol for zero? If you had to invent a symbol for zero different from the one you use now, what would it be? What type of writing did the Maya use? Who knew how to write, and what did they write on? Why did Maya kings use writing as a propaganda tool? Can you think of contemporary examples of people who use writing as propaganda?

Activities:

Teach your students the principles of Maya mathematics, beginning with writing the numbers 1 to 19. You could use beans to represent 1, Popsicle sticks or toothpicks to represent five, and shells or pebbles to represent zero.

Compare the U.S. modern calendar to the Maya 365-day Vague Year calendar. Ask your students to figure out when the Maya New Year began by transposing the Maya 365-day calendar onto our calendar. (*Clue:* January 1 in our calendar corresponds to the 8th day of the 14th month in the Maya 365-day calendar).

Additional activity:

Search for words in English or Mayan at <http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/dictionary/montgomery/search.html>. Then, create your own code or secret message for your classmate to break.

Olmec	1200-1000 B.C.
Early Preclassic Maya	1800-900 B.C.
Middle Preclassic Maya	900-300 B.C.
Late Preclassic Maya	300 B.C. - A.D. 250
Early Classic Maya	A.D. 250-600
Late Classic Maya	A.D. 600-900
Post Classic Maya	A.D. 900-1500

Resources and Links

Evolution of Maya culture

Brief Note about Maya Hieroglyphic Writing

Numerous features distinguish the Maya from other cultures of ancient Mesoamerica, but one that has attracted explorers, scholars, and enthusiasts for centuries is Maya Hieroglyphic Writing. The calligraphic style and pictorial complexity of Maya glyphs are like no other writing system.

While the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs has been advancing rapidly in the past few decades, differing opinions of whether or not Maya writing was either a number of simple word-pictures or a sophisticated phonetic system stifled decipherment for years. Indeed, it was only in the mid-twentieth century following a breakthrough by Mayanist Tatiana Proskouriakoff that epigraphers (or glyphic experts) could finally agree that Maya Hieroglyphic Writing was a fully functional system based on phonetic signs.

While our system is also based on phonetic signs, in comparison to Maya writing our system seems much simpler. All of our words are formed from various combinations of only 26 signs—that list of letters we call an Alphabet. By contrast, all Maya words are formed from various combinations of nearly 800 signs, and each sign represents a full syllable—so that list of signs is called a Syllabary, not an Alphabet.

Twenty-six signs versus hundreds of signs? Sounds impossible? Not really. As can be seen in the Syllabary below, while one sign of our alphabet can represent only one sound, Maya writers could select from many different signs to represent one sound. For example, there are at least five different signs that could be chosen to represent the Maya syllable *ba*. Please note that the syllabary includes only about 100 of the nearly 800 possibilities.

In the syllabary presented, sounds are formed by combining a particular consonant with one of the five vowels; a, e, i, o, or, u. If a Maya writer wanted to describe the act of “writing” (or *tz’ib’* in Maya) the scribe could select from several different signs to convey the sounds. For example, this combination might be chosen:

(Retrieved from: <http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting> on February 28, 2005)

Online Resources

http://mayaruins.com/yuc_bib_framed.html

The history:

<http://www.civilization.ca/civil/maya/mmc01eng.html>

Teacher Development Resources:

Cultural Explorations of the Maya Study Abroad Program for Teachers

July 1-13, 2005

Yucatán, Mexico

<http://inst.uno.edu/mayan/>

Join Tulane professor Amy George Hiron and University of New Orleans professor Allen Bryant on a two-week journey through the Yucatán visiting great cities and sites such as Mérida, Tulum, Valladolid, Chichén Itzá, and many more. Participants will receive 6 hours of graduate or undergraduate Curriculum and Instruction credit from the University of New Orleans' College of Education.

Structure of Program

Prior to departure, participants will be required to conduct readings and participate in online discussions and chat. These readings and subsequent discussions will help familiarize participants with the content covered during the two-week excursion. While in the field, participants will gather information and materials for the development of curricular resources for use in their classrooms. These items will be assembled into an electronic or traditional portfolio, due August 1, 2005. Grades will be based on pre-departure participation, participation while in the field and the development of curricular resources.

Additional Resources:

Potter, David F. *Maya Architecture of the Central Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico*. [Middle American Research Institute](#), New Orleans 1977.

This monograph forms part of a series of final reports on the 1969-1971 National Geographic Society Tulane University Program of Research in the Rio Bec area of Campeche, directed by E. Wyllys Andrews IV. Detailed coverage of Becan and Chicanna, with Xpuhil mentioned in the Appendix.

Inga Clendinnen *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570*. Cambridge Latin American Studies, February 1989.

"This beautifully written and finely researched book is the best account we have of the tragic confrontation between the Yucatan Maya and the Spanish invaders (both military and religious). It

throws entirely new light on the far-from-benevolent role of the Franciscans -- especially the famous Diego de Landa -- in the process of crushing native Maya culture. This is a triumph of modern scholarship." (Michael Coe, Yale University).

Friar Diego de Landa, translated with notes by William Gates. *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest*. Dover Publications, June 1978.

Smyth, Michael P., Christopher D. Dore, & Nicholas P. Dunning. "[Interpreting Prehistoric Settlement Patterns](#): Lessons from the Maya Center of Sayil, Yucatan" *Journal of Field Archaeology* 22 (1995): 321-347

Sabloff, Jeremy. "Settlement Patterns and Community Organization in the Maya Lowlands." *Expedition: The Magazine of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology* 38.1 (1996): 3-13.

Jones, Christopher, Linton Satterthwaite; illustrations by Wm. R. Coe. Tikal Reports no. 33, *The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tikal*. University of Pennsylvania, University Museum. Philadelphia 1982.

Coe, William R. *Tikal, a handbook of the ancient Maya ruins*. University of Pennsylvania, University Museum. Philadelphia 1988.

Harrison, Peter D. *The Lords of Tikal: Rulers of an Ancient Maya City*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 1999.

Jones, Christopher. *The Twin-Pyramid Group Pattern, a Classic Maya Architectural Assemblage at Tikal, Guatemala*. Philadelphia: 1969.

Martin, Simon and Nikolai Grube. *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.

Michel, Genevieve. *The Rulers of Tikal: A Historical Reconstruction & Field Guide to the Stelae*. Guatemala, C.A.: Publicaciones Vista, 1991.

Map: (See next page)

M A P



FOR MORE STUDY GUIDES AND FILMS

VISIT:

<http://www.der.org>