

Putting the Pieces Together – Reconstructing a Maya Vase

Target grade level: 1st grade +

Background: One of the most famous ceramic types that the Maya produced were Codex-style vases. These are tall cylindrical vessels that have thin walls. They are painted in a polychrome style and depict scenes from Maya mythology. The images on the vases usually depict nobles, warriors, or deities.

It is believed that these vases were actually drinking cups for chocolate drinks. Archaeologists hypothesize that Maya rulers shared chocolate drinks and these vases with their subordinates at ritual feasts where they “wined and dined” other nobles, and gained their loyalty. There are thousands of these vases known from the Maya area and hundreds of them have been published.

Vocabulary

Reconstruction – putting something that is broken back together.

Ceramic Vessel – vessel is a broad term that encompasses all ceramic forms.

Form – the shape that a vessel has.

Polychrome – Having more than one color.

Teacher Preparation:

Download vase.pdf from the Stone Center web site and print it in color. Glue the vase image around the cardboard oatmeal container, cutting the image and the vase to fit. Cut the “vase” into jigsaw puzzle-like pieces.

Materials Needed:

- Cardboard oatmeal container
- Rubber cement
- Scissors
- Clear tape

Procedure:

Provide students with some background about Maya vessels. Show them lots of pictures. Give students tape and have them reconstruct the vessel. Talk about the scenes you see.

References

There are six volumes of *The Maya Vase Book* by Justin Kerr, published by Kerr Associates, New York. These are picture books that reproduce hundreds of Maya vases in roll-out format. To create many different vases for your students to reconstruct, get one of these books, take it to Kinkos and have color copies made of the vases you like.