

Maya, Past and Present

Grade Levels: 3rd and 5th grades

Subject Areas: Art, ELA and Social Studies, Maya

Key Words: Maya, culture, empathy

Designed by: Denise Tullier-Holly

Time Frame: Three weeks (2 days a week, 45 minutes classes)

School District: Tangipahoa Parish

School: Southeastern Louisiana University Laboratory School

Brief Summary of Unit:

Maya, Past and Present unit plans were specifically designed to address elementary school students' need to understand the wider world, a world beyond their direct experience. A goal of this unit is to build empathy for others, the Maya, through the celebration of their rich history and accomplishments and by honoring and respecting who they are today. From the study of the Ancient Maya, glyphs, stela, numbering system, and society to the present-day Maya life of Kindergarten Kim at the Melody School in Guatemala, students grasp an understanding for the wider world. They embrace a start for lifelong learning of another culture.

This is an arts integrated unit where the arts, specifically visual art, meld with English Language Arts and Social Studies, for a holistic approach to student learning. This unit unfolds naturally through student curiosity for this ancient civilization.

The “super skills”, 4Cs, for the 21st century were employed:

- Communication, students share their ideas, questions and thoughts through particular activities (teacher initiated Visual Thinking Strategies, student discussions and letters to Melody School).
- Collaboration, students are paired for certain tasks in the unit (deciphering Maya number glyphs and more [5th grade]).
- Critical Thinking, students link their learning across subjects (Social Studies, ELA and Art).
- Creativity, students create several art products of their own invention (drawings and ceramics of their own personal glyphs [5th grade] and Maya headdresses [3rd grade]).

For both the 3rd and 5th grade units, books are used to hook or engage the students deeply into the topic. The 3rd grade unit highlights the work of Louisiana artist, Luz Maria Lopez. The book, *How the Gods created Finger People*, is a Maya creation fable as told by Ms. Lopez' grandmother, which builds empathy for the finger people. Her illustrations, original paintings, and sculpture, are inspiring and become the focus of their art work, Maya headdresses. The 5th graders read the Scholastic book: *The Ancient Maya* by Jackie Maloy. It's part of a series by Grolier and can be found online in its entirety. It's accompanied by a series of links for further investigations.

The weaving of the “super skills” and the subject matter creates units of deeper learning. In these units, the student work builds on their global perspective and hones their lifelong learning skills. I believe that this learning is transferable to other areas in their schooling.