

## Where Do Indigenous People Go when the History Book Ends?

**Grade/Target audience:** Spanish IV, Spanish IV Honors Students or above

**Subject/Topic Areas:** History of the Maya people, including culture, architecture, art, life style, city-states, highland life, etc.; the Conquest of the Yucatan Peninsula and Central America; the Spanish Inquisition; the survival of the Maya; the politics, economy and sociology of modern-day Guatemala; cultural diversity; persecution against ethnic groups; the survival of indigenous cultures vs. the assimilation of indigenous cultures

**Key words:** Maya, Inquisition, Mayan civilizations, modern-day Maya

**Designed by:** Ellen Cohen

**Time frame:** Six weeks

**School:** Metairie Park Country Day School, Metairie, Louisiana

**Includes:** Service-learning project, if possible

### Brief Summary of Unit:

Students often view indigenous groups of people as finite; when the chapter in the history book ends, they feel that these people somehow cease to exist. This unit uses the Maya as an example of an indigenous group that has survived many obstacles to remain cohesive, identifiable and culturally unique. Students study the history of the Maya, their civilization, religion, languages, architecture, literature and art to understand the uniqueness of the Maya people. They follow the Maya people through the fall of the Mayan city-states, to their exodus to the Guatemalan highlands, and through their first encounters with Spanish conquerors. They trace the survival of the Maya people from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, understanding how the Maya people managed to maintain their individuality, their distinct languages, their art, their distinctive crafts, their agricultural life style and their identity. Students then learn of the challenges the Maya faced throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century with land acquisition by the Guatemalan government. They learn of the Guatemalan civil war and the genocide of the Maya people. Finally, students learn about the life of the Maya people today. What challenges do they face? Is there social equality and justice in Guatemala for all ethnic groups? Are social services equal for Maya and non-Maya citizens of Guatemala? Through these studies, students will extrapolate that indigenous people do not simply disappear. They often assimilate into other cultures in their own country, blend into other countries as immigrants, and less often, as is the case of the Maya, they maintain their individuality and their unique identity throughout centuries.