UNIT 2 Origins (who they are)

THE MAYA

ORIGINS

1. Development of Civilization
2. Who are the Maya?
3. Language
4. Geography
5. Environment
6. Historical periods

+ case study: THE OLMECS
think about
ARCHAEOLOGY
Driving historical questions:
Historical categories of inquiry

1. How to distinguish the “Maya” from the archaic people and the other Mesoamerican civilizations? What is different from the Maya? (Using the past)

2. How the changes occurring in each period affect the subsequent period? (cause and effect)
Maya history includes:

1. Archaeology
2. Epigraphy
3. Art history
4. Ethno history
5. Ethnography
6. Biological anthropology
7. Linguistics
8. Geography
9. Geology
10. Ecology

Why study Maya history?

1. It's interesting
2. It's another case study for understanding the human species more broadly
3. It provides us with a mirror for self-reflection
4. We can learn lessons that apply to our world today
5. What we learn can help Maya peoples today.
Language was instrumental in labeling the people that came after the archaic people as Maya (because they spoke proto-Maya and Chol)

proto = original/first
How we know they were Maya?

1. **Language** was instrumental in labelling the people that came after the archaic people as Maya (because they spoke proto-Maya and Chol), **culture and agriculture** were also important.

2. An important aspect to note is that we see the Maya people now as one. However, in those days they did not see each other as belonging to one society.

3. They were loyal to their different cities and kingdoms.

4. **Mayan** refers to the language

5. **Maya** refers to culture, civilization, sites, arts, artifacts etc
preclassic connections in BELIZE

- **Cerro**: one of the earliest preclassic sites (2600 - 1200 BC)
- **Pulltrouser Swamp**: evidence of early agriculture (“raised fields”)
- **Cuello**: Trade with Olmecs (jade)
Agriculture

WHY SWAMPS?

People likely settled around swamps because of the rich faunal, plant, soil and water resources this environment made available.

Maize appears at the site around 890 BC. Pollen records show mass forest disturbance around 2500 B.C., this coincides with the appearance of maize pollen, a decline in tree pollen and an increase in charcoal. This is evidence for a rapid and extensive expansion of agriculture with maize as an important crop.

Further charcoal indicates that agriculture was expanded in the area between 1500 and 1300 B.C. and squash and bottle gourd were cultivated as well as maize.
the **diet** of the Preclassic occupants of Cuello consisted of less than 30% **maize**, compared with up to 75% for the **modern Maya**. **White-tailed deer** made up over half the meat in their diet, followed by freshwater turtles and domestic dogs, the last of which represents 7% of the animal remains found at the site.[8]

Two **Late Preclassic** mass burial areas have been uncovered at Cuello, one of which contained 26 or more males who had been **sacrificed**. Healed fractures on the bones suggest that they may have been captured warriors.

Further evidence of local **warfare** comes from evidence of burnt buildings at the site.

A number of elite burials have been excavated at Cuello. The earliest phases of the Middle Classic included both adults and children accompanied by offerings of **jade** and shell ornaments, indicating social differentiation.
Geographical Location of the Maya

- The Maya were occupying an area referred to as the geological bridge, which is essentially the upper part of Central America and parts of Mexico (stretches covering Yucatan Peninsula, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador).
- The Maya occupied different environments, lowlands, highlands and also the pacific coast.
- The Maya area is divided into the Southern, Central and Northern.
  - **The northern area** upper area of the Yucatan Peninsula (Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo) savannah like environment
  - **The southern area** Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico along with the coastal plain along the Pacific and Western half of El Salvador alluvial area/ swampy.
  - **Central area** : lowlands of Guatemala, Belize alluvial/swampy
The Maya Environment
Maya Sites in Belize

- Cerros
- Samanai
- Altun Ha
- El Pilar
- Cahal Pech
- Barton Creek
- Actun Tunichil Muknal
- Xunantunich
- Actun Che Chem
- Caracol
- Nim Li Punit
- Sabantun
MAYA HISTORICAL PERIODS

The Ancient Maya’s success was a gradual process that combined factors such as: ecological adaptation, temporal and spatial diversity, requirements of the elites, interaction, competition and ideology.

- Historians divide the history of the Maya civilization into three main periods:

**Pre-Classic**

**Classic**

**Post classic**

The periods are divided into subsequent periods:

**Pre-classic:**
- Early pre-classic
- Middle pre-classic
- Late pre-classic
General characteristics of the periods:

**Pre-classic**

- Pre-classic- they farmed land and lived in simple houses and compounds or groups of buildings.
- Pre-dates the rise of the first kingdoms
- Agricultural surplus production
- Trade also occurred when there was surplus between the highlands and lowlands due to the different environments.
- During these periods the stage was set for agriculture, mathematics, astronomy, calendrics, architecture, science, and writing.
- Pottery that was common was that of Polychrome
- Important architectural feature: in Belize and Peten, a stucco mask tradition may have preceded the use of stelae.
- Important sites: Cuello, Cahal Pech, Lamanai, Santa Rita, Colha, Blackman Eddy, etc.
Class**ic Period**: is the period when the Maya reached their highest peak in terms of development.

- The population grew significantly, making their settlements larger and it led to specialization and trade.
- They made achievements in agriculture, arts, textiles, astronomy, mathematics, religion, architecture amongst other areas.
- Their achievements will be covered as separate units.

**Post classic period**: will be covered as a separate unit in order for students to understand the collapse of the Maya civilization.
CASE STUDY: THE OLMECs

Stone Materials
As mentioned, sculpture was the starting point for the archaeological identification of the Olmecs. In terms of their number and variety, La Venta’s pieces constitute the most outstanding discoveries to date. The origin of the material used in these carved sculptures has yet to be explained, because the nearest deposit of basalt similar to that used in the colossal heads is located some 100 km (62 mi) away from La Venta.

Monument 53 at La Venta is a 35-ton monolith. The original rock must have come from the deposit in Los Tuxtlas, in Veracruz. How such enormous cargoes were transported is not known, but it is surmised that the Olmecs must have used the river network. The large blocks of columnar basalt also found at La Venta were imported from distant locations, and the more than 3,000 carved jade artifacts probably came from deposits in the Motagua River basin, 800 km (500 mi) away in Guatemala.

Finally, the massive offerings of serpentine that have been found in subterranean deposits in amounts estimated to be as much as 1,000 tons indicates that the Olmecs had developed a system for moving stone materials. These offerings were undoubtedly made little by little, but all the same, the rock had to have been transported from faraway locations, like Nistepec in Oaxaca, some 400 km (250 mi) from La Venta. River navigation seems to be the only possible mode of transportation for long distances. When moving stone on land, they probably rolled the huge rocks over logs. These are only suppositions, since there is no evidence of the nature of the technology they used.
Monument 1, from the site’s zenith, between 600 and 400 BC. This basalt monolith weighs approximately 24 tons. It was found in 1925 at the Great Plaza, near Stele 2. It is unknown if this colossal heads were painted, but it is a possibility herein reconstructed according to archaeological analysis. La Venta, Tab. PMV.