

Maya Dental Mutilation

Name _____

Class Period _____

Activity 1

One way to understand the culture of the Ancient Maya is to look at cultural artifacts from the time period. In this activity, you will be making observations and inferences based on images of artifacts. Complete the following chart as you examine the images of four artifacts.

Artifact	Observations -What do you first see? -What about it draws your attention? -What patterns can you identify? -List 3 specific details you see in the artifact.	Inferences -Why do you think somebody did this? -What tools do you think were used to create this? -Why do you think this item is important?	Questions -What questions do you have about the artifact, time period, or the people who created it?
1			
2			
3			
4			

1. What type of source are you examining (primary, secondary, tertiary)?
2. What similarities and differences did you note about the artifacts?
3. If you were an archeologist, how could you determine if this was a widespread practice or limited to a certain group or place?
4. Using all artifact observations and inferences, make a hypothesis about, "Why would someone do this?"

Activity 2

In this activity, you will read an article on Maya Dental Mutilation and determine the validity of the source.

Sourcing

1. What type of source are you examining (primary, secondary, tertiary)?
2. What is the type of evidence (letter, picture, article, etc.)?
3. Determine credibility of the source.
 - ~Who is the author?
 - ~What is the author's background?
 - ~Where was the author when the evidence was created?
 - ~When was the evidence created?
 - ~How does the author's background influence the evidence?

Analysis

1. How does the author define dental mutilation?
2. The author assumes that dental mutilation was done to make the person attractive. What evidence does the author use to support this claim?

Do your observations of the artifacts support this hypothesis? Why or why not?

3. Hypothesize other reasons for why the people may have used dental mutilation besides to be attractive.

4. The author states that the practice was widespread both in time and place. What type of evidence would support these claims?

5. The author claims dental mutilation practiced by the Maya was mostly restricted to the elite ruling class. What might lead someone to make that claim?

Contextualization

1. What method did Dr. Smith use to help him imagine how the Maya performed dental mutilation without modern technology?

2. Why did they think that the Maya most likely used a drug during dental mutilation?

3. Using background knowledge and textual clues, explain how the geographical and cultural setting of the Maya civilization made this practice possible.

Activity 3

In this activity you will watch a video clip about the Maya. Here is an introduction to the film to provide background information:

Archaeologist Stephanie Simms analyzes teeth from a human burial found at an ancient hilltop mansion called "Stairway to Heaven." She's seeking clues about who lived there. Was this the royal palace of a Mayan king? Hard to believe, scientific analysis of teeth can yield valuable data about what life was like for the residents there. The 1200-year-old plaque contains traces of food, which reveal the Mayan diet was rich and diverse. They were skilled cooks who used a wide variety of foods and spices in their recipes. Though it's not covered in the film, Stephanie is recreating some of those recipes from data gleaned from the teeth. Stephanie also finds unique tooth carvings where precious stones ("tooth jewelry") would have been implanted. Many people have a misconception that life for ancient Maya peasants was rough and poor, but this new evidence shows some Maya lived a very comfortable and prosperous "middle class" existence.

(http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/clues-mayan-prosperity/?ar_a=1)

Sourcing

1. What type of source are you examining (primary, secondary, tertiary)?

2. The film was produced by the National Geographic Society. What does this tell you about the reliability of the source?

3. Who do they interview in the film to support the claims of the documentary?

Analysis

1. What new technology was available to Dr. Stephanie Simms in 2012 that was not available to Dr. Smith in the 1990s?
2. How does this new evidence provided by Dr. Simms help scientists understand the daily life of the Maya?

Corroboration

1. What similar information did you find in both the article and the video?
2. What information did you find that was different in one of the sources?
3. What could account for the similarities and/or differences between the sources?
4. The film questions whether dental mutilation was limited to the elite ruling class as stated in the article. The film argues that wealth was more widespread among the middle class than originally thought. What evidence does the film use to support this claim?

Conclusion

Many historians say that their conclusions are *temporary* or *tentative*. **From what you have learned about sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization, how might our interpretations of history change in the future?** In a one-paragraph essay, reply to this prompt using specific examples to support your argument.