



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1999 Volume II: Art and Identity in Mexico, from the Olmec to Modern Times

Artistic Traditions of the May People

Guide for Curriculum Unit 99.02.04
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The purpose of this unit is to explore the rich and varied artistic traditions of the Maya people through music, dance, drama, and visual art. Special emphasis is given to the musical traditions of the Maya through the years.

The major focus of this unit is the musical traditions of the Maya people. This includes an explication about the traditional music used by the Maya, a brief overview of how music instruments might have been constructed by the Maya and what music is like for the Maya today.

Maya music groups were usually small ensembles. These groups used a few primary basic instruments that were members of either the percussion family or the woodwind/brass family. The percussion instruments used were a large stationary drum and a smaller slit gong drum. The woodwind instruments used were primarily the flute with a trumpet like instrument representing the brass family.

The Maya regarded musicians as someone who was born with God given talent. This was a position held in high esteem by the Maya.

Other elements of this unit include a brief history of the Maya and an overview of some of the significant periods in the history of the Maya.

This unit also refers to some of the art practices of the Maya. This includes body painting, body tattoos, orthodontia, skull deformation and other ritual practices. The color of the paint, the type of decorative clothing and the amount or type of other body ornaments often was related to the status that a Maya person held in their society.

This unit is adaptable for use in social studies, art, dramatic art, or other related arts areas. This is in addition to its intended purpose of use within a music class. This unit is adaptable for students in grades K-8.

(Recommended for Music and Social Studies, grades K-8.)

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