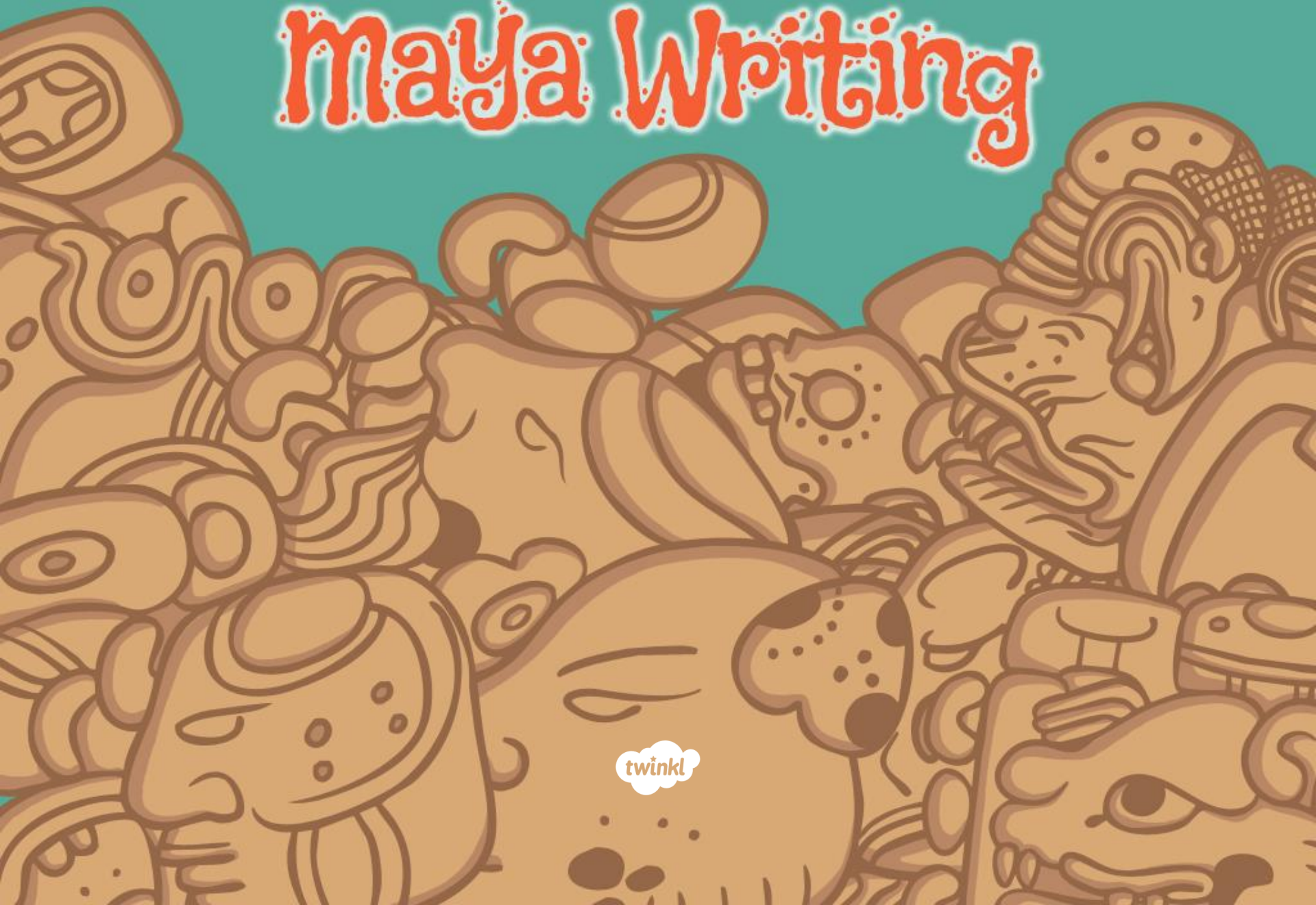


# Maya Writing



# Maya Writing

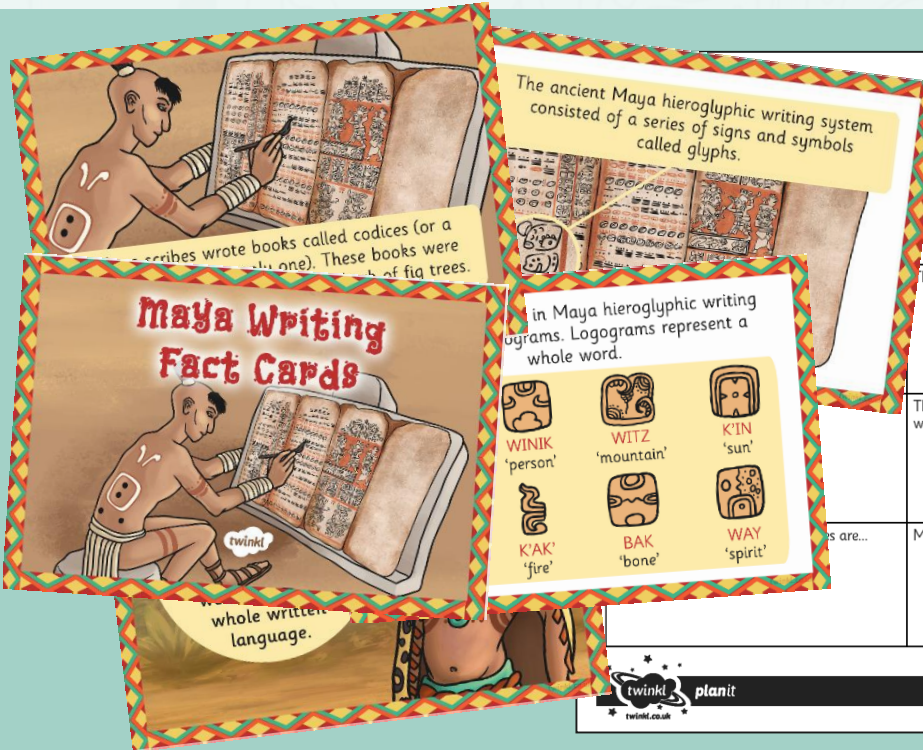
## What do you know about Maya writing?

1. What does Maya writing look like?
2. Where have you seen examples of Maya writing in your learning about the Maya so far?
3. What do you think the Maya may have written about? Why?
4. What would you like to find out about Maya writing?



# Maya Writing Fact Hunt

Read the Maya Writing Fact Cards. Use the information on the fact cards to help you complete the Maya Writing Fact Hunt Activity Sheet.



The ancient Maya hieroglyphic writing system consisted of a series of signs and symbols called glyphs.

scribes wrote books called codices (or a whole written language). These books were made of fig trees.

**Maya Writing Fact Cards**

in Maya hieroglyphic writing Logograms represent a whole word.

|                   |                    |                 |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| WINIK<br>'person' | WITZ<br>'mountain' | K'IN<br>'sun'   |
| K'AK'<br>'fire'   | BAK<br>'bone'      | WAY<br>'spirit' |

whole written language.

## Writing Fact Hunt

Use the facts to help you complete the information about Maya writing?

|                                                           |                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| These people knew the whole Mayan language...             | Maya books are called...            |
| The different types of glyphs used in Maya writing are... | Maya hieroglyphs have been found... |
| Maya books were made of...                                | My own amazing Maya writing fact... |



planit

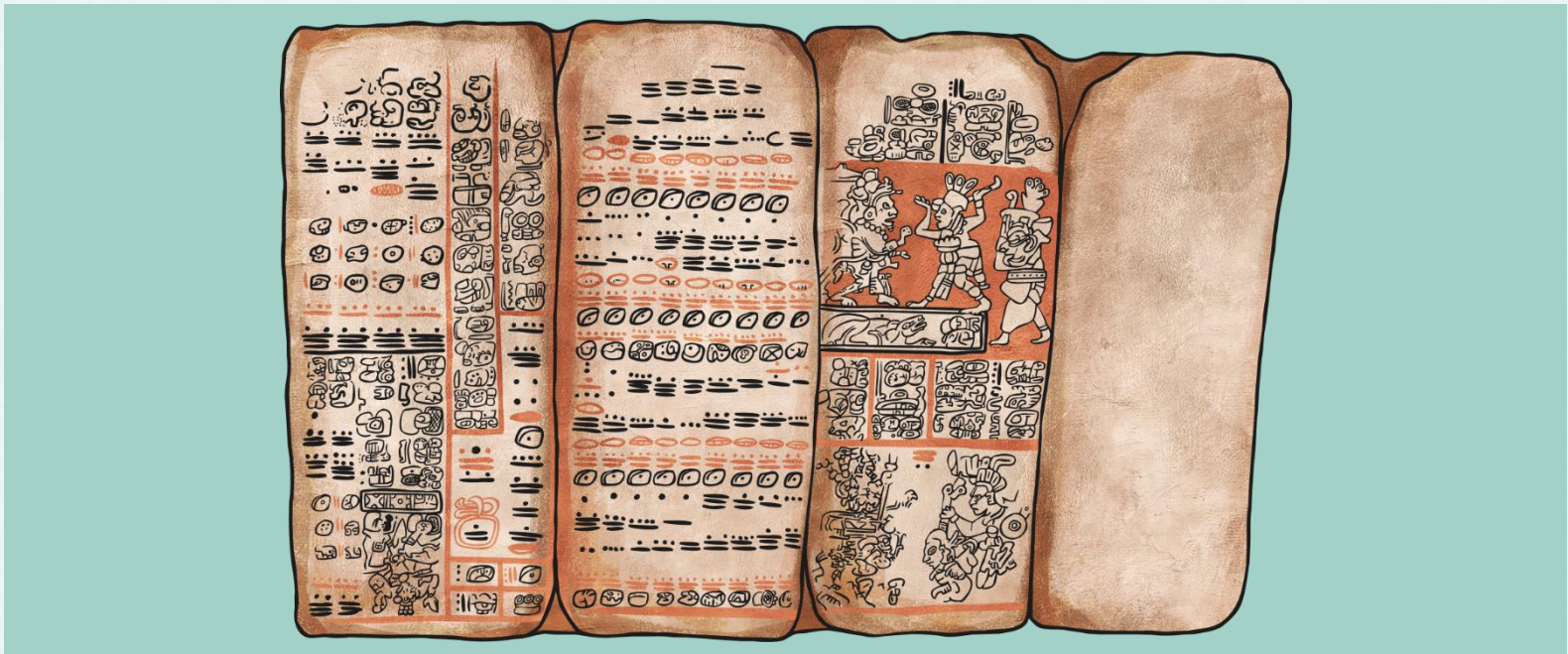
History | UKS2 | The Maya Civilisation | Maya Writing | Lesson 5

# Codices

The Maya people also wrote books made of the bark from fig trees. One book is called a codex and the plural is codices.

The codices were written by professional scribes and contained information about astronomy, gods, war and history.

Rather than having separate pages, the codices unfolded like a concertina.



# The Last Codices

Unfortunately, when the Spanish arrived and set to conquer the Maya, their priests burned as many Maya codices as they could find as they considered them to be the work of the devil. Three genuine Maya codices remain, and they were discovered 'hiding out' in Europe. These codices are named after the places they are kept.

- **The Dresden Codex:** part of the Royal Library collection in Dresden, Germany.
- **The Madrid Codex:** Housed in the Madrid Archaeological Museum, Spain.
- **The Paris Codex:** Housed in the National Library of Paris, France.

A fourth codex was discovered in the 1960s, but historians cannot decide if it is real. It is called the Grolier codex.

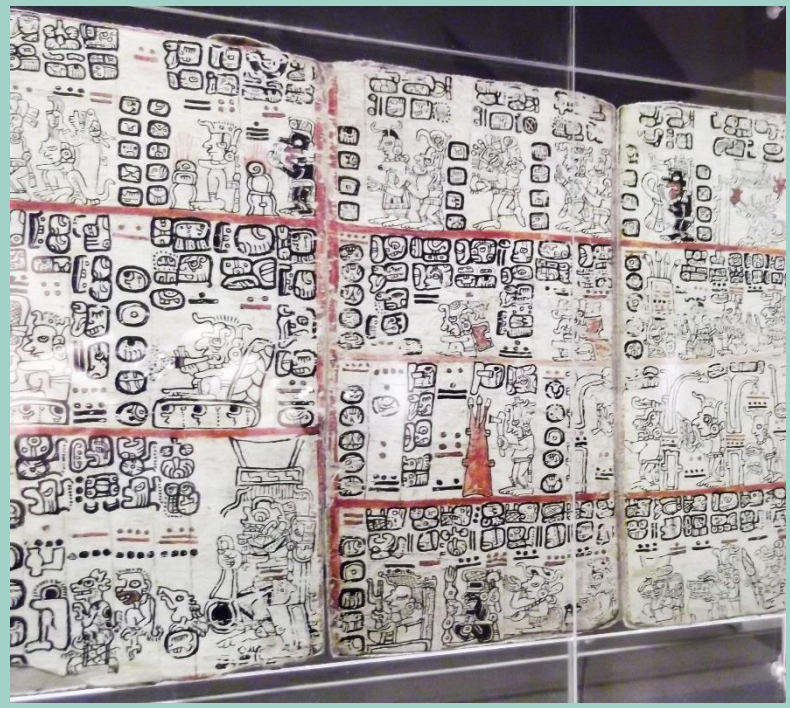


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# Maya Writing Comprehension



Read the information on your activity sheet carefully. Use the information and your own knowledge to answer the comprehension questions.

## Maya Writing

The Maya were one of the five ancient civilisations to develop a writing system. The earliest Maya writing was found in Guatemala and dates in as far back as 300 BC.

The Maya people used signs or symbols called hieroglyphs or glyphs for their Maya writing, and written in columns and then read in a zigzag way like this:

Examples of Maya writing have been found carved in stone, on pottery, on stone monuments and in codices (books). These hieroglyphs were also carved with writing.

Codices were Maya books written in a special ink called pichil. In 1562, Diego de Landa (a priest - religious man) ordered the burning of many Maya codices as he believed they were a work of the devil. The Spanish also burned hundreds of other documents as well.

Landa's actions in Maya writing were useful in helping us to understand their writing system. The sense is given to some of the glyphs which became known as Landa's alphabet. In the 1920s, a Russian man called Yuri Vokhtanovsk Krasnov discovered that a lot of the Maya writing was based on numbers. This not really helped us to understand the Maya writing as it began.

### Codices

There are four known codices left today: Madrid, Madrid, Paris and Dresden.

The Paris Codex: The Paris Codex was found in Paris and contains important information about the Maya astronomical signs (calendar to predict signs). The Paris Codex is kept at the National Library of Paris in France.

The Dresden Codex: The Dresden Codex was found in Vienna, Austria, in 1759. It is the most complete of the four codices.

The Madrid Codex: The Madrid Codex was discovered in 1962 in length. It is painted on both sides and contains information about religious beliefs and rituals. It is now kept at the Museo de Historia in Madrid.

The Madrid Codex: The Madrid Codex was discovered in the Madrid Club in New York. Some historians agree that it is fake, although the Big Book says it is written on a real.

## Maya Writing

The Maya were one of the five ancient civilisations to have independently developed a fully-fledged writing system. The earliest examples of Maya writing were found in Guatemala, Central America and date in as far back as 300 BC.

Examples of Maya writing have been found carved in stone, on pottery, on stone monuments and in codices (books). Writing was also found on simple.

Codices were Maya books written in a special ink called pichil. In 1562, Diego de Landa (a priest - religious man) ordered the burning of many Maya codices as he believed they were a work of the devil. The Spanish also burned hundreds of other documents as well.

### Codices

The codices that remain were probably found in private collections after being smuggled out of the Maya area sometime after the arrival of the Spanish. There are four known codices, but some versions question if the Madrid Codex is real, or a number of reasons. The other three codices are named after the places in which they are kept today: Madrid, Paris and Dresden.

**The Madrid Codex**

The Madrid Codex is the largest of the remaining codices, measuring 22 feet in length. It is painted on both sides and contains information about religious beliefs and rituals. The codex was found in two separate places in Spain in the 19th century and is now housed in the Museo de Historia in Madrid, where a perfect copy of the document is on display for visitors to see.

**The Paris Codex**

The Paris Codex was found in a private collection in Paris in the 19th century. It contains information about the Maya astronomical signs (calendar to predict signs). The codex was found in two separate places in Spain in the 19th century and is now housed in the Museo de Historia in Madrid, where a perfect copy of the document is on display for visitors to see.

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The Dresden Codex was bought from a private collector in Vienna, Austria in 1759 by the Royal.

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## Maya Writing Comprehension Questions

- Where were the earliest examples of Maya writing found?
- What is the name of the symbols the Maya people used to write with?
- Where has Maya writing been found?
- Who was Diego de Landa?
- How did the Russian man, Yuri Vokhtanovsk Krasnov help us to understand Maya writing better?
- Which places do some of the Maya codices get their names from?
- Which codex is the most complete?
- Which codex might not be real?

Now can you think of your own question to ask a friend? Make sure you know the answers too!

**My question:**

## Maya Writing Comprehension Questions

- Where were the earliest examples of Maya writing found?
- What is the difference between a hieroglyph and a syllabogram?
- Why do you think the Maya people often used different syllabograms to represent the same sound?
- How do you read Maya writing?
- Who was Diego de Landa and why did he order the mass burning of Maya books?
- Where did Diego de Landa help people to understand Maya writing?
- Where do Maya Codices get their names from?
- Which is the longest codex and which is the most complete?
- What can the codices help us to learn about the Maya people?
- Which codex do you think sounds the most interesting? Why?

Extension: Now can you think of three of your own questions to ask a friend? Make sure you know the answers too!

## Maya Writing Comprehension Questions

- Where were the earliest examples of Maya writing found?
- What is the difference between a hieroglyph and a syllabogram?
- Why do you think the Maya people often used different syllabograms to represent the same sound?
- Who was Diego de Landa and why did he order the mass burning of Maya books?
- What evidence suggests the Dresden Codex is authentic and what evidence suggests that it isn't?
- Where do you think the Maya people might have found codices out of the Maya area?
- Where do Maya Codices get their names from?
- What can the codices help us to learn about the Maya people?
- Which codex do you think sounds the most interesting? Why?
- Why do you think it's so difficult to prove the authenticity of the Dresden Codex?

Extension: Now can you think of three of your own questions to ask a friend? Make sure you know the answers too!

# Maya Hieroglyphs

Maya hieroglyphic writing can be made up of syllabograms (representing sounds) or logograms (representing whole words).

Logograms often resemble the thing that they represent, so it is easy for us to see what they mean, but others are more tricky.

Look closely at these logograms. Can you match them to their meanings?

|                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  |  |  |
| to grab                                                                           | fire                                                                              | to scatter                                                                          | jaguar                                                                              |



**chan**  
'sky'



**winik**  
'person'



**witz**  
'mountain'



**k'in**  
'sun'



**b'alam**  
'jaguar'



**k'ak'**  
'fire'



**bak**  
'bone'



**way**  
'spirit'



**juun**  
'book'



**ja'**  
'water'



**ajaw**  
'lord'



**muyal**  
'cloud'



**ix**  
'woman'



**ch'am**  
'to grab'



**k'uk'**  
'quetzal'



**chan**  
'snake'



**ch'ul**  
'holy'



**chok**  
'to scatter'



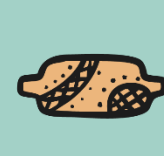
**jaab**  
'year'



**yax**  
'blue/green'



**pakal**  
'shield'



**tok**  
'flint'



**naj**  
'house'



**k'al**  
'twenty'

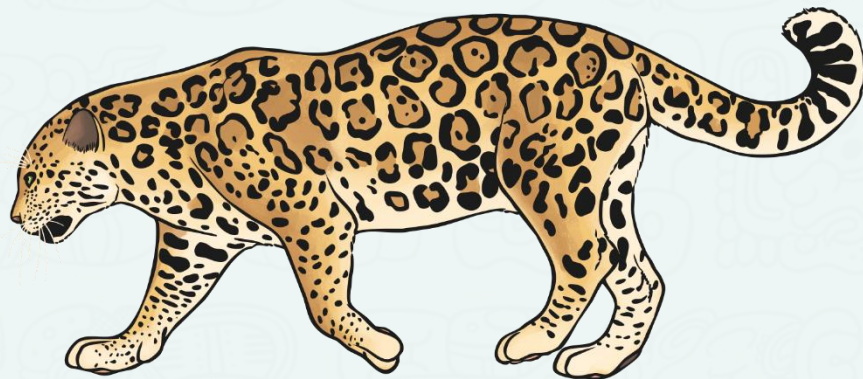
# Syllabograms

About 150 syllabograms were used in the Maya script and syllables were often represented by more than one glyph. This meant that different people could spell the same words differently depending on which syllabograms they chose to use.

For example, the Maya word for jaguar is b'alam which can be split into three syllables b'a – la – am, with the final 'a' silent.

Have a look at the syllabograms for the syllables in b'alam. How many different ways of spelling the word can you find?

**Remember there is a logogram for the word jaguar too!**



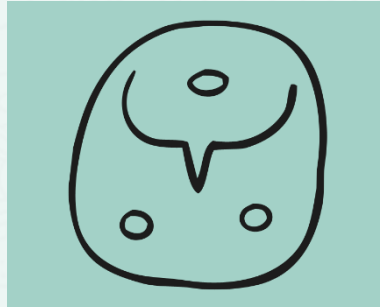
# Jaguar – b'alam

ba



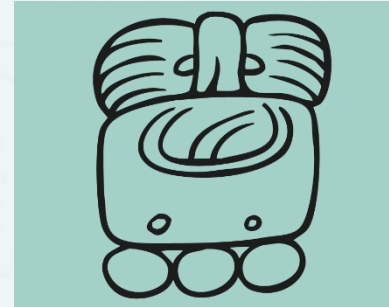
+

la

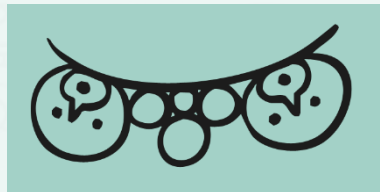
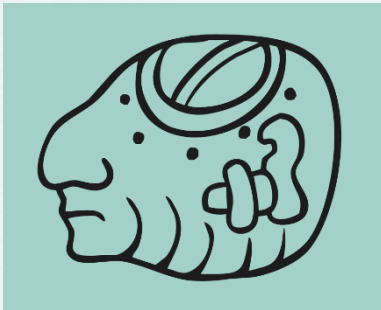


+

am



=

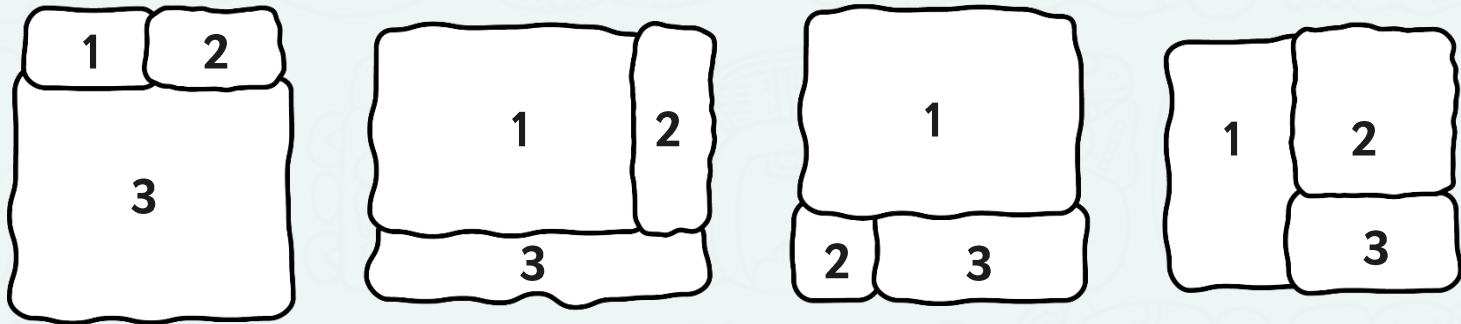


# Creating a Glyph Block

Now you have three syllabograms to write b'alam, you need to combine them into one glyph block.

Maya glyphs were roughly read top to bottom and left to right.

For example:



So the word b'alam could look like this:

