

Reading Explorer 5 Unit 1 Lesson A

DIRECTION: Choose the best answer for each question.

Secrets of the Maya

The study of caves and wells in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula is shining new light on the beliefs of the ancient and modern Maya.

[A] From deep in a well near the ruins of the Maya city of Chichen Itza, archaeoastronomer¹ Arturo Montero shouts to his colleague on the surface, "I saw it, I saw it! Yes, it's true!" Leaning over the mouth of the well, archaeologist Guillermo de Anda hopes to hear what he has suspected for many months. "What is true, Arturo?" he shouts. And Montero yells up again, "The zenith² light, it really works! Get down here!"

[B] The two archaeologists are anxious to confirm whether this cenote could have acted as a sacred sundial³ and timekeeper for the ancient Maya. On two days every year - May 23 and July 19 - the sun reaches its zenith over this part of Mexico. At those moments, the sun is vertically overhead and there is no shadow. On the morning of their descent, on May 24, Montero and de Anda see that the sun's rays come very close to vertical. The day before, they realized, a beam of light would have plunged straight down into the water.

[C] Beneath its narrow mouth, the walls of the cenote open up to become a giant dome. It looks like a cathedral, except for the roots of trees that penetrate the rock as they reach for the water. The beam of sunlight dances like fire on the surrounding stalactites,⁴ and it turns the water a beautiful transparent blue. The archaeologists were probably the first people in centuries to watch the sun move slowly across the cenote's water.

[D] Did Maya priests wait in this well - known as the Holtun cenote - to observe and correct their measurements of the sun's angle when it reached the zenith? Did they come here during times of drought to make offerings to their water god, and at other times to give thanks for a good harvest? These and other questions involving the Maya religion and its extraordinarily accurate calendar are what the two explorers were investigating.

[E] In recent years, archaeologists have been paying more attention to the meaning of caves, the zenith sun, and cenotes in the beliefs of the ancient and modern Maya. Archaeologists already knew that the ancient Maya believed cenotes to be doors to a world inhabited by Chaak, the god of life-giving rain, but the significance of this fact has only recently started to become clear.

[F] De Anda began exploring Holtun in 2010. One day, inspecting the walls of the cenote a few meters below the surface, he felt something above his head. He was astonished to find a natural rock shelf holding human and animal bones, pottery, and a knife - probably used for sacrifices - all neatly placed there centuries earlier. Below the water, he saw a number of columns and Maya stone carvings - the well was clearly a sacred site.

Key to Survival

[G] Three years later, in the cornfield on the surface above the cenote, a crew of Maya farmers is working hard in the grueling Yucatan heat to pull the explorers out of the well. "There was a good rain the other day," said the crew's leader, Louis Un Ken, as he wipes the sweat off his face. "The Chaak moved."

[H] For men like Un Ken, the old gods are still very much alive, and Chaak is among the most important. For the benefit of living things, he pours from the skies the water he keeps in jars. Thunder is the sound of Chaak breaking a jar open and letting the rain fall. The Chaak had moved, Un Ken said, and that meant the planting season would soon arrive.

[I] Chaak's absence can cause disasters for the Yucatan Maya, possibly the demise of the ancient Maya civilization itself. Their land is an endless limestone shelf. Rain sinks through the porous⁵ limestone down to groundwater levels, and consequently no river or stream runs through the land. From the air, one sees a green sea of dense jungle, but at ground level, however, the tropical forest appears very thin. Wherever there is enough soil, the Maya plant corn or a *milpa*, a crop-growing system including the corn, beans, and squash that constitutes their basic source of protein. But corn is a hungry crop; it sucks lots of nutrients from the soil. For thousands of years, milpa farmers have kept their small fields productive by burning a different area of trees every year and planting in the corn-friendly ashes.

[J] As for water for the fields, that's where Chaak comes in. Only seasonal rains can make the corn grow, and they must arrive in an exact pattern: no rain in winter so that the fields and forest will be dry enough to burn by March; some rain in early May to soften up the soil for planting; then very gentle rain to allow the planted seeds to begin to grow; and finally, plenty of rain so the corn can flourish.

Pleasing the Rain God

[K] In the village of Yaxuna, many people still depend on milpa, and an annual ceremony is held there to please the rain god. They walk a long way through the forest to a sacred cave and climb down to its center to bring up the water the ceremony requires. They raise the altar, dig a large cooking pit, and provide 13 fat chickens for the ritual meal. They cook them in the pit so the steam can rise directly to the rain god as an offering.

[L] One recent such ceremony in Yaxuna was guided by Hipolito Puuc Tamay, a Maya holy man called a *hmem*. He stood in front of an altar praying for the holy blessing of rain. On instructions from the hmem, one of the villagers sat on a rock near the altar, blowing from time to time into one of the gourds⁶ in which Chaak stores the wind. He was just one of the neighbors, but he was also the rain god, and he sat with his eyes closed so as not to harm the ceremony with his terrible glance. Two other participants brought him to the altar, facing backward, to receive a blessing from the hmem.

[M] Out of nowhere, a wind came up, and thunder could be heard in the distance. As the ceremonial meal was being distributed, the rain started - a sign, the hmem said, that Chaak had received his offering and was pleased with his people's prayer. Soon, perhaps, the earth would be ready for planting.

¹ An **archeoastronomer** is someone who studies archeological artifacts to determine what ancient people believed and understood about astronomy.

² The **zenith** is a point directly above a particular location.

³ A **sundial** is a device used for telling the time when the sun is shining. The shadow of a pointer falls onto a surface marked with the hours.

⁴ **Stalactites** are rock formations hanging from cave ceilings, slowly formed by dripping water.

⁵ Something that is **porous** has many small holes in it, which water and air can pass through.

⁶ A **gourd** is a container made from the hard, dry skin of a gourd fruit. Gourds are often used for carrying water or for decoration.

- _____ 1. Which would be the best alternative title for this passage?
- a. An Ancient Ceremony in a Deep Well
 - b. Milpa in the Modern Maya Diet
 - c. The Maya Rain God Still Reigns
 - d. Water Systems in the Yucatan Peninsula
- _____ 2. On which date does the zenith light appear directly above the cenote?
- a. May 24
 - b. June 21
 - c. July 19
 - d. September 23
- _____ 3. What is the purpose of paragraph F?
- a. to support the idea that the well was a holy place
 - b. to explain why de Anda hit his head
 - c. to describe ancient tools and pottery
 - d. to identify people and animals that lived nearby
- _____ 4. Why are there no rivers in this part of Mexico?
- a. Rain water runs through the limestone.
 - b. It hardly ever rains so the soil is very dry.
 - c. Farmers in the mountains use up all the water.
 - d. The land is too steep for river valleys.
- _____ 5. What is the purpose of paragraph J?
- a. to show the importance of rain at certain times during the agricultural cycle
 - b. to explain why Chaak is only worshipped as a seasonal god
 - c. to describe the Maya lifestyle and traditional food source
 - d. to identify the different gods that the Maya prayed to
- _____ 6. In paragraph K, what does *ceremony* refer to?
- a. killing an animal to honor a god
 - b. a large meal for a lot of people
 - c. a performance where people sing and dance
 - d. a formal event following traditions or customs
- _____ 7. The following sentence would best be placed at the end of which paragraph?
- The air in the cave fills with the fragrant smell of cooking meat.*
- a. Paragraph I
 - b. Paragraph J
 - c. Paragraph K
 - d. Paragraph M
- _____ 8. In the ceremony described in paragraph L, who plays the part of Chaak?
- a. the hmem
 - b. a chicken
 - c. a villager
 - d. two men

- _____ 9. In paragraph M, why does the religious leader think that Chaak was pleased?
- a. Distant thunder could be heard.
 - b. It started to rain.
 - c. The people ate all the food.
 - d. He sat with his eyes closed.
- _____ 10. Which of the following people is most likely to think his personal actions will affect the weather?
- a. the author
 - b. Arturo Montero
 - c. Guillermo de Anda
 - d. Louis Un Ken

DIRECTIONS: Complete the sentences. Choose the correct word.

- a. blessing
- b. constitutes
- c. demise
- d. flourish
- e. grueling
- f. inspect
- g. penetrate
- h. plunge
- i. sacrifices
- j. soil

- _____ 11. The climbers on the glacier were always aware that one misstep could mean a sudden _____ into the icy river far below.
- _____ 12. Grass seedlings are strong enough to _____ through the concrete sidewalk.
- _____ 13. The _____ in this region is rich and fertile, so plants grow easily.
- _____ 14. Before every race, the drivers _____ their race cars very carefully.
- _____ 15. The amount allocated to advertising _____ less than 10% of the total budget.
- _____ 16. His parents made many financial _____ in order to send him to university.
- _____ 17. The Tour de France is difficult, especially the _____ mountainous route through the Alps.
- _____ 18. Some marketers say that smartphones mark the _____ of traditional digital cameras.
- _____ 19. They finally got engaged after years of courtship, with the _____ of both their families.
- _____ 20. Citrus trees such as oranges and lemons _____ in warm climates, but don't do as well in colder climates as they are sensitive to frost.

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Answer Section

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|----------------------------------|--------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1. ANS: C
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Gist |
| 2. ANS: C
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Supporting Detail |
| 3. ANS: A
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Purpose |
| 4. ANS: A
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Cause and Effect |
| 5. ANS: A
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Purpose |
| 6. ANS: D
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Unfamiliar Vocabulary |
| 7. ANS: C
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Cohesion |
| 8. ANS: C
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Supporting Detail |
| 9. ANS: B
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Inference |
| 10. ANS: D
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Pages 9-13 | OBJ: Inference |
| 11. ANS: H
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 12. ANS: G
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 13. ANS: J
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 14. ANS: F
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 15. ANS: B
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 16. ANS: I
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 17. ANS: E
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 18. ANS: C
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 19. ANS: A
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |
| 20. ANS: D
TOP: Rise and Fall | PTS: 1 | REF: Page 17 | OBJ: Vocabulary |