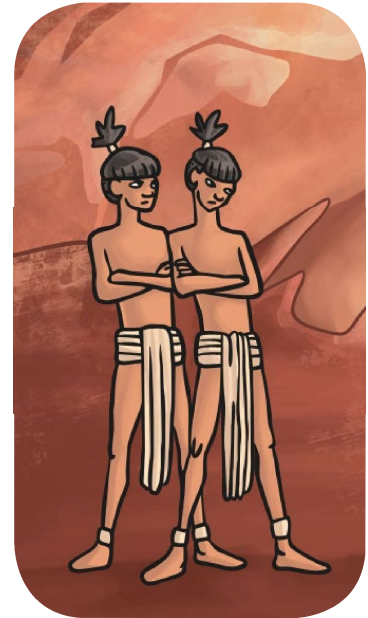


The Hero Twins

The Hero Twins are two of the most significant characters in Mayan mythology. Their story is told in the Popol Vuh, one of the few surviving Maya texts. Nobles claimed to be direct descendants of the twins thereby giving them the right to rule.

The story of the Hero Twins begins with two boys - One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. These two boys loved to play Maya ball games. They were very good at it and as a result, caused a lot of noise when they played. This agitated the Lords of Death, the gods of the underworld, who then summoned the boys to the underworld. Once in the underworld, the Lords of Death made them take part in a variety of tests. They passed the first test by crossing the river of spikes and blood. Sadly however, the boys failed the second test as they did not recognise the real gods and greeted wooden carvings of them instead. Subsequently, the gods put them to death.



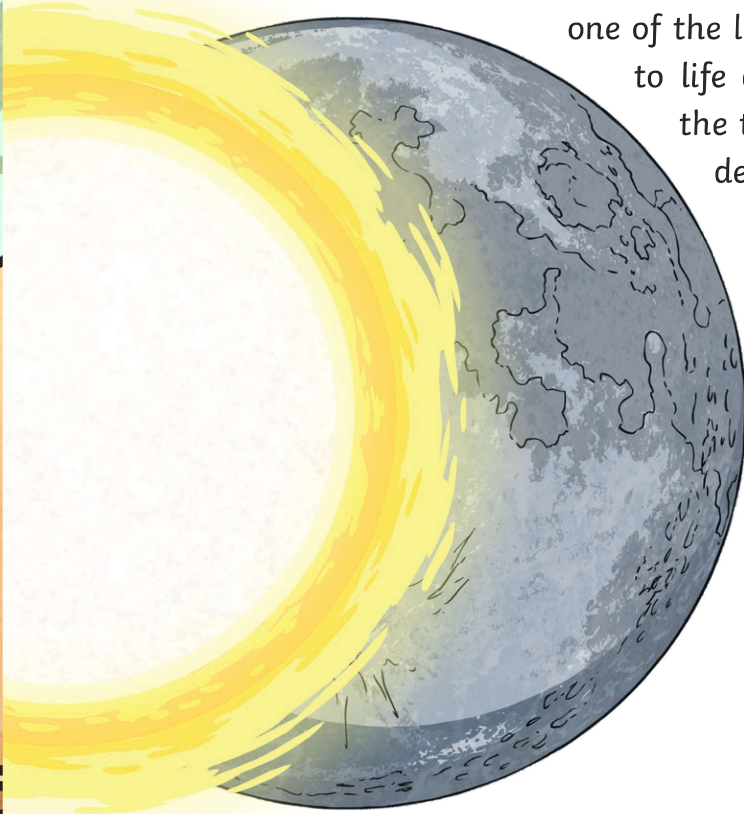
According to the myth, a Mayan princess sat by the severed head of one of the twins (One Hunahpu) and then discovered that she was pregnant. She gave birth to the next generation of twin boys whose names were Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The twins were good ballplayers, just like their father and uncle, and were equally as loud. Annoyed by the noise again, the Lords of Death invited the twins to the underworld.

The Hero Twins accepted the invitation and went to the underworld. However, they had learnt about their father's mistakes and did not fall for any of the gods' tricks and passed each test. They used a mosquito to bite the gods so that they knew which ones were real and which were wooden carvings. They also refused to sit on the fiery bench that their father and uncle had previously burnt themselves on. After passing the tests, the gods challenged them to a game of ball. The gods tried to trick them by using a ball covered in sharp blades but the twins did not fall for it. They told the gods that they would only play ball if the gods agreed to play fair.

The gods agreed and finally, the twins defeated them. The lords were furious and ordered the twins to jump into an oven. Knowing they had no choice, the boys agreed but only because they had a plan. Once their ashes were thrown into the river, the boys came back to life as catfish.

Later, they were even restored to their previous form but now possessed many powers of the gods. One power was that they could kill things and then revive them. This impressed the Lords of Death who asked the twins to perform the trick on them. Seeing their chance, the twins killed one of the lords but refused to bring him back to life again. Realising at this point that the twins had won, the Lords of Death decided to leave the twins alone.

The Hero Twins were made rulers of the Earth by the gods of the sky. One twin was turned into the Moon and the other into the Sun. Mayans also believe that the Hero Twins brought their father back to life and turned him into the Maize god.



The Hero Twins Questions

1. What is the Popol Vuh?
2. Why did Mayan nobles claim to be direct descendants of the Hero Twins?
Explain your answer fully.
3. Find and copy a word which means called upon or asked to go.
4. Use the text to explain what the word subsequently means?
5. Why do you think the Lords of Death grew agitated by the noise of the twins playing ball? Explain your answer fully.
6. Who is the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque?
7. Why did they refuse to sit down on the bench?
8. Explain how the Lords of Death's plan to kill Hunahpu and Xbalanque backfired.
9. Use the evidence from the text to describe what the Lords of Death are like.
10. According to Mayan mythology, who was turned into the Maize god?
11. What is the purpose of this Mayan myth?

Answers The Hero Twins Questions

1. What is the Popol Vuh?

The Popol Vuh is an ancient Mayan text.

2. Why did Mayan nobles claim to be direct descendants of the Hero Twins? Explain your answer fully.

You may have an answer, such as: I think that the Mayan nobles claimed to be direct descendants of the Hero Twins because after they were killed by the Lords of Death, they came back to life and had powers of gods. Eventually, they were also made rulers of the Earth. If the nobles are descendants of the twins, it means that they too are gods.

3. Find and copy a word which means called upon or asked to go.

summoned

4. Use the text to explain what the word subsequently means?

Afterwards

5. Why do you think the Lords of Death grew agitated by the noise of the twins playing ball? Explain your answer fully.

Pupil's own response, such as: I think that the Lords of Death grew agitated because it would have been a happy, lively sound which is the opposite of the noise of death. They probably did not like hearing people enjoy themselves.

6. Who is the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque?

One Hunahpu

7. Why did they refuse to sit down on the bench?

They refused to sit on the fiery bench that their father and uncle had previously burnt themselves on.

8. Explain how the Lords of Death's plan to kill Hunahpu and Xbalanque backfired.

Pupil's own response, such as: The Lords of Death's plan backfired because when the twins came back to life, they had powers of the gods. The Lords of Death then asked the twins to perform a trick for them, which the twins did, but they then showed the lords that they had more power over them because they did not bring one of the lords back to life.

9. Use the evidence from the text to describe what the Lords of Death are like.

You may have one or some or other answers:

The Lords of Death got "agitated" when they heard "a lot of noise when they played." this means that they get easily annoyed or angered.

The Lords of Death "made them take part in a variety of tests" this means they liked to play games and trick the people.

The Lords of Death liked to cheat as they want to play with a "ball covered in sharp blades".

10. According to Mayan mythology, who was turned into the Maize god?

One Hunahpu

11. What is the purpose of this Mayan myth?

You may have an answer that talks about the myth providing an explanation on how the sun and moon came to be or about the Lords of Death and what they are like or about the hero twins themselves and learning from previous mistakes.