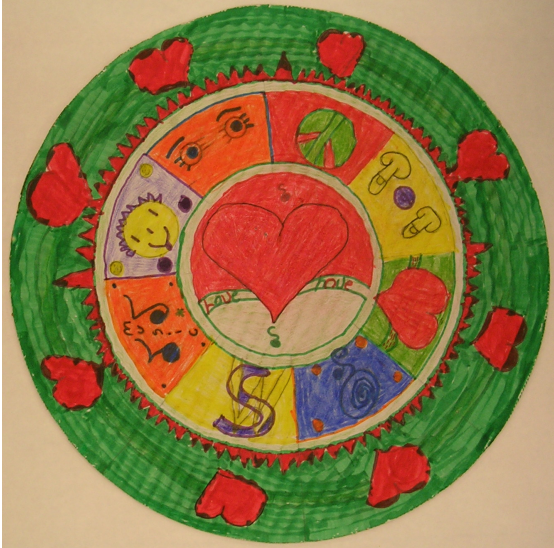


Aztec Sun Stone

Grade Level: Upper Elementary
Region: Mexico
Student Examples and Handouts





The Aztec Calendar The History and Importance

The Aztec calendar has a very interesting history and many interesting myths that go along with it. It has served many purposes in the Aztec culture and is decorated very beautifully, making it the most famous symbol of Mexico.

There were two calendars systems used by the Aztecs. One was the solar year which was a 365 day cycle, divided up into 18 months of 20 days each. This left five days over, which were "bad luck days". The second calendar was 260 days and made up of 20 day signs named after aspects of nature, and 13 numbers. Once the 260 and 365 day cycles have passed through every possible permutation, 52 years has gone by and the cycle begins again. 52 years to them is our equivalent to our century

The Aztec calendar, also known as Cuauhxicalli, or Eagle Bowl, is dedicated to the sun deity, which is why it is also called the Sun Stone. It weighs almost 25 tons and is about 12 feet in diameter. The stone was discovered in the main square of the City of Mexico. After that, it was embedded in the wall of the Western tower of the Metropolitan Cathedral where it stayed until 1885, when it was moved to the National Museum of Archeology and History. The stone was carved during the reign of the 6th Aztec monarch (Artcamp,1).

Each day on the calendar has special meaning and is represented graphically with a glyph, or drawing and a number from one to thirteen. Each number is represented by dots, so not to be confused with each other. This calendar has twenty thirteen-day weeks with each day having its own god looking over it. The face of the sun, Tonatiuh, is in the center of the disc. He is decorated with a nose ring, earrings, necklaces and other ornaments. With each ring around the sun, there is an epoch, or tale of the god assigned to that ring. Scholars believe that the stone was meant to portray the five ages, or cycles of creation (Crystalinks, 1).

Because the Aztec Calendar had so many meanings, epochs and gods and innumerable importance because of this,

it has become the most famous symbol of Mexico. By learning where their calendar came from ,we can better understand the production and meaning of ours today.

What I Learned in Mexico

This is a fictional story written by myself to help explore the Aztec Calendar, the Sun Stone.

While on my vacation to Mexico with my family, I continued to see a replica of a circular slab of stone with many drawings around it and the face of the sun in the middle. I asked my parents if they knew what it was, but they weren't quite sure either. One day while on a tour, I snuck off the bus and decided to do some learning of my own. My first stop was the plaza, where there were many people milling around. It was hard to find someone to speak to because of the language barrier. I spoke only a little Spanish, and what I did know wasn't going to be enough help me communicate. As I turned the corner at the fish stand, I bumped into an old man, carrying a smaller replica of the same stone I was out searching to learn about! I stopped the man and asked him if he knew English, he answered "Yes, very well actually." I then asked the man what he was holding, and he told me it was the Aztec Calendar, also called the Sun Stone. I asked the man why I kept seeing it everywhere and he said that it was because it was possibly the most famous symbol in Mexico. He seemed surprised that I didn't know what it was. I asked him if he could tell me more about the stone as he led me out of the ally. He began to tell me, "Long, long ago, the original of this stone was found, buried in the main square of the City of Mexico and then embedded into that wall right over there," and he pointed to the Metropolitan Cathedral. I rose as he said this, hoping to see the stone, but he explained to me that it was no longer there, but had been moved in 1885 to the National Museum of Archeology and History. He then continued to tell me the many mythological and astronomical significances of the stone.

He told me that all the little characters around the stone were actually gods, each assigned to watch over that certain day. He said that the face in the middle of the stone was the Sun God, the Lord of Heaven. He told me that the original weighs almost 25 tons and is about 12 feet in diameter and 3 feet thick! I was amazed by these proportions. He continued to tell me about that there were actually two calendar systems used by the Aztecs. The first was the solar year, or the 365 day cycle, divided up into 18 months of twenty days each, with 5 leftover days, deemed to be bad luck. The second calendar was the 260 day cycle made up of 20 day signs, named after nature, and 13 numbers. Together, once the 260 and 365 day cycles pass through every possible permutation, 52 years has gone by. He told me that this was the equivalent to our century! I was amazed by all the information that this man knew about the Aztec Calendar. Once the man told me about all the mythology and what each god did for each day, I realized that several hours had passed and my parents were probably worried sick about me. I thanked the man for his help and ran back to the hotel we were staying at, excited to tell my parents what I had learned about the Sun Stone.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/aztecalendar.html>

Many of the Aztecs' religious ceremonies, including frequent human sacrifices, were performed at the Great Temple, located in the center of their capital city of Tenochtitlan.



700 Years Ago in Central America



The Aztecs were late comers to the Valley of Mexico, recent emigrants from the desert frontiers of northern Mesoamerica (another term for Central America). Legend says they left their original homeland of Aztlan (hence the name Aztec) around 900 AD. The name Mexico comes from one of the Aztec clans, the Mexica. The early Aztec clans fought against the ruling Toltecs, but were usually defeated. The Mexica instead of fighting the Toltecs fought for them as mercenaries (hired soldiers), and became the military power of the region. In later wars, the Mexica had to flee their Toltec homeland.

Led by their tribal god, Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica Aztecs arrived in the Central Plateau of Mexico around 1200. The city of Tenochtitlan, founded in 1325, was built on a rocky island in Lake Texcoco where the Aztecs discovered an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its mouth. They had been

told by Huitzilopochtli that this symbol, still the emblem of modern Mexico, would mark the spot for their capital city. Ancient ideas concerning religion, agriculture, trade, markets, and the need for human sacrifice were adopted by the Aztecs from earlier peoples such as the Toltecs, Mixtecs and Olmecs.

By 1430, Tenochtitlan was part of a three-city league with Tlacopan and Texcoco. The alliance soon gained control of most of central Mexico, except for a few independent cities like Tlaxcala. Internal fighting began, with Tenochtitlan emerging as the centre of a new Aztec Empire. Under the Emperor Moctezuma II (who ruled 1505-1520), Tenochtitlan had a population of 250,000 people making it one of the largest urban centres in the world.

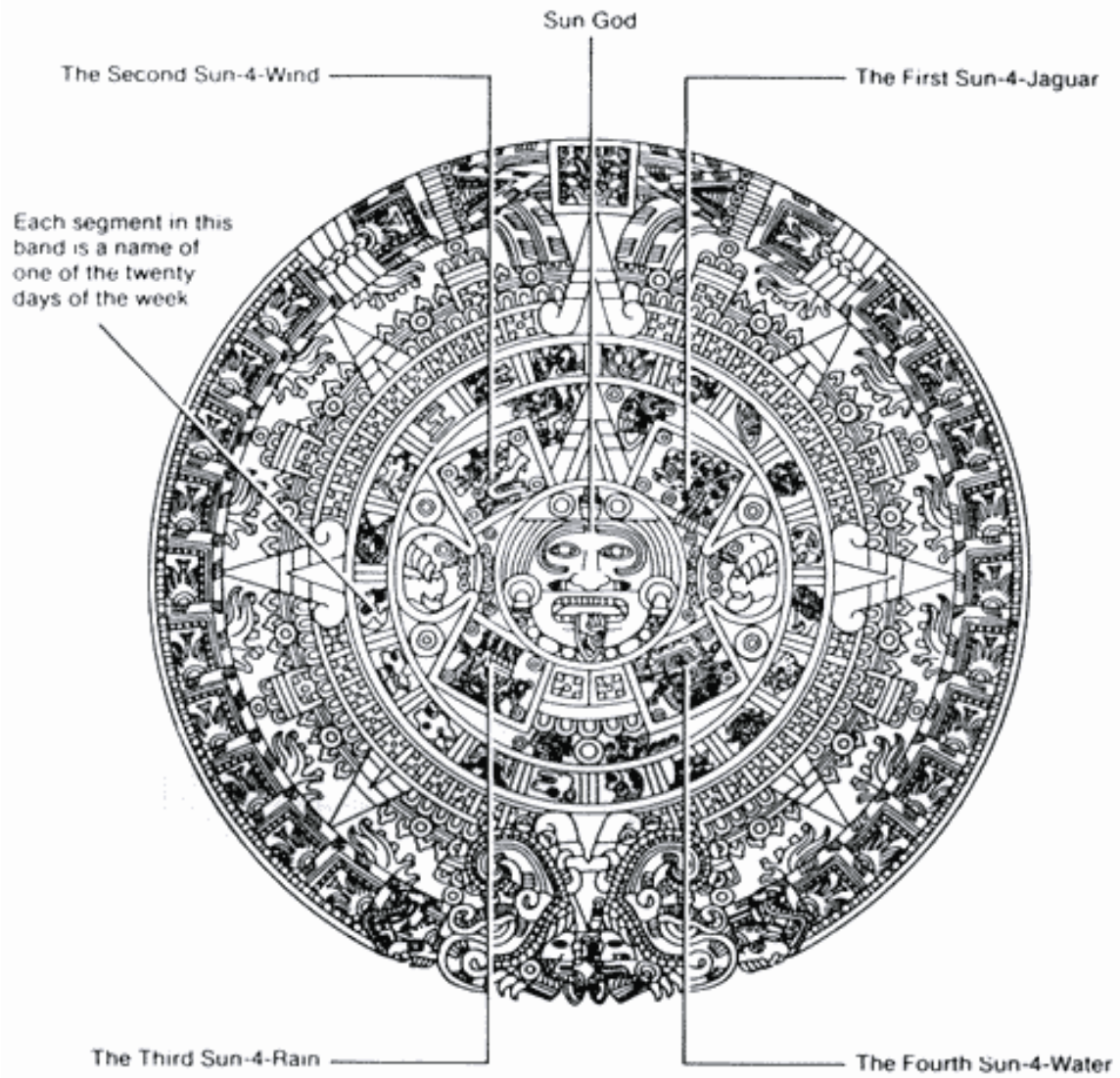
The Sun Stone



This decoration is taken from a stone altar often called the Sun Stone, or the Aztec Calendar. However, the altar was where victims of human sacrifice were killed. The pictures on the stone are taken from the Aztec calendar. The colours are based minute paint particles left on the stone. Like the Mayas, the Aztecs counted time in years of 365 days based on the solar cycle and a religious year based on the cycles of the planet Venus. The centre of the stone shows the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli. Huitzilopochtli also represents the sungod, Tonatiuh. His tongue is formed by the tecpatl (stone knife). It can be seen as a sign of authority and refers to the human hearts that had to be offered to the sun to keep it moving. This tongue points towards the heads of the two monsters that form the outer circle of the stone. In the mouth of the monster on the left side one can see the firegod Xiuhtecuhtli. The other monster has the sungod Tonatiuh in its beak, perhaps representing the everlasting battle between these two elemental forces. Around it is a double ring with the twenty "day signs" of the religious year. Each day of the Aztec year was associated with or "protected" by one of the day signs. These included various animals and objects with different symbolic meanings, something like the 12 months of the zodiac. Cipactli the crocodile symbolizes energy and work, and this is a good day to begin new things. Xochitl the flower marks a good day for reflection and spending time with friends.

<http://www.edunetconnect.com/TimeMachine/centralamerica-700.php>

(Sorry, this link is no longer valid.)





A teaching resource by
Mexicolore. Drawings
by Felipe Dávalos.
Free educational use.
mexicolore.co.uk

The 20 Aztec 'Day' Signs.

You can use this sheet as an introduction to the signs themselves (the count of 20 days was the basis for the ancient Mesoamerican ritual calendar), and to introduce the idea of associations or 'levels' of meaning. Many of these signs feature in our In-school programmes...

The qualities below are based on Sonja Atkinson's book "The Aztec Way to Healthy Eating", 1992.



1 Alligator

Quick response



2 Wind

Strength



3 House

Love of home



4 Lizard

Endurance



5 Snake

Meditation



6 Death

Life force, vitality



7 Deer

Alertness



8 Rabbit

Speed



9 Water

Cleanliness



10 Dog

Loyalty



11 Monkey

Agility



12 Grass

Healing (herbs)



13 Reed

Music



14 Jaguar

Grace



15 Eagle

Great spirit



16 Vulture

Hope



17 Movement

Sensitivity



18 Flint

Renewal



19 Rain

Fertility



20 Flower

Contentment