

Into the Underworld

A thrilling story from Maya mythology

About the Story

Lexile® Measure 970L (captions only)
For qualitative complexity factors, go to
Scope Online.

Learning Objective: to analyze
how a conflict is resolved over the
course of a play

Featured Skill: conflict

**Additional skills covered in this
lesson plan:** text structure, key ideas
and details, plot, metaphor, synthesis

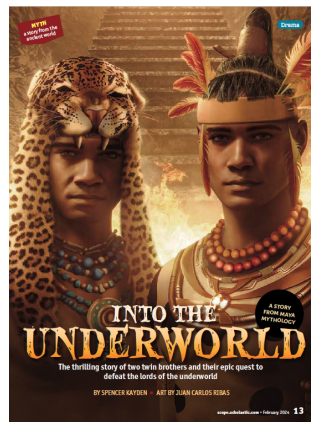
Essential Question:

- What can we learn about a society
from its stories and myths?

Standards:

The article and its suite of support
materials support these Common Core
Anchor Standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4,
R.5, W.2, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—
including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Text-to-speech
- Q&A read-aloud
- Vocabulary
- Pronunciation Guide

Slideshow:

- Background Builder

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- *Olympians Rising*
- *Pandora's Box*
- *Gods Versus Giants*
- *The Doomed Quest*
- *Hunting a Snake-Headed
Monster*
- *Prince Setna and the Book of
Magic*

Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions and
Practice
- Pronunciation Guide
- Close-Reading and Critical-
Thinking Questions
- Featured Skill: Conflict
- Genre Explorations
- Choice Board
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck
- Quiz*

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

1. Prepare to Read (15 minutes)

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the Google Slides version of **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *emerge, intact, marimba, outwit, realm, smugly, summoned, valiantly, wither*. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Optionally, print the PDF version or share the slideshow link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently before class.
- Project the **Pronunciation Guide** video at Scope Online to teach students how to pronounce the Maya names and words that appear in the play and interview.

Build Background Knowledge (5 minutes)

- Project the **Background Builder** slideshow, which provides context for the play and interview, including information about the Maya, Mesoamerica, and the Popol Vuh.

2. Read and Discuss (55 minutes)

- Invite a volunteer to read aloud the As You Read box on page 14 or at the top of the digital story page.
- Assign parts and read the play aloud as a class.
- Divide students into groups to discuss the following **Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking** questions, which are also located in the Resources tab.

Close-Reading Questions (25 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **What is the purpose of the prologue?** (text structure) *The elders in the prologue provide the audience with background information about the Popol Vuh and the Maya people. They*

introduce the time (thousands of years ago) and place (Mesoamerica) where the events of the play take place. They also engage the audience and transition audience members from reality to a fictional world—a magical place with powerful beings that can communicate with all creatures.

2. **Who or what helps the twins pass the three “tests” the lords of the underworld give them: surviving the House of Darkness, the House of Knives, and the House of Jaguars?** (key ideas and details) *The twins’ cleverness along with their magical powers allow them to pass each of the three tests. In each case, animals also play an important role in the twins’ success: Fireflies keep the candle “lit” without burning it, an army of ants retrieves the flowers the lords demanded, and hungry jaguars obey the twins and eat the bones the twins conjure rather than eating the twins themselves (as the lords intended).*
3. **What role does the ball game pok-ta-pok play in the plot of *Into the Underworld*?** (plot) *After a mosquito reveals to the twins that their father and uncle’s ball playing equipment is hidden in their hut, the twins decide to play the game. The lords of the underworld become angry about the noise and summon the twins to the underworld to kill them—just as the lords summoned the twins’ father and uncle before them. In other words, the game is the reason the twins end up traveling to the underworld in the first place. (The twins, unlike their father and uncle, survive their trip to the underworld.)*
4. **The caption “The Game” states that the ball game pok-ta-pok is often viewed as a metaphor for both the battle between good and evil and the cycle of life and death.**

A. Which characters in the play represent good and which represent evil? How do these two groups battle each other? (metaphor) *The lords of the underworld are evil. They trick, torture, and kill people, and they rule over a terrifying realm and have names like Flying Scab and Skull Scepter that reflect their awful natures. The twins—who live on the surface of the Earth, defeat the evil lords, and become the sun and moon—are good. The good characters and evil characters battle each other by playing the ball game—it is quite literally a contest between good and evil. The two groups also battle each other as the lords try to kill the twins, who then turn around and kill the lords.*

B. How is the idea that life and death are a cycle developed throughout the play? (metaphor) *The idea that life and death are a cycle is developed when the twins jump into a bonfire and die—and are then resurrected after their ground-up bones are sprinkled in the river. The idea that life and death are a cycle is also developed through the corn stalks in the grandmother’s hut, which flourish when the twins are safe, wither when they die, and then flourish again when they come back to life. In addition, when the twins return to the underworld in disguise, Skull Scepter asks, “But can you destroy a living thing and bring it back?,” and Hunter responds by pulling Jaguar Moon’s heart out and then replacing it, reviving him. The idea is further reinforced when Hunter and Jaguar Moon become the sun and moon, which are symbols of renewal, cycles, and rebirth.*

“My Life in a Maya Village”

- Read the Q&A as a class. Optionally, have students listen to the interview being read aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following **Critical-Thinking Questions**, some of which apply to the play and the interview.

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **How does *Into the Underworld* highlight the importance of corn in Maya culture? How does the interview further support this idea?** *Corn appears or is mentioned at many points in the play. The elders stand in a cornfield as they deliver the prologue. The twins are masterful corn farmers. The twins plant corn stalks in their grandmother’s hut that will flourish as long as the twins are safe but will wither if the twins die. When the twins seek Xulu’s help in resurrecting themselves, they ask him to tell the lords to grind their bones into dust “like the softest flour made from corn.” In addition, the caption “The Corn” explains that corn was and still is a crucial crop with cultural and spiritual significance for the Maya. In the interview, Ezekiel shares that his family, his village, and Maya people in general are masterful corn farmers who eat corn daily, sell it for their livelihoods, and feed their livestock with it.*
2. **What other elements of ancient Maya culture reflected in *Into the Underworld* are mentioned in the interview as part of Maya culture today?** *In the play, the elders tell the story of the Popol Vuh and how the sun and moon came to be; Ezekiel says that this story was passed down through his own family, from his grandfather to his father to him. Ezekiel also shares that pok-ta-pok is still played and that jaguars—which appear in the play in the House of Jaguars and after which Jaguar Moon is named—are a part of everyday life in his village. A photo shows Ezekiel dressed as a jaguar for a ceremonial dance.*
3. **How would you characterize the twins: boastful and foolish or confident and clever?** *Answers will vary.*

3. Write About It: Conflict

(45 minutes)

- Have students complete the **Featured Skill Activity: Conflict**. This activity will prepare them to respond to the writing prompt on page 18 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

To outwit someone is to beat them through cleverness. How do the twins outwit the lords of the underworld? Answer in an essay, using text evidence from the play.

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. (Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine, differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story or article.)

Connected readings from the Scope archives—other read-aloud plays based on ancient myths:

- [Olympians Rising](#)
- [Pandora's Box](#)
- [Gods Versus Giants](#)
- [The Doomed Quest](#)
- [Into the Burning Sun](#)
- [Hunting a Snake-Headed Monster](#)
- [Prince Setna and the Book of Magic](#)