

The Hero Twins

The story of the Hero Twins is one of the main Maya myths.

The First Hero Twins

The story begins with One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. These two boys loved to play ball games and were very good at it. However, when they played, they caused a lot of noise. This angered the Lords of Death who were the gods of the underworld. So the Lords of Death invited the boys to the underworld and made them take part in a variety of tests. Sadly, the boys failed one of the tests and so the gods killed them.



The Second Hero Twins

A Mayan princess sat by the head of One Hunahpu after he had been killed and then discovered that she was pregnant. She gave birth to twin boys whose names were Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Like their father and uncle, the twins were also good ballplayers. They were also very loud. Once again, the Lords of Death invited them to the underworld.

Visiting the Underground

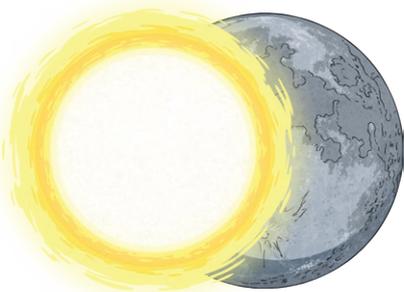
The Hero Twins had learnt about their father's mistakes and did not fall for any of the god's tricks. They passed each test that they were given. The gods even challenged them to a game of ball but the twins knew that the gods would continue to try to trick them.

Victory

The boys beat the Lords of Death who then ordered the boys to jump into an oven. The boys agreed because they had a plan. Their ashes were thrown into the river and the boys came back to life as catfish. Eventually, they even returned to being boys again. Now however, they had many powers of the gods. They could kill things and make them come back from the dead. Their best trick of all was to kill one of the Lords of Death but not bring him back to life. The

other Lords of Death realised that the twins had won and left them alone.

Mayans believe that the gods of heaven were so pleased with the twins that they brought them to live in the sky with them. One was turned into the Moon and the other into the Sun.



Questions

1. What were the names of the first Hero Twins? **Tick one.**

- Hunahpu and Xbalanque
- One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu
- Seven Hunahpu and Eight Hunahpu
- Xbalanque and One Hunahpu

2. What angered the Lords of Death? **Tick one.**

- noise
- crowds
- people
- silence

3. Why did the gods kill the first Hero Twins?

4. **Find** and **copy** a word that means the same as **errors**.

5. Explain one way in which the second Hero Twins were like their father and uncle and one way in which they were different.

6. Where were Hunahpu and Xbalanque's ashes thrown? **Tick one.**

- in the underworld
- in the oven
- in the river
- in the sky

7. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story.
One has been done for you.

- Hunahpu and Xbalanque kill a Lord of Death
- A Mayan princess discovers she is pregnant.
- 1** One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu play a loud game of ball.
- One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu fail the gods' tests.
- Hunahpu and Xbalanque jump into an oven.

Answers

1. What were the names of the first Hero Twins? **Tick one.**

- Hunahpu and Xbalanque
- One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu**
- Seven Hunahpu and Eight Hunahpu
- Xbalanque and One Hunahpu

2. What angered the Lords of Death? **Tick one.**

- noise**
- crowds
- people
- silence

3. Why did the gods kill the first Hero Twins?

The gods killed the first Hero Twins because they failed their tests.

4. **Find** and **copy** a word that means the same as **errors**.

mistakes

5. Explain one way in which the second Hero Twins were like their father and uncle and one way in which they were different.

Pupil's own response, such as: One way in which the second Hero Twins were like their father and uncle is that they were good ballplayers and made a lot of noise. A way in which they are different is that the second Hero Twins learnt from their father and uncle's mistakes and so didn't fail the gods' tests.

6. Where were Hunahpu and Xbalanque's ashes thrown? **Tick one.**

- in the underworld
- in the oven
- in the river**
- in the sky

7. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story.
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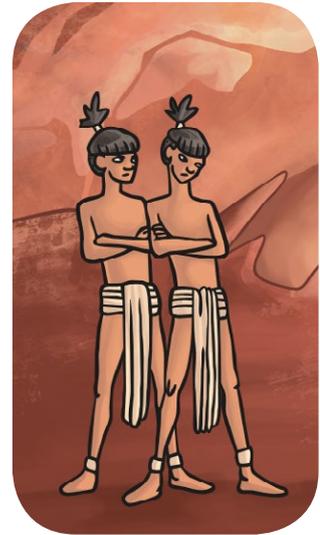
- 5 Hunahpu and Xbalanque kill a Lord of Death
- 3 A Mayan princess discovers she is pregnant.
- 1 One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu play a loud game of ball.
- 2 One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu fail the gods' tests.
- 4 Hunahpu and Xbalanque jump into an oven.

The Hero Twins

The story of the Hero Twins is one of the most famous Mayan myths and begins with two twin boys.

The First Ancestors

One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu 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, who summoned the boys to the underworld. Once there, 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 greeted wooden carvings of the gods. Because they failed this test, the gods put them to death.



The Second Hero Twins

According to the myth, a Mayan princess discovered that she was pregnant with One Hunahpu's children. 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.

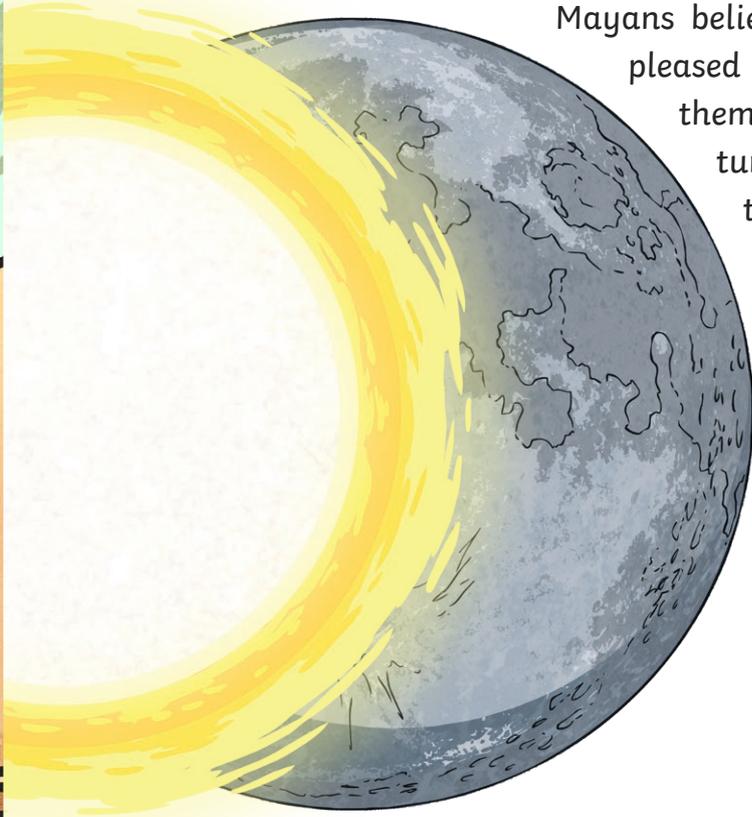
Visiting the Underground

The Hero Twins accepted the invitation and went to the underworld. However, they had learnt about their father's mistakes and passed each of the god's tests. 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 with sharp blades in it 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. The boys agreed but only because they had a plan. Their ashes were thrown into the river and the boys came back to life as catfish. Later, they were restored to being boys again and now had many powers of the gods. One power was that they could kill things and make them come back to life.

This impressed the Lords of Death who asked the twins to perform the trick on them. The twins killed one of the lords but did not bring him back to life. At this point, the other Lords of Death realised that the twins had won and left them alone.

Mayans believe that the gods of heaven were so pleased with the twins that they brought them to live in the sky with them. One was turned into the Moon and the other into the Sun.



Questions

1. What name is used to describe **One Hunahpu** and **Seven Hunahpu**? **Tick one.**

- Mayan ancestors
- the second ancestors
- the first ancestors
- gods

2. **Find** and **copy** a word that shows that the Lords of Death were annoyed by the noise of the ball game.

3. What is in the river in the underworld? **Tick one.**

- ashes
- spikes and blood
- fire
- poison

4. What are the names of One Hunahpu children?

5. Explain in your own words how Hunahpu and Xbalanque identified the real gods from the wooden carvings.

6. What did Hunahpu and Xbalanque come back to life as at first? **Tick one.**

- the moon
- dogfish
- stars
- catfish

7. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story. One has been done for you.

- Hunahpu and Xbalanque become the Moon and the Sun.
- Hunahpu and Xbalanque are born.
- 1 One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu visit the underworld.
- One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are killed.
- Hunahpu and Xbalanque come back to life.

8. If you could have one power of a god to defeat the Lords of Death, what would it be and why? Explain your answer fully.

Answers

1. What name is used to describe **One Hunahpu** and **Seven Hunahpu**? Tick **one**.

- Mayan ancestors
- the second ancestors
- the first ancestors**
- gods

2. **Find** and **copy** a word that shows that the Lords of Death were annoyed by the noise of the ball game.

agitated

3. What is in the river in the underworld? **Tick one**.

- ashes
- spikes and blood**
- fire
- poison

4. What are the names of One Hunahpu's children?

One Hunaphu's children were called Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

5. Explain in your own words how Hunahpu and Xbalanque identified the real gods from the wooden carvings.

Pupil's own response, such as: Hunahpu and Xbalanque identified the real gods by taking mosquitos with them into the underworld. The mosquitos bit the real gods whereas they wouldn't be able to bite a wooden carving. The real gods would have yelped or swatted the mosquitos, revealing themselves to the twins.

6. What did Hunahpu and Xbalanque come back to life as at first? **Tick one**.

- the moon
- dogfish
- stars
- catfish**

7. Number the events below to show the order in which they happen in the story. One has been done for you.

- 5 Hunahpu and Xbalanque become the Moon and the Sun.
- 3 Hunahpu and Xbalanque are born.
- 1 One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu visit the underworld.
- 2 One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu are killed.
- 4 Hunahpu and Xbalanque come back to life.

8. If you could have one power of a god to defeat the Lords of Death, what would it be and why? Explain your answer fully.

Pupil's own response, such as: If I could have one power to defeat the Lords of Death, it would be the power to read their minds. That way, every time they tried to trick me, I would know what to do.

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.



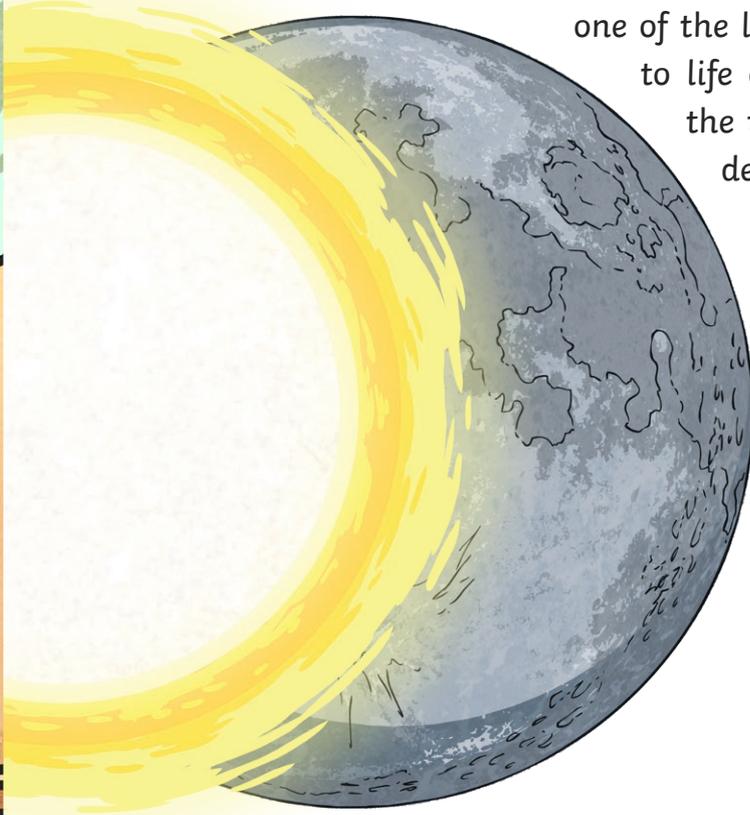
According to the myth, a Mayan princess sat by the severed head of one of the twins (One Hunahpu) and then discovered that she was pregnant. She gave birth to the next generation of twin boys whose names were Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The twins were good ballplayers, just like their father and uncle, and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



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

5. Who is the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque? **Tick one**.

- Seven Hunahpu
- a Lord of Death
- One Hunahpu
- a Mayan princess

6. Fill in the missing words.

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

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

8. According to Mayan mythology, who was turned into the Maize god? **Tick one.**

- Xbalanque
- Seven Hunahpu
- the princess
- One Hunahpu

Answers

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.

Pupil's own response, 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. 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.

5. Who is the father of Hunahpu and Xbalanque? **Tick one.**

- Seven Hunahpu
- a Lord of Death
- One Hunahpu**
- a Mayan princess

6. Fill in the missing words.

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

7. 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.

8. According to Mayan mythology, who was turned into the Maize god? **Tick one.**

- Xbalanque
- Seven Hunahpu
- the princess
- One Hunahpu**