Secrets of the Past

Scientists dig up ancient paintings in Mexico.

Deep in the jungle of southeastern Mexico, researchers stumbled upon a surprise. They found an ancient, or very old, pyramid. The pyramid was buried underground. It is covered in colorful murals. A mural is a painting on a wall. Those murals are helping scientists unlock a mystery about people from long ago.

The murals are about 1,350 years old. That’s more than five times older than the United States. Experts say the paintings belonged to the Mayas. That is a group of Native American people. They lived many years ago in what is now Mexico and Central America.

The paintings show scenes from everyday Mayan life. One mural shows a man drinking from a bowl. Another is of a woman selling food to a crowd of people.

Scientists are excited about the discovery because they don’t know much about the Mayas’ daily lives, explains Michael Coe. He is an expert on the Mayas. The paintings show how the Mayas worked, shopped, and dined.

“Mostly you get the murals ... that show gods and kings, never anything about daily life,” Coe told WR News. “This is like walking into a Maya supermarket.”

So far, scientists have found more than 30 murals on the pyramid. They are not sure why the Mayas created them. The experts hope to learn more as they continue their search.
“We never had anything like this before,” says Coe. “These are really [special] murals.”

Oh, Maya!

The Mayas were known for more than just painting. Keep reading to learn some fun facts about the Mayan way of life.

Home Sweet Home
The Mayas lived in what is now Central and North America. Today the area includes parts of Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

Smart Starts
The Mayas invented a type of math. They also created a type of writing that uses symbols, or pictures (above). Mayas made books using tree bark.

What’s Cooking?
The Mayas often chowed on corn and used it to make other foods, such as tortillas. They grew many crops, including avocados, beans, chili peppers, and sweet potatoes.

Cool Clothes
Mayan men wrapped themselves in strips of cloth, while women wore long, loose dresses. Wealthy, or rich, Mayas wore jewelry.
1. Which of the following is shown on the recently found Mayan murals?

   A  a Mayan king and his family
   B  a Mayan woman selling food
   C  a Mayan crowd worshipping a god
   D  a Mayan man eating tortillas

2. Which of the following is described last in the text?

   A  the paintings on the pyramid
   B  how the ancient pyramid was found
   C  various facts about the Maya people
   D  an expert talking about the murals

3. The passage suggests that

   A  the Mayans had many gods and kings
   B  the Mayans were a very angry group of people
   C  the Mayans had a rich and varied culture
   D  the Mayans lived in a very hot part of Mexico

4. The passage states “The paintings show scenes from Mayan daily life.”

   As used in this example, **scenes** means

   A  views
   B  people
   C  gods
   D  pictures

5. What would be another good title for this passage?

   A  Mayan Murals Found in the Jungle
   B  Mayan Clothes and Cooking
   C  The Daily Life of the Mayans
   D  Mayan Math and Writing
6. How are the murals helping scientists learn about the Maya?

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

7. What word might the author use to describe the Mayas? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Scientists don’t know much about Mayan daily life ___________ they are excited about the discovery of the murals.

A certainly  
B because  
C so  
D after

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

In the jungle, researchers were able to determine that Mayan men wrapped themselves in strips of cloth, while women wore long, loose dresses.

Who? researchers

What? _________________________________________________________________

Where? ________________________________________________________________
10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

**Vocabulary Word**: wealthy (weal·thy): rich.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **wealthy**.

1. You could tell if a Mayan person was wealthy by whether or not they were wearing jewelry.

2. I would like to get a great job when I grow up so I can be wealthy.

3. If I were very wealthy, I would give some money away, and use some money for a new house.

4. Some lawyers and doctors are wealthy because they are paid a lot of money for their jobs.

5. Companies try to sell perfume, jewelry, expensive clothes, and fancy cars to wealthy people.

10b. Which of the following pictures shows a person who is wealthy?

![Picture 1](image1)

11. If you were paid to babysit for one night, would that make you wealthy? Why or why not?

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________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________