

Mesoamerican Day-Count ***Teacher Information***

Background Information:

In prehispanic Mesoamerica a variety of calendars were used for agricultural and religious reasons. One important calendar is the “Day Count” used by the Mixtecs and later Aztecs, along with other indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica. This calendar is sometimes referred to as the *sacred calendar* or *divinatory calendar*. In Nahuatl, this calendar was called the *tonalpohualli*. An important use of this calendar was to give people their names. There were 20 different signs that one could possibly be born on, and 13 different days, resulting in a 260 day year (13 x 20) with 260 different possible names for people. The names people would be given would be a number between 1 and 13 and then the sign. For example a powerful Mixtec leader during the 11th Century was named 8 Deer. His father’s names was 5 Crocodile and his mother was 9 Eagle. Each name had a significance that was meant to influence the life of the person born on this day, in a similar way that astrology in other cultures assign a meaning to the date of someone’s birth.

Purpose:

This student worksheet is designed to allow students to find their Mixtec name using a series of calculations. It requires students to use multi-digit addition, subtraction, multiplication and division within one 9-step problem. If students are to use a calculator, they will need to be able to convert decimals to whole number remainders as well. Based on Common Core Standards, this worksheet should be given to students in Grade 5 or above. At the end of the calculations, students are asked to check their answer by using a website which calculates what their day name is. To make it through the whole problem without making mistakes, students will have to attend to precision, make sense of the problems’ context and come up with their own method for calculating difference in dates (in Step 6.)

Materials Students Will Need:

Student worksheet, A 365 day calendar, A list of Day Signs (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_calendar#Day_signs has one example), An online capable device to check their answer once finished

Possible Connections to Other Subject Areas:

Social Studies - The names assigned by the *Tonalpohualli* are found throughout the codices that tell us most of what we know about Mesoamerican history. Having students connect themselves to this history by discovering their own Mixtec names can enable a deeper appreciation to this history. Also, looking at how names are still frequently given based on the patron saint of ones’ birth in modern Mexico can help students see the way this tradition has actually prevailed through time.

Art - After appreciating the artistic representations of names in codices, artifacts and the walls of temples, students could use their newly found Mixtec name to create an image representing this name.