

At the beginning of time, before the world had a true form, there was no land or sky, no animals or plants. There was only silence and stillness all around: a complete void.

Two Mayan gods saw that all around them was dark: Tepeu, the creator, and Gucumatz, the feathered spirit with feathers of sparkling sapphire and emerald. They came together to create the world: their spirit and power giving energy to form the Earth.

Thoughts passed through their minds and then came into being. When the gods thought of the 'Earth', land slowly formed from through darkness. They now had space to create life.

They dreamt of mountains and valleys, seas and skies. All of these things came to be the moment they thought of them.

Huge trees were formed, their roots penetrating deep into the nine levels of the Mayan underworld and their branches reaching up to the thirteen levels of the upper world.

Tepeu and Gucumatz decided that they needed creatures to care for their new world and to praise their names as their creators. So they created all of the animals, from the hopping frog to the stomping elephant, from the slithering snake to the soaring eagle. Every creature which filled the planet was created in an instant.

The two gods commanded that the creatures praise their name.

"Praise us! We are your creators. Praise our names."

But all the animals could do in response was bark, howl, tweet and hiss. The creatures tried as hard as they could to speak and praise the gods but they just could not do it. They chirped and squawked at the top of their lungs until the sound was so deafening that the gods demanded they stop at once.

Disappointed with their creations, the gods decided they needed to create an even better creature which would be able to worship them properly.

They made a race of man from wet clay and the gods gave them life. The first men tried to speak but instead they crumbled as soon as they tried. The gods knew they needed to make a stronger race of men, if they were to survive.

The second race of men were made from solid wood. These men were much stronger and were able to walk and talk, but these men had no minds of their own and their hearts were empty. They had no memory of their creation and when they spoke aloud their words were empty and meaningless. They were still unable to praise the gods.

So Tepeu and Gucumatz sent a great flood to destroy them all. The gods demanded that the animals attack any remaining survivors, but a few managed to escape and became monkeys. The creators let them be as an example to the future race of men.

The gods thought long and hard about how they would make the race of men that would be perfect. Nothing seemed to work and no material seemed good enough.

Eventually, some of the animals brought the gods a stack of white corn which grew on the far side of the earth. The gods ground this material into a paste and from this formed four individual men.

This new race of men seemed to be perfect. They were strong enough to last and their minds were full of thoughts and feelings. After their creation, the men immediately began to worship Tepeu and Gucumatz and thank them for their lives. This pleased the gods greatly.

“What can you see?” the gods asked the corn men.

“We can see forever. We can see through rocks, trees, rivers and mountains. We can see to the ends of the earth and beyond. We can see everything you have created every plant and animal and tree. We see and understand all. Thank you.”

Tepeu and Gucumatz were confused. “Perhaps we made these creatures too perfect. They can see and understand even more than we do. This cannot be.”

The creator’s decided to remove some of the men’s vision so they would only be able to see those things which were close to them. They were no longer able to see and understand as they once did.

However, the men could still worship and praise their creators as intended and then were able to settle down to a new life. Feeling content, Tepeu and Gucumatz then made four women to be companions for the men.

These special men and women were the ancestors of all people today. Even today man’s sight and understanding of the world is not perfect.

The Mayan Creation Story – Comprehension

Section A

1. What did the god Gucumatz look like according to the text? (C6/2b)

2. How many levels of the Mayan underworld are mentioned in the story? (C6/2b)

3. What does the term 'worship' mean in this context? (C1/2a)

4. Why were the gods unhappy with the second race of men? (P5/2d)

5. Can you think of another possible title for this text? (R2)

Section B

6. Use a dictionary to find the meaning of the word 'void' in this context. (L3)

7. Summarise the content of the first three paragraphs of the text. (S2/2c)

8. How did the gods destroy the second race of men? (C6/2b)

9. Why were the gods immediately pleased with the corn men? (C6/2b)

10. Do you think the gods were right to remove some of the first corn men's vision?
Explain your answer. (R2)

11. What is the meaning of the word 'companions' from the text? (C1/2a)

Section C

12. What do you think the writer means by 'before the world had a true form'? (L5/2g)

13. Why do you think the gods were 'disappointed with their creations' after making the animals? (P5/2d)

14. Why do you think the gods gave the corn men women to be their companions? (P5/2d)

15. What is the meaning of the word 'ancestors'? (C1/2a)

16. Maize and corn was especially precious to the Mayan people. How can we tell this from reading this creation story? (P5/2d)

Section D

17. The word 'race' has several meanings. What does it mean in the context of this story? (C1/2a)

18. According to the story, the second race of men escaped and became monkeys. How does this relate to the theory of evolution? (R3)

19. Why do you think the gods altered the vision of the corn men? (C6/2b)

20. The gods were proud creatures. What evidence is there within the text to support this? (C7)

21. This story is a myth. What features of a myth are present in this text? (T4)

22. Do you know any other examples of creation stories? How are they similar? (T2)

The Mayan Creation Story – Challenge Activity

Section A

Which character(s) did the following:

Action	Character
crumbled when they tried to speak	
came together to create the world	
created a deafening noise that disappointed the gods	
had no memory of their creation and spoke empty and meaningless words	
became monkeys	
had perfect vision with minds full of thoughts and feelings	

Section B

Find an example from the text of the gods experiencing each of these emotions.

Emotion	Event
Frustration	
Jealousy	
Loneliness	
Disappointment	
Satisfaction	

The Mayan Creation Story – Challenge Activity

Section C

Determine the motive or reason behind each event from the text.

Event	Motive (Why?)
Tepeu and Gucumatz sent a flood to destroy the second race of men.	
The gods were jealous and took away some vision from the men made from corn.	
The gods demanded the animals be silent.	
The gods let some survivors live after escaping the flood.	
Tepeu and Gucumatz created four female companions for the men made from corn.	

Section D

When creating men, the gods found clay was too fragile, and wood was too hollow. They finally settled on a paste made from corn. Imagine a missing paragraph from the myth where the gods use a different material to create men. What substance could they use? What sort of men would it create?