

## **Juego de pelota Lesson Plan**

### **Introduction**

What are the origins of the various types of ball games that maintain such an important place in our society today? In this lesson we take a closer look at the Mesoamerican ball game, the first team sport in history and the first to use a rubber ball. The lesson will examine how and where the game was played, its ritual significance in Mesoamerican life, and what it has become in today's society. Students will form teams and play a simulated series of ball games in the classroom as the lesson progresses. We will look at what we can learn about the game from the ancient texts, read a legend based on a story found in the codices, and construct a codex that tracks the results of the series of ball games we play in class.

The previous lesson, "Introduction to Mesoamerica," sets the stage and gives a cultural context for the ball game lesson, however the "Juego de pelota" lesson can also be used as a stand-alone lesson.

### **Guiding Questions**

What are the origins of the ball games we play today?

What was the ancient Mesoamerican ball game like?

How is the world different today as a result of the contributions of the Mesoamerican cultures?

### **Learning Objectives**

Students will become familiar with:

- The Mesoamerican origins of modern day ball games
- The Mesoamerican ball game as it was played in prehispanic times
- The ritual significance of the ball game to the Mesoamerican cultures
- The pictographic and hieroglyphic texts related to the ball game
- The ball game as a unique contribution of Mesoamerican cultures to the world today

### **Preparing to Teach this Lesson**

Look over the suggested websites and links for background information on the ballgame. The website [ballgame.org](http://ballgame.org) is particularly interesting and informative.

Students will look at several pages of the Codex Nuttall and the Codex Borgia for Activities 3 and 4. You could provide the students with copies, ask students to look at them on line in a computer lab or at home, or you could make laminated copies to pass around. These links are also listed in the student notebook.

Activity 3:

Códice Nuttall

[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche\\_nuttall/img\\_page50.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche_nuttall/img_page50.html)

[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche\\_nuttall/img\\_page79.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche_nuttall/img_page79.html)

[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche\\_nuttall/img\\_page86.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche_nuttall/img_page86.html)

Códice Borgia

[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borgia/img\\_page21.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borgia/img_page21.html)  
[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borgia/img\\_page42.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borgia/img_page42.html)  
[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borgia/img\\_page14.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/borgia/img_page14.html)

#### Activity 4:

References to Eight Deer

[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche\\_nuttall/img\\_page54.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche_nuttall/img_page54.html)  
[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche\\_nuttall/img\\_page56.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche_nuttall/img_page56.html)

Nose-piercing ceremony Eight Deer

[http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche\\_nuttall/img\\_page57.html](http://www.famsi.org/research/graz/zouche_nuttall/img_page57.html)

Students will need access to the chapter “The Ball Game,” in John Pohl’s *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer*, 2002, Oxford University Press. This is a great addition to the lesson because it helps students see the ballgame from the perspective of a player. This activity could be optional if you do not have the book.

You will need to construct a “Mesoamerican goal” that can be attached to the wall of your classroom. Here’s how I did mine. You will need:

- 1 12” Styrofoam ring (available at any craft store)
- 2 12” thin wood rings that match the size of the Styrofoam ring
- Glue
- Tape that paint will stick to (used to wrap the ring for added strength – I used athletic tape)
- 1 can light colored stone-textured spray paint
- A small amount of slightly darker craft paint to make designs on the ring
- 2 small L-brackets and screws that will fit the pre-drilled holes in the wood rings
- 1 or 2 nerf balls about 4” in diameter
- A piece of tape to mark the shooting line on the floor.
- (These supplies are available at most craft stores)

Glue the wood rings on either side of the Styrofoam ring, making sure the pre-drilled holes line up. Wrap the whole thing with tape for added strength, making sure you can see the location of one set of holes. This is where you will attach the bracket. Spray the ring with stone-textured paint. When dry, paint or stencil desired designs on either side of the ring to simulate those found on Mesoamerican ball courts. Attach the bracket to the ring with screws (I put glue in the predrilled holes first, again for added strength), and have your custodian attach the entire thing to the wall of your classroom at a height of about eight feet.

Mark the shooting line with tape on the floor about 8-10 feet away from the goal.

You will also need 30 questions for each game. The questions could be about Mesoamerican cultures, or they could also be review questions to prepare for upcoming tests. A set of questions about Mesoamerica and the juego de pelota is included. It can be cut into cards so the questions can easily be scrambled.

Materials contained in this lesson:

- Student Notebook: “Juego de pelota”
- PowerPoint Presentation: “Juego de pelota”

- PowerPoint Presentation: “Los jeroglíficos y los códigos”
- Ballgame Question Cards
- Example of Ballgame Codex

## **Suggested Activities**

### **Activity 1: The First Team Sport in History**

- Introduce the idea that the indigenous cultures of Mexico and Central America were the first to invent a ballgame that was similar to the various ballgames we play today, and that played an important role in their lives. Talk about why the Mesoamericans were the only ancient culture to invent the ball game (other ancient cultures did not have rubber, a plant native to the Americas).
- Provide a copy of the student notebook “Juego de pelota” to each student. In small groups, students will discuss and make a list of questions they would have about the ballgame in ancient times. They will also review the “Preguntas importantes” on page 1 of the notebook.
- Students will go to the interactive website [ballgame.org](http://ballgame.org), to find answers to questions in the Juego de Pelota notebook, pages 1-2.
- Following the students’ research at [ballgame.org](http://ballgame.org), show the “Juego de pelota” PowerPoint presentation in class, using it as an interactive review of the information the students learned at [ballgame.org](http://ballgame.org), with some additional information included. Students should add any additional information to their notebooks.

### **Activity 2: My Team**

- Students will complete the exercise in the notebook, page 3, matching the animal glyphs to the team mascots.
- Divide class into 4 teams. (If you have just done the lesson “Intro to Mesoamerica,” you could keep the same groups from that lesson.) Each team will choose a mascot from the list and discuss as a group why they chose that mascot and what important qualities their mascot brings to the team. Each student should draw the glyph of their mascot in the space provided on page 3 of the notebook, color it appropriately with paint or marker, and write a short summary of the qualities the team discussed.

### **Activity 3: The Ballgame in the Ancient Texts**

- Explain that the Mesoamericans wrote pictographic and hieroglyphic historical accounts in books called codices, and also left written texts in relief sculptures, including many references to ball games.
- If you have not done the Introduction to Mesoamerica unit, show the PowerPoint presentation “Los jeroglíficos y los códigos” to give students a brief background. The Mesoamerican cultures used a ritual calendar of 260 days in which days were named with one of twenty day signs paired a number from one to thirteen. As the day signs and numbers rotated, the number for a given day sign would change (see chart on PowerPoint). People were named after the day on which they were born.

- Students will examine several pages of the Codex Nuttall and the Codex Borgia (see “Preparing to Teach this Lesson”). What were the writing systems of the Mesoamericans like? How did they communicate important events and information? Discuss how they communicated numbers (dots). Have students see if they can identify any references to the ball game in the codex pages. Ask them to redraw some of them in their notebooks as a way of looking at them more closely. What are some characteristics of the text? What information about the ballgame can you find? What do you think some of the pictographs might mean? Brainstorm possible answers in groups. (There aren’t any right answers in many cases.)
- Students will examine the [Maya Tonina ballplayer panel](#) from Tonina, Monument 172. How is it similar to the ball game references in the Codex Nuttall and the Codex Borgia? How is it different? Students should sketch the ball players in their notebooks as a way of looking at them more closely, and record their observations.

#### **Activity 4: The Legend of Lord Eight Deer**

- Students should prepare for this activity by reading [background information](#) about Lord Eight Deer. Explain that Lord Eight Deer was an important Mixtec conqueror who was challenged to a game of ball by a Toltec king. If Lord Eight Deer won, he would become king of the lands he had conquered. If he lost, he would lose his life. He accepted the challenge. At this point students will read the chapter “The Ball Game,” in John Pohl’s *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer* (See “Preparing to Teach this Lesson”). Ask the students to look at three pages of the Codex Nuttall (see “Preparing to Teach this Lesson”) to see if they can find references to Lord Eight Deer.

#### **Activity 5: A Codex**

- Students will make their own codices that will keep track of the results of the ball games they will play in class. Give each student a sheet of 8 ½”x14” paper. Demonstrate how to screen-fold it and show them again how the codices are read from right to left, with lines to guide the reader. (See Codex Example) The codices should show the match-ups and results of the games played in class. Students may add any other information they choose to the codex. The pictographs should be rendered in color. This could be a continuation of the codex begun in the lesson “Introduction to Mesoamerica.”

#### **Activity 6: Play Ball!**

Set up team pairings for a round of games, codex style, and post in the classroom. See example in “Preparing to Teach this Lesson.” You can set up additional rounds of play initially, or add them as time permits. If you play more than one round, you may want to stretch them out over the course of the year. They can be a useful way to review material for tests and other assessments (you will need about 30 questions for each game – see “Preparing to Teach this Lesson.”)

How to play:

Appoint a referee, a timekeeper and a scorekeeper from one of the teams that is not playing that day. The referee will take care of the ball when it is not in play, and will rule on infractions such as speaking English or stepping over the line while shooting. The timekeeper will give each team 15 seconds to answer. The scorekeeper will keep score on the board.

Each team chooses the order in which group members will answer the questions. A member may not answer a question if it is not his or her turn. If anyone on either team speaks English, it is a “technical foul,” and the other team gets a free shot.

The referee will toss a coin to see which team starts. The first person will answer a question. If incorrect, the turn goes to the other team. If correct, they have a chance to shoot the ball through the ring from behind the shooting line (see “Preparing to Teach this Lesson”). I allow them to shoot with their hands, making it clear that this is a necessary adaption to playing in the classroom. If a player can make it through the ring with his hips, knees or elbows, his team automatically wins the game. Once the player has a chance to shoot, the turn goes to the other team.

When all 30 questions have been answered, the game is over and the team with the most points wins.

### **Activity 7: The Ballgame Today**

Students will view videos of the ballgame as it is played today. Emphasize that it is a very dangerous game because the ball is solid rubber and can severely injure or even kill. Students should discuss the videos in small groups. What do you notice in the videos? How is the game similar to the various types of ballgames we play today? How is it different? Would you like to play the game as pictured in videos? Why or why not?

There are many youtube videos of the ballgame. Here are a few possibilities:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yvLUYnUqeA>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ACQmNPp-YU>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCzhtTjzWvU&feature=related>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0tdtHZIP89k&feature=related>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGUGq3gqii4&feature=related>

### **Activity 8: Discussion Questions**

- In small groups, or as a class, students will discuss the essential questions and will write answers in their notebooks.
  - What are the origins of the ball games we play today?
  - What was the ancient Mesoamerican ball game like?
  - How is the world different today as a result of the contributions of the Mesoamerican cultures?

## Assessment

Students can either write or present their answers, with examples, to the questions in Activity 8.

## Extending the Lesson

Students could do further research into

- the ballgame and its significance in Mesoamerican culture

<http://www.monte-alban.com/ballgame.htm>

[The Great Ballcourt Stone of Chichén Itzá](#) - by Linnea Wren, Peter Schmidt & Ruth Krochock

[Divine Patrons of the Maya Ballgame](#) - by Alexander Tokovinine

[Sport, Spectacle and Political Theater: New Views of the Classic Maya Ballgame](#) - by Marc Zender

- the ball game in the original texts

[Glyphs for "Handspan" and "Strike" in Classic Maya Ballgame Texts](#) - by Marc Zender

“New Ballplayer Panel from Tonina, by Joel Skidmore.

[http://www.mesoweb.com/reports/Tonina\\_M172.html](http://www.mesoweb.com/reports/Tonina_M172.html)

- the ball game as it exists today  
The Mesoamerican Ballgame – Ulama

<http://www.ulama.freehomepage.com/index.html>

## Standards Alignment

### ACTFL 1.1

Students engage in conversation , provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions: Activities 1, 2, 6, 8

### ACTFL 1.2

Students understand and interpret written language on a variety of topics: Activities 1, 2, 3, 6, 8

### ACTFL 1.3

Students understand and interpret spoken language on a variety of topics: Activities 1 through 8

### ACTFL 1.4

Students convey information, concepts and ideas to listeners for a variety of purposes: Activities 1, 2, 3, 6, 8

### ACTFL 1.5

Students convey information, concepts, and ideas to readers for a variety of purposes:  
Activities 1, 2, 5, 8

ACTFL 2.1

Students recognize that different languages use different patterns to communicate and can apply this knowledge to their own language: Activities 1, 2, 3, 5

ACTFL 2.2

Students recognize that cultures use different patterns of interaction and can apply this knowledge to their own culture: Activities 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8

ACTFL 3.1

Students understand the relationship between the perspectives (meanings, attitudes, ideas, values) and practices (patterns of social interaction) of cultures studied and use this knowledge to interact effectively in cultural contexts: Activities 1 through 8

ACTFL 3.2

Students understand the relationship between the perspectives (meanings, values, ideas) and products/contributions (books, tools, food, art, laws, music, games) of the cultures studied: Activities 1 through 8

ACTFL 4.2

Students acquire information and perspectives through authentic materials in the foreign languages and within the cultures: Activities 3, 7

## References

<http://ballgame.org/>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlachтли>

The Mesoamerican Ballgame – Ulama

<http://www.ulama.freehomepage.com/index.html>

Skidmore, Joel (2004). "New Ballplayer Panel from Tonina". *Mesoweb*:

[www.mesoweb.com/reports/Tonina\\_M172.html](http://www.mesoweb.com/reports/Tonina_M172.html)

ZENDER, MARC (2004). "[Glyphs for "Handspan" and "Strike" in Classic Maya Ballgame Texts](http://www.mesoweb.com/pari/publications/journal/404/Handspan.pdf)".

*The PARI Journal* IV (4).

<http://www.mesoweb.com/pari/publications/journal/404/Handspan.pdf>.

Zender, Marc (2004). "Sport, Spectacle and Political Theater: New Views of the Classic Maya Ballgame". *The PARI Journal* IV (4).

<http://mesoweb.com/pari/publications/journal/404/sport.html>