

Uxmal

On land | Mexico | about 700-1000 CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

A Maya legend says Uxmal's tall pyramid was built in a single night by a magical dwarf.

Read the story

Uxmal was a major Maya city in the Puuc hills, at its height from about 700 to 1000 CE. Its buildings are famous for their decoration. Builders covered upper walls with stone mosaics of geometric patterns, latticework and masks of Chaac, the rain god, with long curling noses.

The Pyramid of the Magician, about 35 meters tall, has rounded sides, which is rare. Legend says a dwarf built it in one night. Archaeologists found it was actually built in several stages, one temple on top of another.

The Nunnery Quadrangle is a group of four long buildings around a courtyard, named by the Spanish. The Governor's Palace sits on a huge platform and is often called one of the finest buildings in the ancient Americas.

How it ended

Uxmal declined around 1000 CE, possibly because of drought and changing power in the region. People still lived nearby when the Spanish arrived in the 1500s, but the great city was left to the forest.

Key words

- Chaac: the Maya god of rain
- chultun: an underground tank for storing water
- sacbe: a raised white stone road built by the Maya

Wow facts

- The Pyramid of the Magician has rounded sides, which is unusual for Maya pyramids.
- Hundreds of masks of the rain god Chaac decorate the buildings.
- A white stone road connected Uxmal to Kabah about 18 kilometers away.

Talk about it

1. Why would a city with no river care so much about the rain god?

2. Why do you think people made up a legend about the pyramid being built in one night?

Try this

Draw a map of Uxmal as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. What is unusual about the Pyramid of the Magician?

- A. It has rounded sides
- B. It is underwater
- C. It is made of wood
- D. It is upside down

2. Who was Chaac?

- A. The Maya rain god
- B. A Spanish explorer
- C. A king of Egypt
- D. A sea monster

3. How did Uxmal get water?

- A. Underground rain tanks
- B. A big river
- C. Snow
- D. Pipes from the sea

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/uxmal/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. Its sides are rounded instead of sharp.
2. A. Chaac was the Maya god of rain.
3. A. People stored rainwater in chultuns.