Power in Stone

Read how Maya buildings connected sacred life and political power.

SS24.7.10c "Describe how religion, architecture, and politics intersected in early Indigenous civilizations, including the Maya civilization."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about buildings or public spaces, circle two details about religious practices, and mark with the numbers 1 and 2 two places where those details connect to a ruler's power.

A City Built for Ceremony

1 Imagine entering a Maya city more than a thousand years ago. A broad plaza opens between tall stone buildings. Maya cities were independent kingdoms, each with its own rulers and nearby communities. Many cities placed temples beside plazas where crowds could gather for ceremonies. Priests and rulers took part in rituals meant to honor gods and seek their favor. A ruler who appeared in such a setting could present political leadership as closely tied to sacred duties. The design of the plaza made that message visible to many people.

2 At Palenque, in present-day Mexico, the Temple of the Inscriptions rises above a tomb built for the ruler K'inich Janaab' Pakal. Carved writing inside the temple records parts of his family's history and rule. The building also connected his memory to religious ideas about death and the afterlife. Building a stone temple took workers and resources, which rulers could direct. By placing Pakal's tomb beneath a towering temple, his successors linked their family to sacred space and showed that their kingdom could organize a major project.

3 In other Maya cities, carved stone monuments stood near temples and plazas. Some recorded a ruler's name, important dates, and events such as a new ruler taking power. Maya people tracked time using calendars that helped set dates for religious observances. When a ruler marked an important date with a public ceremony, a carved record could help keep that event in the city's memory. Together, the monument, the sacred gathering place, and the ceremony connected beliefs about time with claims about who had the right to rule.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the layout of a Maya plaza help a ruler connect political leadership to religion?

2. How did the Temple of the Inscriptions connect Pakal's family to both religious ideas and political power?

3. Why would directing workers and resources to build a temple matter to a ruler's authority?

4. How could a carved monument near a temple link a religious observance to a claim about who should rule?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are planning a new public space for a Maya city. In four sentences, describe one specific design choice, a religious use for it, and how a ruler could use it to support political authority; include one detail from the passage as evidence.

ANSWER KEY

Power in Stone

GRADE 7 · SS24.7.10c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about buildings or public spaces, circle two details about religious practices, and mark with the numbers 1 and 2 two places where those details connect to a ruler's power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the layout of a Maya plaza help a ruler connect political leadership to religion?	**A plaza beside temples could hold a crowd for rituals. People could see the ruler take part in sacred duties.**
2	How did the Temple of the Inscriptions connect Pakal's family to both religious ideas and political power?	**The temple placed Pakal's tomb in sacred space connected to ideas about the afterlife. Its carved writing recorded his family's rule, and the large building showed the family's ability to organize workers.**
3	Why would directing workers and resources to build a temple matter to a ruler's authority?	**The ruler could support a religious building while showing the kingdom that its leaders could organize a major project.**
4	How could a carved monument near a temple link a religious observance to a claim about who should rule?	**It could record a ruler's name and an important date connected to a public ceremony. Near a sacred gathering place, that record could keep the ruler's claim in the city's memory.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would add a raised stone platform at the edge of a plaza, with steps facing the crowd. On a date set for a religious observance, priests and the ruler could lead a ceremony there. The steps would let many people see the ruler taking part in a sacred event. This design builds on the passage's detail that Maya plazas could hold crowds for ceremonies.

Accept historically plausible designs that explain a connection among a built space, religious practice, and a ruler's authority. Students should support their idea with a detail from the passage without claiming that every Maya city was the same.