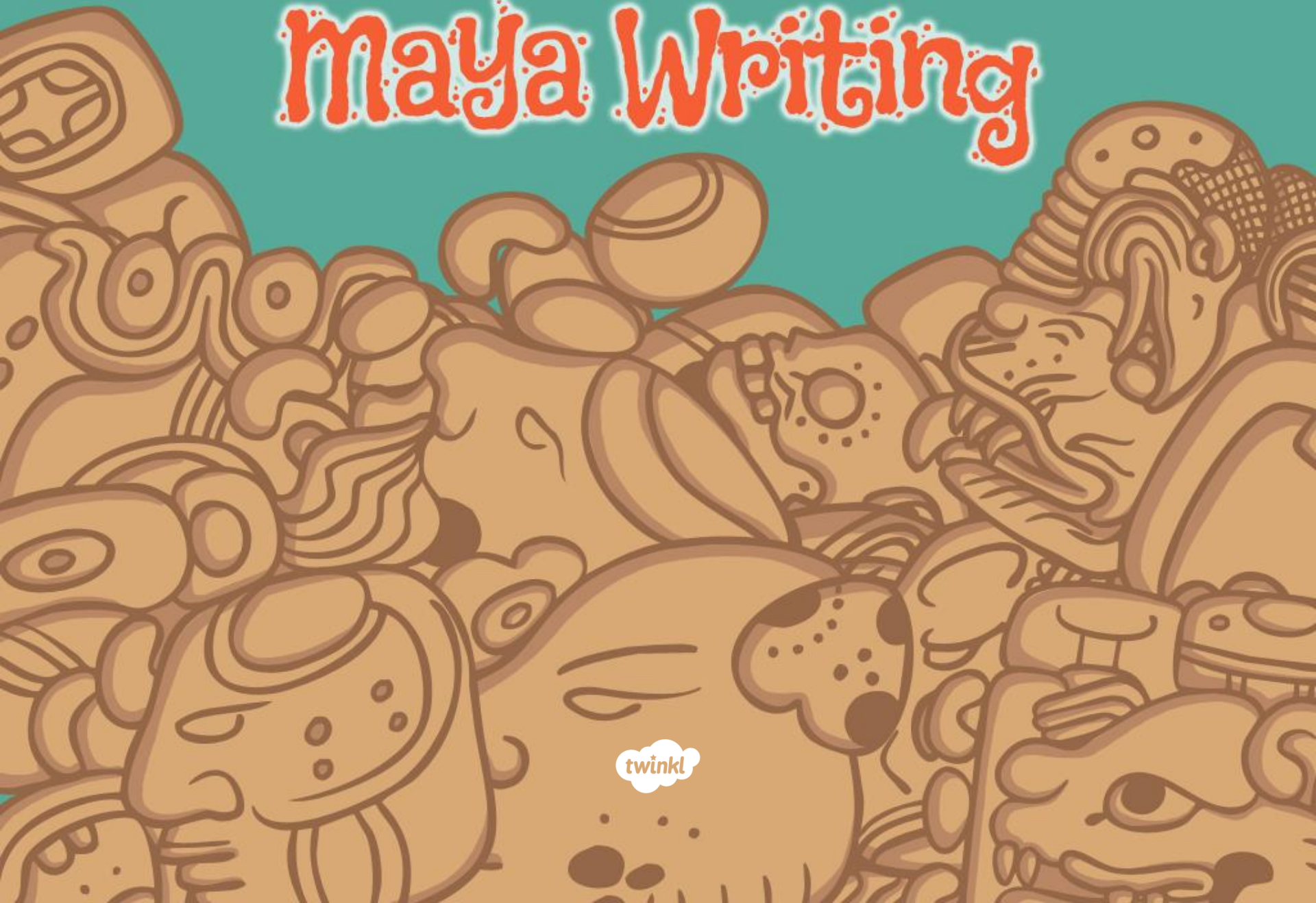


# Maya Writing



# Aim

- I can explain what the Maya writing system consists of, how words are constructed and what codices are.

# Success Criteria

- I can identify key facts about the Maya writing system.
- I can construct Maya words using syllabograms and logograms.

# Maya Writing



## What do you know about Maya writing?

Discuss these questions with your partner. Be ready to feedback your ideas to the rest of the class.

1. What does Maya writing look like?
2. Where have you seen examples of Maya writing in your learning about the Maya so far?
3. What do you think the Maya may have written about? Why?
4. What would you like to find out about Maya writing?

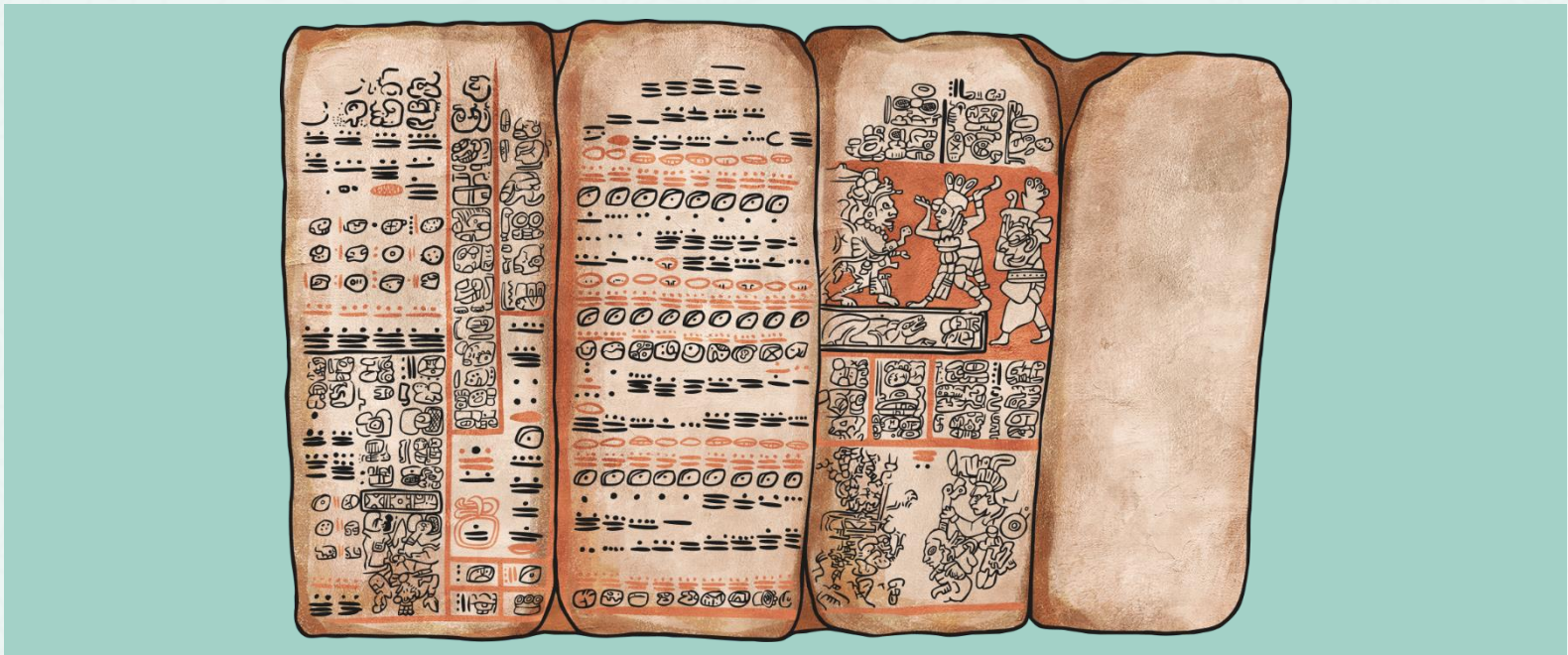


# Codices

The Maya people also wrote books made of the bark from fig trees. One book is called a codex and the plural is codices.

The codices were written by professional scribes and contained information about astronomy, gods, war and history.

Rather than having separate pages, the codices unfolded like a concertina.



# The Last Codices

Unfortunately, when the Spanish arrived and set to conquer the Maya, their priests burned as many Maya codices as they could find as they considered them to be the work of the devil. Three genuine Maya codices remain, and they were discovered 'hiding out' in Europe. These codices are named after the places they are kept.

- **The Dresden Codex:** part of the Royal Library collection in Dresden, Germany.
- **The Madrid Codex:** Housed in the Madrid Archaeological Museum, Spain.
- **The Paris Codex:** Housed in the National Library of Paris, France.

A fourth codex was discovered in the 1960s, but historians cannot decide if it is real. It is called the Grolier codex.

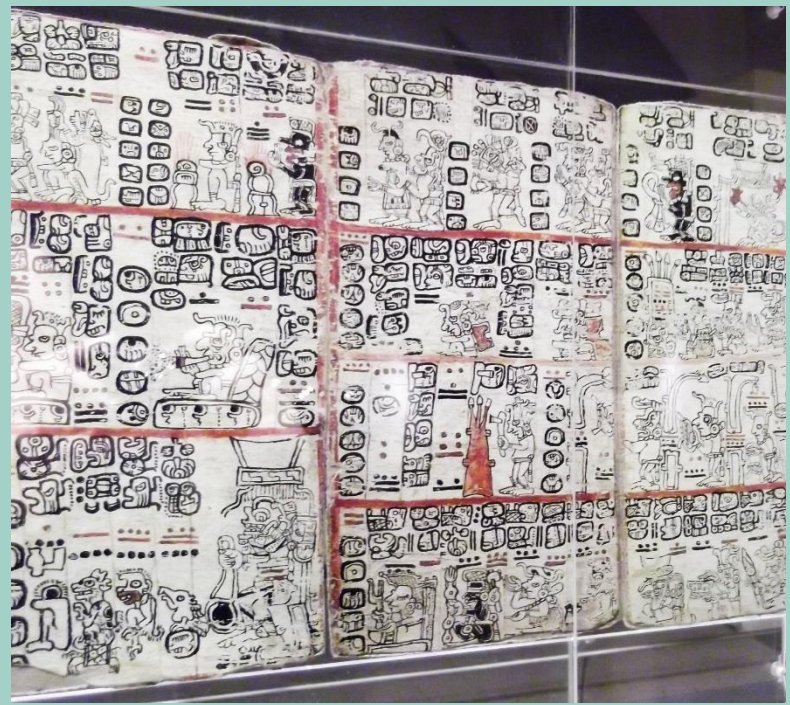


Photo courtesy of David Holt London (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

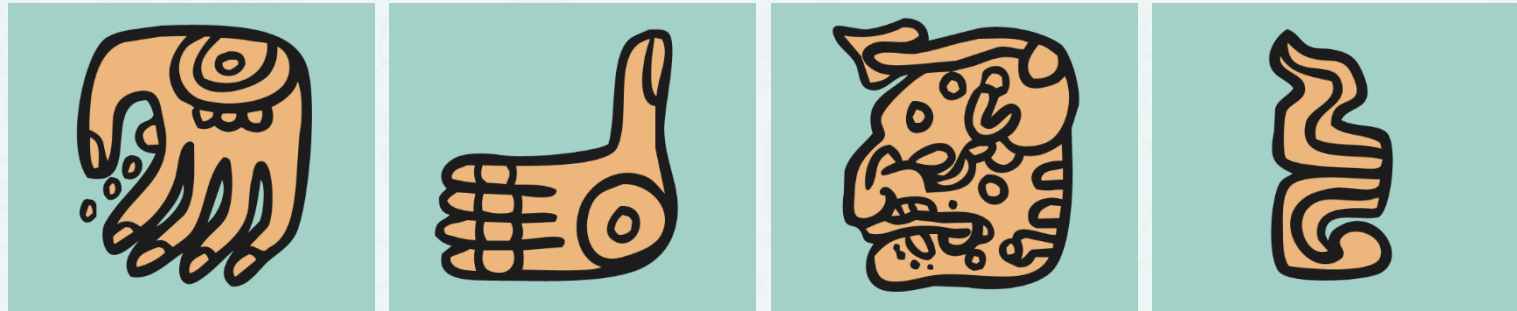
# Maya Hieroglyphs



Maya hieroglyphic writing can be made up of syllabograms (representing sounds) or logograms (representing whole words).

Logograms often resemble the thing that they represent, so it is easy for us to see what they mean, but others are more tricky.

Look closely at these logograms. Can you match them to their meanings?



to grab

fire

to scatter

jaguar



**chan**  
'sky'



**winik**  
'person'



**witz**  
'mountain'



**k'in**  
'sun'



**b'alam**  
'jaguar'



**k'ak'**  
'fire'



**bak**  
'bone'



**way**  
'spirit'



**juun**  
'book'



**ja'**  
'water'



**ajaw**  
'lord'



**muyal**  
'cloud'



**ix**  
'woman'



**ch'am**  
'to grab'



**k'uk'**  
'quetzal'



**chan**  
'snake'



**ch'ul**  
'holy'



**chok**  
'to scatter'



**jaab**  
'year'



**yax**  
'blue/green'



**pakal**  
'shield'



**tok**  
'flint'



**naj**  
'house'



**k'al**  
'twenty'

# Syllabograms

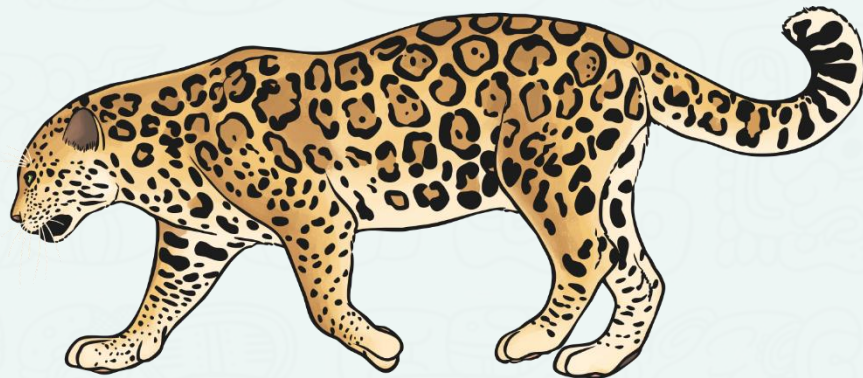


About 150 syllabograms were used in the Maya script and syllables were often represented by more than one glyph. This meant that different people could spell the same words differently depending on which syllabograms they chose to use.

For example, the Maya word for jaguar is b'alam which can be split into three syllables b'a – la – am, with the final 'a' silent.

Have a look at the syllabograms for the syllables in b'alam. How many different ways of spelling the word can you find?

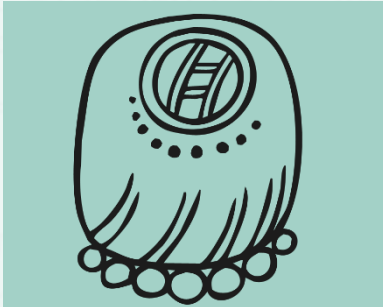
**Remember there is a logogram for the word jaguar too!**



# Jaguar – b'alam



ba



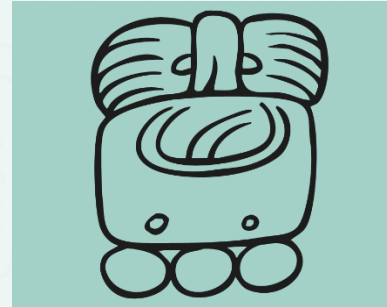
+

la

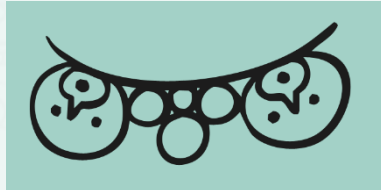


+

am



=



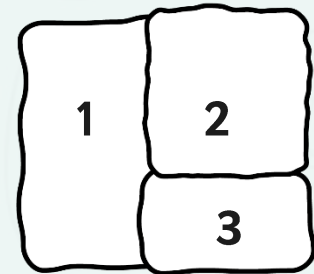
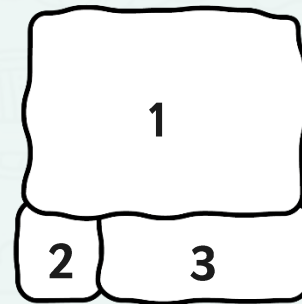
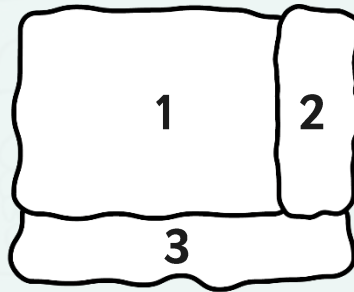
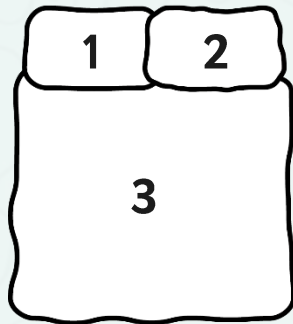
# Creating a Glyph Block



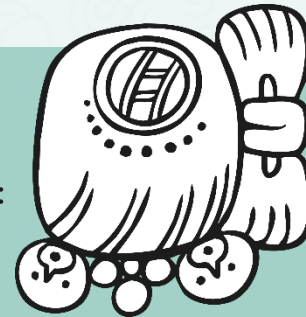
Now you have three syllabograms to write b'alam, you need to combine them into one glyph block.

Maya glyphs were roughly read top to bottom and left to right.

For example:



So the word b'alam could look like this:



# Can you draw some Maya logograms and write down their meanings?

Perhaps once you have done this, create your own Maya style logogram. What does it mean?

