

|||||  
**MYSTERIOUS  
OLMECS**  
|||||



# INTRODUCTION

Hi! I'm Eduardo, and this is my jaguar cub Zuma!  
I live in Mexico City, and I love discovering and taking photos  
of the traces of the city's past. History is everywhere.  
All you have to do is keep your eyes peeled and stay curious!

I just discovered the Olmec civilization.

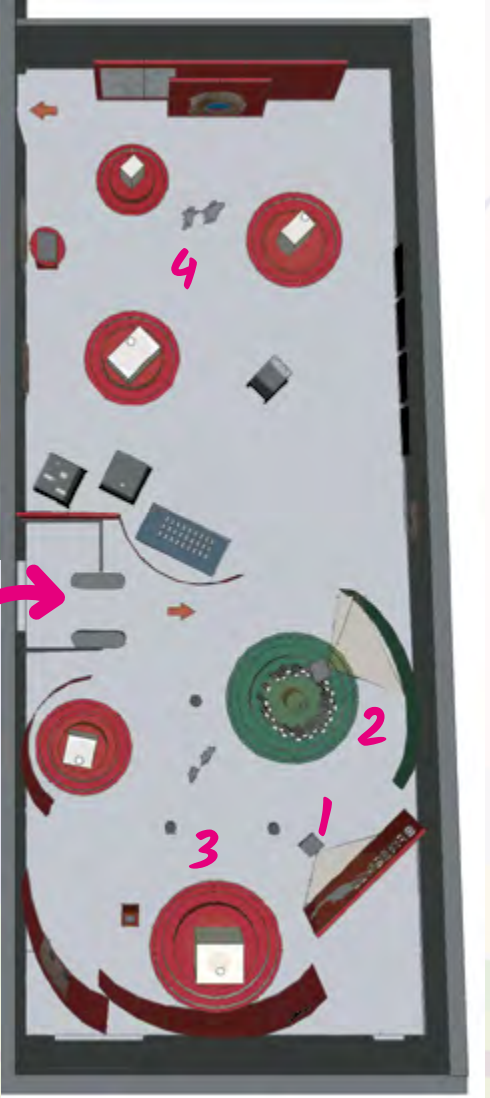
*DO YOU KNOW WHO THE OLMECS ARE?  
THEY'RE MEXICO'S OLDEST KNOWN GULF COAST  
CIVILIZATION. THEIR ART, ARCHITECTURE,  
BELIEFS AND WRITING INFLUENCED MANY  
CULTURES, INCLUDING THE MAYAS AND AZTECS.*



When it comes to the Olmecs, there's still a lot to discover.  
So let's learn more about them and unlock some of their mysteries!

**THE OLMEC ADVENTURE STARTS NOW!**

# GROUND FLOOR PLAN



**MORE OLMECS  
THIS WAY!**

**GROUND  
FLOOR  
ENTRANCE**

**RGRRGRR**



# / MAP

You can't get to know the Olmecs without getting to know the Gulf of Mexico, Mesoamerica and some of the major cities. So it's important to understand where we are in the world.

Look closely at the interactive map in the exhibition and fill in the missing information.

**Colour the regions of Mesoamerica and the Gulf of Mexico.  
Match the dots on the map with the names of the Olmec cities.**

1. San Lorenzo   2. La Venta   3. Tres Zapotes



## 2 THE OJOSHAL OFFERING

Take a look at this impressive installation of the Ojoshal offering.

There are 100 celts, which are like axe heads, and a reproduction of the sceptre of the master of the harvest. This offering embodies the main characteristics of the Olmec people. Let's find out what they are!



**AN OFFERING IS  
A GIFT OF ITEMS  
GIVEN TO A GOD.**

**A SCEPTRE IS A STAFF  
CARRIED AS A SYMBOL OF  
AUTHORITY. IT SIGNIFIES  
POWER AND ROYALTY.**

### WHO AM I?

I'm the most important grain in the Olmec diet.

**1. Maize (corn) 2. Wheat 3. Oat**

I help ensure the survival of Olmec farmers.

People used jade to represent me.

**1. Earth 2. Water 3. Sky**

I'm the guardian of the underworld that links the realms of the humans and the gods. I'm also the god of fertility.

**1. Dog 2. Sea monster 3. Jaguar**



**FERTILITY IS THE ABILITY  
OF LIVING BEINGS TO REPRODUCE  
OR OF LAND TO GROW PLANTS.**

**RRRRR**



GREAT JOB! TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE REPRODUCTION OF THE FIGURE OF THE MASTER OF THE HARVEST, AND YOU'LL SEE ALL THREE ELEMENTS REPRESENTED. YOU'LL COME ACROSS THEM AGAIN, SO KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN!

## 3 SAN LORENZO



We saw on the map that San Lorenzo was the first Olmec capital. It's where archaeologists discovered 10 of the 17 colossal heads that have been unearthed.

Take some time to observe this impressive artifact!

Archaeologists have discovered 17 heads, which are believed to represent Olmec leaders. Although they're all unique, the heads share some common attributes.

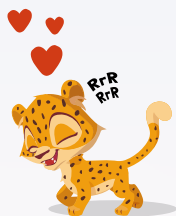


DID YOU KNOW THAT THE HEAD WEIGHS 4.5 TONS? THAT'S 4,500 KILOS OR 9,920 POUNDS!



From this list of features, circle the ones that are common to all the colossal heads.

FLAT NOSE      ROUND EYES      CHISELED CHEEKBONES  
BEAUTY MARK      FULL LIPS      HELMET  
CURLY HAIR      EAR ORNAMENTS



# 4 JAGUAR

I think Zuma really likes this section!

Take a look at the statues around you and admire all the representations of the jaguar. A deity of the night, water and fertility, the jaguar is also the guardian of the underworld. It was very important to the Olmecs.

JUST LIKE ZUMA  
IS IMPORTANT  
TO ME!



The jaguar is represented in many forms: as an animal, as a were-jaguar (a human-like form) and as a were-jaguar child (a childlike human form).

**It's your turn! Look closely at these photos and the jaguars in the exhibition and match the image with the right form.**

ANIMAL JAGUAR



MAN



WERE-JAGUAR







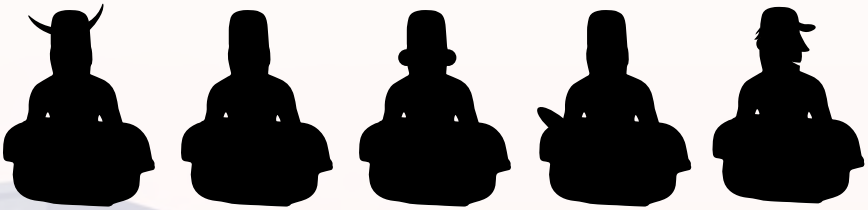
# 6 SEÑOR DE LAS LIMAS

In this section, find the shadow that exactly matches the sculpture.

**Take a close look at it.**

It was discovered by two children and was worshipped by villagers for many years. The figure represents a were-jaguar holding a jaguar cub.

**Can you find the shadow that exactly matches the sculpture?**



# 7 WRITING AND CALENDAR

The Olmecs developed a writing system of **glyphs** and **symbols**. They also used a calendar and accounting system known as **the long count**. The dot is 1 and the bar is 5. The shell is 0.

**Can you decipher the four numbers on this stela?**

● = 1

— = 5

🐚 = 0

The answer is:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A GLYPH IS A CARVED CHARACTER THAT REPRESENTS A WORD OR LETTER.

NEED INSPIRATION? LOOK OVER AT STELA C THAT WAS FOUND AT TRES ZAPOTES!



# 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR PLAN

Ready for more adventure?

We're about to discover the legacy of the Olmecs: the culture, history, art and beliefs they passed on to other civilizations.

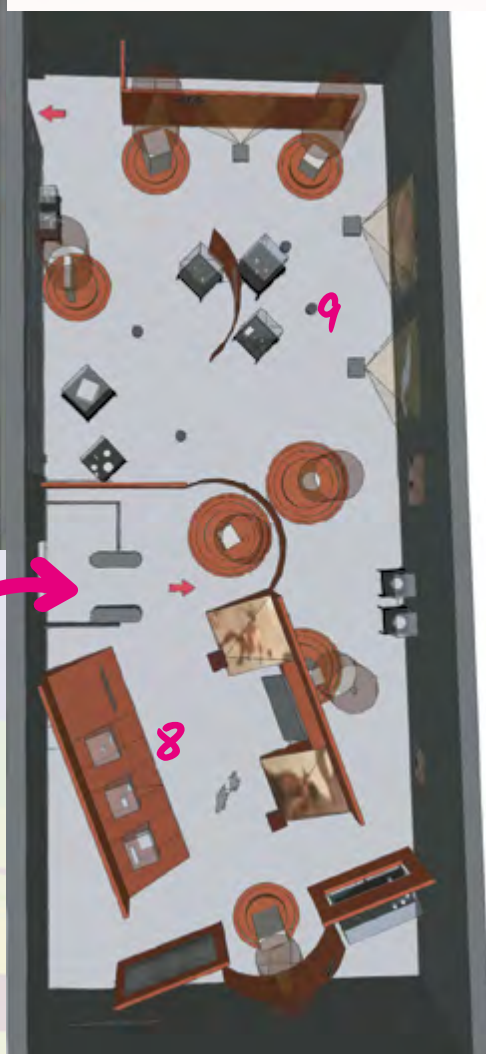
Follow the floor plan.  
It'll guide us on our expedition.

Here we go!



**EXIT:  
END OF  
THE EXHIBITION**

**FIRST  
FLOOR  
ENTRANCE**



**8**



**Rrrrr**

# 8 BALL GAME

Have you heard of the Olmec ball game?  
It was more than a sport: it was a very important ritual.  
But there are still plenty of mysteries that surround it.  
The Olmec ball game was adopted by several Mesoamerican civilizations and is still played today in some regions of Mexico.

**Let's learn how to play!**  
**Start by completing this sentence:**

Kitted out in \_\_\_\_\_ gear, two teams of \_\_\_\_\_ players selected among the \_\_\_\_\_ used only their \_\_\_\_\_, elbows or knees to hit a \_\_\_\_\_ ball.

# 9 DECLINE OF THE OLMEC CIVILIZATION

Our last city marks the decline of the Olmec civilization and the rise of other Gulf civilizations.

As the deities, Olmec cults and ritual practices live on, they enable new groups to affirm their own artistic and cultural identities.

*A DECLINE IS THE PROCESS OF BECOMING LESS AND MAYBE EVEN DISAPPEARING.*

*A RISE IS THE PROCESS OF BECOMING MORE AND GAINING IMPORTANCE.*

**Write the names of the civilizations in chronological order.**

**Nahua - Olmecs - Huastec**



# CONCLUSION GROUND FLOOR

Wow, you're an awesome explorer!  
Thanks to your curiosity, we discovered the Olmecs, the places  
where they lived, their beliefs, their art and their writing  
and calendar systems on **our adventure!**

**We've still got a lot to learn about the Olmecs and their influence.**

**Follow me upstairs where our adventure continues!  
Onward and upward!**



IT WAS SO MUCH FUN  
TRAVELLING WITH YOU!

RGRGRRR



# 10 WOMEN AND MEN OF THE GULF

During our visit, we observed several sculptures that represent some of the men, women, deities and animals who were important to the Olmecs.

Look closely at the Mujer Arrodillada sculpture (figure of a woman kneeling) which represents an elderly woman. The figure celebrates women, the political roles they could play and their embodiment of fertility.

**Compare the sculpture and the image in your notebook to find the 7 differences. Don't forget to look at the back, too!**



Figure of a woman kneeling, 900–1200 CE, Tuxpan, Veracruz, Sandstone, Museo Nacional de Antropología.



**LOOK AT THE 5 SCULPTURES THAT STAND AT THE END OF THE EXHIBITION.**

# // TODAY

The Olmec's influence can still be felt today in many beliefs and traditions. At the start of the exhibition, we saw that maize (corn) was a central and symbolic staple for the Olmecs. It was important in other Mesoamerican cultures, too. Harvested at the same time as the Day of the Dead, it was presented as offerings during ceremonies.



THESE TRADITIONS  
ARE DEFINITELY  
ALIVE TODAY!



Look closely at the tapestry of the agricultural cycle and answer the following questions:

How many birds are there? \_\_\_\_\_

How many purses are there? \_\_\_\_\_

How many yellow corns are there? \_\_\_\_\_

A PURSE IS A SQUARE  
SHOULDER BAG,  
HERE WITH BANGS  
AT THE BOTTOM.

## CONCLUSION

On our adventure, we learned about the Olmecs' beliefs, art, writing and calendar systems and how the civilization influenced other Mesoamerican cultures.

WOW! WHAT AN AMAZING  
CULTURE AND HISTORY!



RGRRGRR

# SOLUTIONS

## GAME 7

The answer is:

- 15
- 6
- 16
- 18

## GAME 8

Kitted out in **protective gear**, two teams of **8 players** selected among the **elite** used only their **hips, elbows** or **knees** to hit a **rubber ball**.

## GAME 9

Nahua

Huastec

Olmecs

## GAME 1



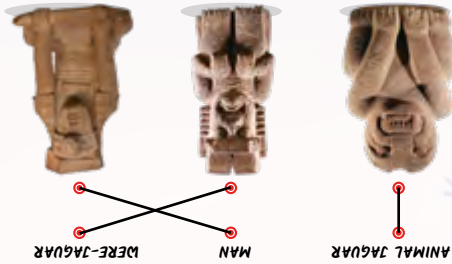
## GAME 2

- WHO AM I?
1. Maize (corn)
  2. Water
  3. Jaguar

## GAME 3

- FLAT NOSE
- ROUND EYES
- CHISELED CHEEKBONES
- BEAUTY MARK
- FULL LIPS
- HELMET
- CURLY HAIR
- EAR ORNAMENTS

## GAME 4



## GAME 6



## GAME 10



## GAME 11

The answers are:  
 5 birds  
 13 purses  
 16 yellow corns

**I hope you enjoyed your visit  
and learned lots of new things.  
See you soon for more adventures  
at Pointe-à-Callière. We're always  
looking for explorers like you!**



## **> CREDITS**

Sculpture with feline attributes, 1200–900 BCE, Loma del Zapote (El Azul), Texistepec, Veracruz, Museo de Antropología de Xalapa, México.

Seated sculpture, Monument 52, 1200–600 BCE, San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán, Veracruz, D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), México.

Sculpture of twins, 1200–900 BCE, Loma del Zapote (El Azul), Texistepec, Veracruz, Museo de Antropología de Xalapa, México.

Figure of a woman kneeling, 900–1200 CE, Tuxpan, Veracruz, Sandstone, Museo Nacional de Antropología.

Texts: Annick Deblois, © Pointe-à-Callière, Montréal Archaeology and History Complex

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