



GUIDE TO READING NOTES 23

23.3 Class Structure

The five levels of the Mayan class structure are outlined on the Temple of the Jaguar below. Label each level with the name of the class. For each class, list at least three interesting or important details about that group's duties, work, or lifestyle.

Possible answers:

The Ruler

- Called the *halach uinic*, or "true man."
- Decided when and where to go to war.
- At religious ceremonies, wore a headdress as tall as a person.
- Was influenced by female family members.

Nobles and Priests

- Only priests and nobles knew how to read and write.
- Nobles gathered taxes, supplies, and labor for important projects.
- Nobles led peasant armies in times of war.
- Priests led rituals and performed sacrifices.

Merchants and Artisans

- Merchants traveled by sea, river, and roads to trade with other city-states.
- Merchants traded such goods as obsidian, jade, copal, and quetzal feathers.
- Artists painted murals of Mayan life and important battles.
- Artisans were skilled weavers and potters.

Peasants

- Peasant men worked mostly in the fields.
- Peasant women generally worked at preparing food, weaving, and sewing.
- Peasants also built temples and pyramids and served as soldiers.
- Peasants sometimes attended royal weddings and religious ceremonies.

Slaves

- People could become slaves if their family sold them into slavery.
- Soldiers of humble background who were captured in war became slaves.
- People who committed serious crimes became slaves.
- Slaves were often sacrificed when their masters died.