


Mayan Math Class

Long before calculators and classrooms, the ancient Mayans created their own way of working with numbers. Let's learn more about how it works... then try it yourself!

The 3 Mayan Number Symbols

The Maya used three symbols to create numbers and equations:

● Dot = 1 — Bar = 5 ☉ Shell = 0

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------|---------|----------|-----------|--------|-------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
|  | ● | ●● | ●●● | ●●●● | — | ● — | ●● — | ●●● — | ●●●● — |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| — | ● — | ●● — | ●●● — | ●●●● — | — — | ● — — | ●● — — | ●●● — — | ●●●● — — |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |

And that's it! They created clever numbers and sequences by combining and stacking dots and bars.

Try This First!

Write the following numbers using dots and bar symbols:

$4 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

$6 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

$9 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

Let's Do Some Mayan Math

Write your answers using dots, bars and shells:

$10 + 5 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

$14 + 3 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

$19 + 1 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

A Clever Trick on Doing Mayan Math: Stacking Numbers

The Maya counted to 19, then they would start again but on a new level above!

This is how it would look:

The bottom level = numbers 0–19

The level above = groups of 20

This is what it means:

1 dot on the top level = 20

2 dots on the top level = 40

It's like a number tower!

Mayan Math Tip!

Use dots first, then once you reach the number 5, make it a bar symbol.

Bonus Challenge!

Can you write the number 25 in Mayan numbers?
Hint: That's $20 + 5$

$25 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$