

# The Hero Twins: A Maya Myth

## Father and Uncle

The story of the Hero Twins begins with two twin boys. Their names are One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. These two boys loved to play the Maya ball game. They were very talented, but they were also very noisy when they played. The gods of the underworld, the Lords of Death, became agitated with the boys and summoned them to the underworld. The Maya underworld was called Xibalba.

When the boys visited the underworld the Lords of Death put them through a number of tests. First they had to make it over rivers of spikes and blood. Then they were to greet the gods by name. However, the gods they greeted were only wooden carvings. By not recognizing the gods they had failed a test. Then the gods asked them to sit down. When they sat down they were burned by a fiery bench. They had failed another test. Because they failed the tests, the gods put them to death.

## The Hero Twins are Born

Despite being dead, according to the myth, One Hunahpu had a child with one of the Maya goddesses. This goddess had twins who were to become known as the Hero Twins. Their names were Hunahpu and Xbalanque.

Just like their father and uncle, the Hero Twins were great ballplayers. They were also loud and annoyed the gods of the underworld. Soon the Lords of Death summoned them to come play a game of ball in the underworld.

## Visit to the Underworld

The Hero Twins went to the underworld to meet the Lords of Death. However, the Hero Twins had learned from their father's mistakes. They didn't fall for any of the gods' tricks. Each time the gods put them to the test, they passed the test.

When the gods tried to trick them with wooden gods, they used a mosquito to bite the gods. This way they knew which god was real and which was wood by the way they reacted. They also refused to sit on the fiery bench.

## Playing a Game of Ball

After passing the tests, the boys were to play a game of ball against the gods. Again, the gods tried to trick the boys by using a ball with sharp blades on it. The boys were having none of this, however. They saw the blades and told the gods they weren't going to play ball if the gods wouldn't play fair.

The gods agreed to play fair. However, the boys knew that the gods intended to kill them if they won. So they let the gods win. After each game, the gods continued to test the boys with rooms of blades, ice, and fire.

## The Hero Twins are Killed

The boys finally beat the Lords of Death at the game of ball. The lords were furious.

They told the boys to jump into an oven, the boys agreed. The boys were killed and the gods threw their ashes into the river. This was all part of the Hero Twins secret plan. When their ashes became part of the river the boys came back to life as catfish. Then later they were fully restored as the Hero Twins.

### **They Win in the End**

The Hero Twins now had many powers of the gods. They could kill things and then make them come back from the dead. The Lords of Death were impressed with the boys' powers. They asked the boys to perform the trick on them. With their best trick of all, they killed the Lords of Death and then didn't bring them back to life. The Hero Twins had won!

### **Interesting Facts about the Maya Hero Twins**

- Characters very similar to the Hero Twins are found in the mythology of several other Native American cultures.
- The Hero Twins were made rulers of the Earth by the gods of the sky. One twin was turned into the Moon and the other into the Sun.
- The Hero Twins brought their father back to life and turned him into the Maize god.
- It was said that the rulers of the Maya were the descendants of the Hero Twins. This gave them the right to rule.
- Many Maya vases are painted and carved with scenes from the stories of the Hero Twins.