

THE MYSTERIOUS MAYA TEMPLE

Creative writing challenge - build atmosphere and make your reader want to keep reading.

The discovery

The rainforest has been hot, wet and noisy all morning. Vines twist around ancient tree trunks. Insects buzz above your head and every step sinks into the damp ground.

Then you see it.

Behind a curtain of leaves, a line of weathered stone steps climbs towards a dark doorway. Strange glyphs are carved into the walls. At the top of the steps, something glints in the shadows...

What happens next?

Your challenge

Continue the story from the moment the temple is discovered. You decide who your main character is, why they are there and what they find. Your story can be mysterious, adventurous or surprising - but keep the Ancient Maya setting at the centre of the scene.

Build the atmosphere with the senses

SEE: moss-covered stone • tangled vines • carved glyphs • shafts of sunlight • a dark doorway

HEAR: dripping water • distant birds • leaves rustling • footsteps • a low rumble

FEEL: humid air • rough stone • sweat on your skin • a sudden cool breeze • your heart pounding

SMELL: wet earth • crushed leaves • smoke • flowers • stale air from inside the temple

Need a starting sentence?

For several seconds, I could only stare at the staircase in front of me.

Without warning, the jungle fell completely silent.

"Did you see that?" I whispered, pointing towards the doorway.

Slowly, I brushed the vines away from the first carved symbol.

Keep it believable

You may invent a mystery or magical twist if you wish but use real Maya details from your learning: stepped temples, glyphs, plazas, rulers, gods, maize, cacao, markets or stone carvings.

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Story planner - use as much or as little support as you need.

1. DISCOVERY	Where is your character? What do they notice first? How do you make the temple feel mysterious? _____ _____
2. BUILD-UP	What draws them closer? What do they hear, see or find? Add a clue. _____ _____
3. PROBLEM / SURPRISE	What changes? A sound? A hidden room? A message in glyphs? Someone else appears? _____ _____
4. RESPONSE	How does your character react? What do they say or do? _____ _____
5. ENDING	Do they solve the mystery, escape, make a discovery or end on a cliffhanger? _____ _____

Writer's toolkit

Expanded noun phrases: the crumbling, moss-covered staircase	Fronted adverbials: Beyond the tangled vines, ...
Precise verbs: crept, stumbled, glimmered, echoed, trembled	Speech: "We should turn back," Maya whispered.
Short sentence for impact: The doorway moved.	Show feelings: My hands shook as I reached for the stone.

Go Further

Reveal information slowly. Do not explain the mystery straight away.
Vary your sentence lengths to control the pace.
Use a repeated sound, object or clue to build suspense.
Try ending a paragraph just before something important is revealed.