



0. OLMEC GLYPHS - Story Preface

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This image depicts an example of Olmec glyphs. Scholars believe that Olmec writing, via glyphs like these, may have been the first writing system in the New World. Image online via [Mesoamericas](#).

In 1862 - when Abraham Lincoln was president and the *Resolute* was still owned by the Royal Navy - a man named Jose Maria Melgar discovered something unusual in Mexico's Gulf-coast-state of [Veracruz](#).

What he found - the statue of a colossal head - would provide scholars with important clues about early civilization in the Americas.

About sixty years later, someone else found another giant head. What did the statues depict? Who had created them?

Before these discoveries, historians believed that [Mayans](#) were the first people in the area. But the statues had interesting facial features which differed from Mayan art. Experts pondered why.

Other artifacts, found in the same general area, were also inconsistent with Mayan work. Some were carvings of a beast which was half-jaguar and half-man. Who was this?

Marshall Saville, director of New York's [Museum of the American Indian](#), weighed the evidence and determined (in 1929) that the findings were created by a previously unknown people. [Hermann Beyer](#) had reached the same conclusion two years earlier.

They named the civilization Olmec, meaning "those who live in the land of rubber" in [Nahuatl](#) (the ancient language of the Aztecs). Both believed this civilization, and its area of influence, predated the Mayans.

Studies continued and more discoveries were made in the Mexican towns of [San Lorenzo](#) and La Venta. The tallest head, found to date, is over eleven feet.

Experts now believe the Olmec civilization was the first complex society in Mesoamerica. It may have started about 1500 B.C., flourished between 1200 B.C. and 300 B.C. - then disappeared. No one knows why.

Archaeological digs and discoveries also reveal the Olmecs had a written form of communication. Using a type of hieroglyphics - referred to as Olmec glyphs - they created what are "believed to be the earliest form of writing ever found in the New World."

The problem, however, is that scholars - such as Dr. Mary Pohl from Florida State University - do not yet fully understand the writings. (The audio clips are from NPR.)

So ... given that the Olmec civilization flourished in the warm climate of Gulf-coast Mexico, could a connection exist between the Olmecs and Native Americans who lived in the area we know as South Dakota?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/OLMEC-GLYPHS-National-Treasure-Book-of-Secrets>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/OLMEC-GLYPHS-National-Treasure-Book-of-Secrets>



### Veracruz - Map Locator

Image online, courtesy the [tips4mexico.com](http://tips4mexico.com) website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Veracruz-Map-Locator>



### Veracruz - Colosal Head

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

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### Evidence of Olmec Writing

Image online, courtesy the [nsf.gov](http://nsf.gov) website.

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### Half-Jaguar Statue

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### Olmec Areas of Influence - Map Locator

Image online, courtesy the Alternative Archaeology website.

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### Olmec Artifact

Image online, courtesy the [crystalinks.com](http://www.crystalinks.com) website.

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### Olmec Head - San Lorenzo

Image online, courtesy the [latinamericanstudies.org](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org) website.

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View this asset at:

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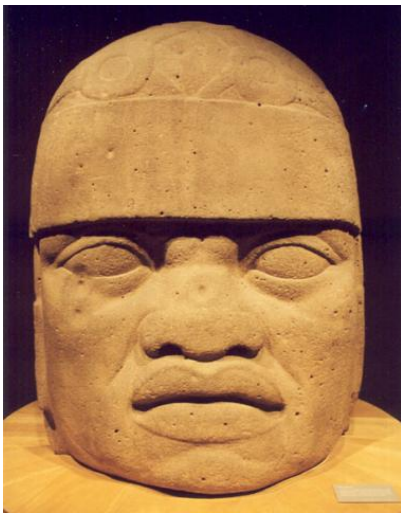
### Olmec Sites - Map Locator

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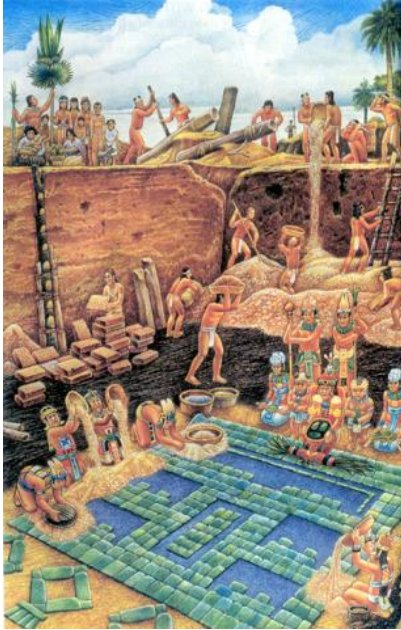




### Olmec Statue

Image online, courtesy the [latinamericanstudies.org](http://latinamericanstudies.org) website.

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### Recreation of Olmec Civilization

Image online, courtesy the [latinamericanstudies.org](http://latinamericanstudies.org) website.

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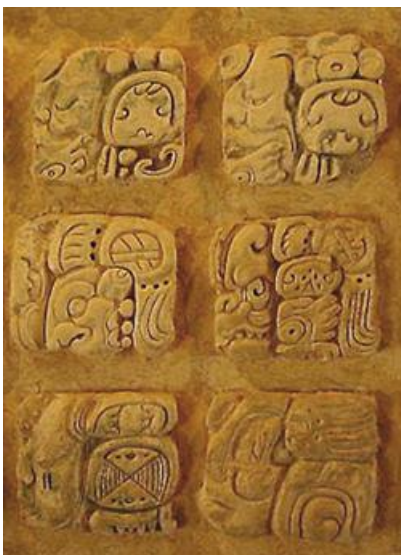


### San Lorenzo - Map Locator

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