Background Information

The Maya are an ancient people, whose civilization thrived in Central America thousands of years ago. Scholars have thought for more than 100 years that Maya culture originated in the northern reaches of what is now Guatemala around 600 BCE, migrating north to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico beginning around 700 CE. Throughout the film Quest for the Lost Maya, a team of anthropologists finds evidence that the Maya have been in the Yucatan more than a thousand years longer than believed.

This segment of Quest for the Lost Maya discusses Xocnacah [SHOHK-nuh-kay], a massive, ancient Mayan city. The construction of the city’s center plaza would have required enormous human effort, including the work of architects, mathematicians, engineers, masons, and accountants, overseen by kings and their appointed leaders. Such a labor force suggests that a very well-organized, highly sophisticated Mayan civilization inhabited the Yucatan as early as 600 BCE.
Questions

1. How old is this monumental structure?

2. What artifacts did archaeologists find at Xocnacah? What do these artifacts suggest about the Mayan culture there?

3. Suppose the year is now 3000, and archaeologists stumble upon the remains of your hometown or city. What remains will they find? What will those remains say about your culture?
Questions and Answers

1. How old is this monumental structure?

   Answer: It was radio-carbon dated to 2,500 years ago (500 BCE).

2. What artifacts did archaeologists find at Xocnacah? What do these artifacts suggest about the Mayan culture there?

   Answer: They found basalt tools from what is now Belize, conch shells from what is now the Mexican city of Veracruz, and jade from what is now Guatemala. This suggests that Xocnacah was the hub of a large trade network.

3. Suppose the year is now 3000, and archaeologists stumble upon the remains of your hometown or city. What remains will they find? What will those remains say about your culture?

   Answer: Answers will vary. Encourage students to think about artifacts of our own civilizations, as well as connections to other places.