

The Maya ballgame, called Pok-ta-Pok was only one type of several ball games played throughout Mesoamerica, from the Preclassic period to the Spanish conquest. The game was not only a sport, but also had ritual and political importance.

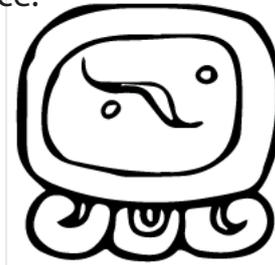
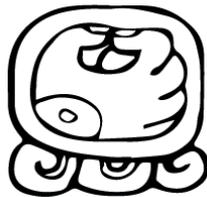
Popul Vuh

The Popul Vuh, a 16th century text from Santa Cruz Quiché in highland Guatemala, is seen as the great literary work of the Quiché Maya. It is the story of a people, a collection of myths, legends, and history, including the Myth of the Hero Twins.

The Myth of the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, includes a ballgame played in the underworld. These twins became great ballplayers and were summoned to a ballgame by the Uucabts. They survived many trials and were able to defeat the Uucabts with their skill play.



To hear how to say **Popul Vuh** point your device here!

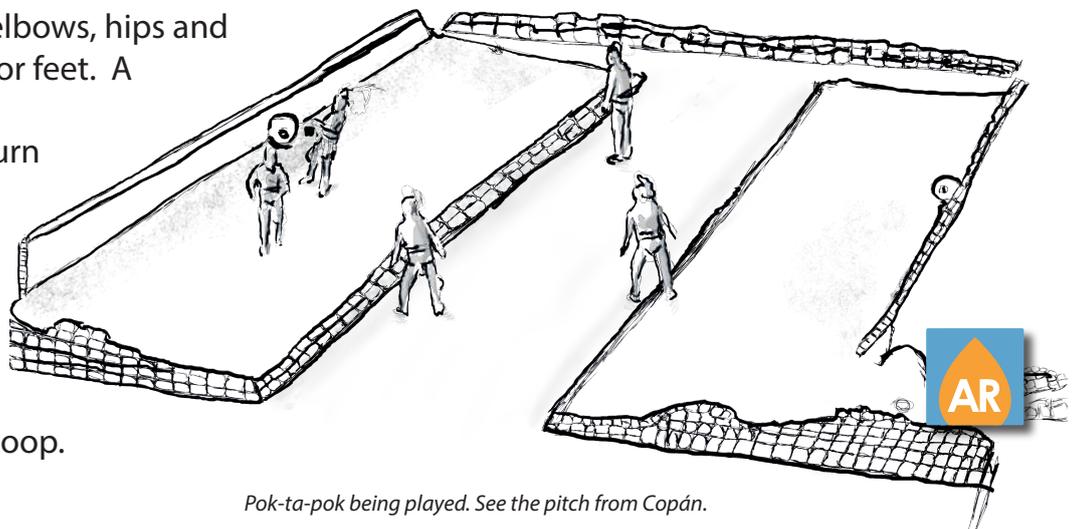


To hear how to say **Pok-ta-Pok** point your device here!



The Game

The court was divided into two halves, and the players wore heavy body padding and belts. The ball; a rubber sphere which is shown in various sizes, could be hit with the elbows, hips and knees, but never the hands or feet. A point was scored when the opposing team failed to return the ball before it bounced a second time, or when the ball reached the other teams end zone. In later versions of the game a point could be scored by passing it through a stone hoop.



Pok-ta-pok being played. See the pitch from Copán.

Mythbuster

The Maya were often said to be "blood thirsty", but this isn't true. Their warfare was often less bloody than ours, preferring to capture than kill their opponents. The ball game was even played instead of warfare sometimes!