The Original Olmec

The Olmec Civilization

- The Olmec civilization existed from 1300 BC to about 400 BC.
- The Olmec are believed to be the earliest civilization in the Americas.
- The Olmec people established a civilization in the area we know today as southern Mexico.
The “Mother Culture”

- Many historians consider the Olmec civilization the mother culture of Mesoamerica.
- A mother culture is a way of life that strongly influences later cultures.
- The Olmec empire led to the development of other civilizations, such as the Maya and the Aztec.
Olmec Daily Life

• The Olmec were very good at farming. The land in this region was very fertile and food supply was steady.

• They lived in villages near rivers and also fished for food.

• Olmec people also were good at making pottery and weaving.

Olmec Daily Life

• where, you must shoot a rubber ball through a stone ring without using your hands or feet.

• Huge ball courts built by the Olmec suggest that the game was popular with spectators.
Olmec Art

• The Olmec carved large heads from basalt, a type of volcanic rock.
• What the giant stone heads represent or why the Olmec built them is a mystery.

Olmec Technology

• Use of glyph writing to record events, dates, and to tell stories.
• Glyphs are pictures that represent words.
• They were incredible astronomers.
• They developed a calendar that was amazingly accurate for its time.
Olmec Trade

- It is believed that the Olmec did not focus on warfare and conquest, but instead, influenced other cultures mainly through trade.
- Most Olmec cities served as trade centers.
  - They mainly traded for luxury items such as precious stones. Knowledge and ideas were also exchanged at these trade centers.
  - As a result, the Olmec culture spread throughout much of Mesoamerica.

Olmec Religion

- The Olmec worshiped several gods (fire god, corn god) but their main god was the jaguar god.
- They believed that the jaguar god brought rain.
- Pyramids built in the center of their cities were probably used for religious reasons.