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THE CRYSTAL SKULLS

MARK GREENWOOD

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YEAR LEVEL: Y4–7

ABOUT THE BOOK

Legendary crystal skulls made by ancient civilisations have been a source of controversy for decades. But are they more modern than we think?

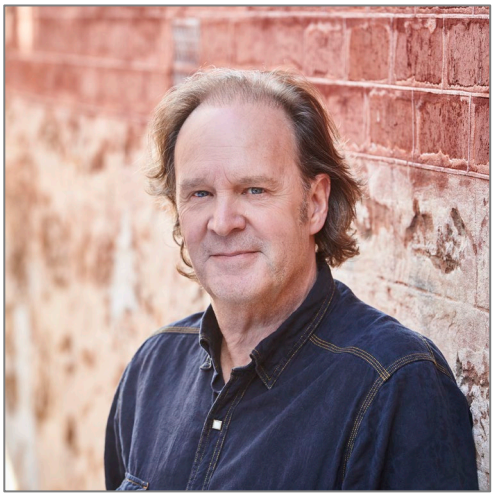
Made by no known human process, the crystal skulls have defied investigations to determine who made them, when they were made, and what tools were used.

Could they be relics from the legendary lost island of Atlantis, or are these exotic artifacts an elaborate hoax?

The truth is out there.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Greenwood is a history hunter. He enjoys searching for lost explorers and glittering treasure, delving into baffling mysteries and investigating famous cold cases. His award-winning books examining history and multicultural themes have been honoured internationally.



THEMES

- Mystery
- Myths and Legends
- Ancient artefacts
- Ancient civilisations
- History
- Crystal Skulls
- Hoaxes
- Myths and legends

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y4–7 English
- Y4–7 Humanities and Social Sciences
- Y4–7 The Arts
- Y4–7 Health and Physical Education
- Y4–7 Science

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: markgreenwood.com.au
- BBC: The Maya Civilisation: bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z2pmvj6#zw8r7v4
- Archaeology: Legend of the Crystal Skulls: archive.archaeology.org/0805/etc/indy
- https://www.heritagedaily.com/2023/01/the-truth-behind-the-crystal-skulls/145970
- Heritage Daily: The Truth Behind the Crystal Skulls: researchgate.net/publication/260591732_Legend_of_the_Crystal_Skulls
- Smithsonian: Mysterious Crystal Skull on Exhibit for the First Time at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History: si.edu/newsdesk/releases/mysterious-crystal-skull-exhibit-first-time-smithsonian-s-national-museum-natural-history

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Vocabulary and Sentence work

1. Students give the definition for the following words and then use them in a sentence of their own:
    a. misinformation
    b. bombarded
    c. fabrication
    d. deception
    e. immune
    f. controversy
    g. polarise
    h. authenticity
    i. artisans
    j. gruelling
    k. translucent
2. What does the author mean by the following phrases?
    a. 'Our lives have become a haven for hoaxes, schemes, scams and swindles' (p. 1).
    b. '… in the mists of antiquity …' (p. 8)
    c. '… a vibrant tapestry of life flourished in Central America' (p. 8).
    d. '… honoured the cyclical nature of time' (p. 9).
    e. '… fakes can skew conclusions and undermine historical accuracy' (p. 77).
    f. '… there is no denying the crystal skulls' enduring power to spark controversy' (p. 87).

Discussion Questions and Class Activities

1. How do we know what to believe when it seems there is **'evidence from credible sources to support opposing opinion'** (p. 2).
2. What are the mysteries to be answered in this book? How do they draw readers into the story?
3. The History Hunter states that experts couldn't agree on the origins or purpose of the skulls. What is the difference between an archaeologist, an anthropologist and a spiritualist, and why do you think they would have different views?
4. How can we be confident that any relic is ancient, modern or fake?
5. Research the Mayan civilisation. Consider the following questions:
    a. Where did the Maya live (which modern countries)? What was the environment like (rainforest, mountains, dry areas)?
    b. Where is Lubaantun, 'The City of Fallen Stones'?
    c. When did Maya civilisation begin, and when did many major cities decline?
    d. What is cacao and how did the Maya use it (food, drink, ceremony or trade)? Why do you think cacao became so valuable?
    e. What were Maya cities like (temples, plazas, ball courts, homes)? Which buildings were most important and why?
    f. What did the Maya believe about gods and the universe? How did beliefs influence buildings, ceremonies or calendars?
    g. What were the Maya famous for in science and maths (number system, calendar, astronomy)? Why were these achievements useful?
    h. What is Maya writing (glyphs) and what information do glyphs record? Where can you see examples of glyphs today?
    i. **'The ruins marked the site of a mighty citadel …'** (p. 8) What is a citadel? How would it differ from a city today?
6. On page 18, the History Hunter discusses the cosmic significance of the number 13. Discuss how this relates to the 13 skulls. Do you believe crystal skulls could have this kind of power?
7. Discuss why symbols can be interpreted in different ways depending on context. Think of the different associations the skulls have had in different cultures over the years:
    a. sacred significance in Tibet
    b. ancestor worship in China
    c. symbol of mortality and rebirth for Mayans and Aztecs
    d. pirate flags (Jolly Roger)
    e. indicating hazardous chemicals today (Acute Toxicity symbol)

   f. clothing brands
   g. Day of the Dead in Mexico
8. In pairs or small groups, research quartz crystal and make notes of where it can be found, its physical, chemical and electrical properties, and its uses, both in the past and in the world today. Compile all the information to make a class poster.
9. What do we know about Anna Mitchell-Hedges from the story? What type of person was she? Create a character profile showing all we know about her.

Creative Writing

1. 'Dig Site Diary': Write a first-person diary entry from the point of view of a young archaeologist on the day a crystal skull is uncovered. Include the following:
   a. what you observe using the five senses
   b. how finding the crystal skull made you feel
   c. one clue that makes you wonder if the skull is ancient or a modern hoax
   d. Extension for Y6–7: Add a final paragraph written later that night where you evaluate your evidence and decide what to do next (test it, tell a museum, keep investigating). Explain your reasoning.
2. Skull imagery has been a **'source of fascination'** (p. 25) throughout history. Write a short narrative story with the title 'The Skull That Changed Its Meaning' where the same skull symbol appears at three different times or places and means something different each time (choose from the list in discussion point 5). The skull could be found, traded, stolen or displayed. Include:
   a. a different narrator in each scene
   b. one sensory detail per scene
   c. a final linking sentence in each paragraph that connects the three scenes

   Use this activity to highlight to the students the purpose and importance of the linking sentence when using the TEEL structure to write a paragraph.
3. Students write a narrative titled 'Midnight at the Museum'. A display case holds eight skull symbols from different places and times (choose any three from those mentioned in the book: Tibet, China, Maya/Aztec cultures, pirate flag, poison warning, clothing brand logo, Day of the Dead). At midnight, the symbols come to life and argue over what the skull should mean. Write a scene that includes the following:
   a. dialogue between the three symbols you chose
   b. one misunderstanding caused by different cultural meanings
   c. a resolution where they agree on a shared message for visitors today

   What is the shared message, and how does each symbol contribute to it?
4. What is the writing style the author has used? Consider how and when information is revealed. What other way could this story be told?
5. Read the chapter The Story of History. What are the main types of evidence that a history hunter might use? Where in the story can you find evidence of the author's research?

The Arts

1. Visual Arts: Crystal Skull Study – Line, Tone & Pattern work:
   a. Students create a 2D crystal skull artwork by developing 3 thumbnail sketches, choosing one, then using line and tonal shading to show faceted 'crystal' form. Add patterned motifs around or within the skull (e.g. symmetry, repeated shapes inspired by Mesoamerican design) and a limited colour palette of cool tones or greys.
2. Visual Arts Y6–7 activity: Create an exhibit label and explanation of their crystal skull artwork:
   a. Students write a brief artist statement of 60–80 words explaining the following:
      i. their material choices (pencil/charcoal/coloured pencil)
      ii. the visual conventions they used to suggest 'authentic' versus 'forged' (colour, texture, pattern, wear)
      iii. the story they want the viewer to believe. They should include a justification for which visual choice they believe is most effective at convincing the viewer.

Health and Physical Education

1. The book explores misinformation and hoaxes. What strategies can you use to check whether a health claim you see online (for example, about food, supplements or fitness) is trustworthy?
2. List two green flags and two red flags.
3. Archaeological Dig Relay:
    a. Y4–5: Teams move like archaeologists – careful steps, low stance, no running – to collect 'artefacts' (beanbags/cards) one at a time from a 'dig site' and carry them to the 'lab'.
        i. You can add 1 movement skill on the way, such as balance for 5 seconds or step over 'rocks' to make it more challenging.
        ii. Which safety rule mattered most (space, scanning, gentle handling) and why?
    b. Y6–7: Add complexity and decision-making:
        i. Include 2–3 movement challenges (e.g. bear crawl 3 m, shuttle run at controlled pace between markers, lateral steps through a 'trench').
        ii. Also include a 'fragile artefact' rule (carry on a flat hand or between forearms).
        iii. What strategy improved speed while keeping control and technique?

Science

1. 'Build-a-Skeleton Investigation' Working in small groups, students assemble a paper or card human skeleton puzzle including skull, spine, ribs, pelvis and upper and lower limbs.
    a. Label each major bone group.
    b. Using their own body, do simple movement tests (bend, twist, reach, squat) to be able to annotate their skeleton creation, stating what each part helps the body do.
    c. Which bones or joints are most important for protecting vital organs, and what evidence from the model supports your answer?
    d. Year 6–7 extension: Identify two bones that form a major joint (e.g. elbow/knee/hip) and explain how the joint's structure supports movement and stability.
2. Energy, Matter and Evidence activity: Do crystals 'hold energy'? Use the mystery of the crystal skulls to explore Einstein's idea that matter and energy are connected (often summarised as $E = mc^2$), and to practise separating scientific evidence from beliefs or claims.
    a. Set up 'Energy is Everywhere' stations with small objects made from different materials, such as:
        i. a quartz/crystal
        ii. a plastic brick
        iii. a wooden block
        iv. a torch
        v. simple thermometers
        vi. a metal spoon
        vii. paper clips
        viii. balloons
        ix. a piece of fabric (for static)
        x. butcher's paper for a class chart
        xi. student notebooks
    b. Have students go to each station and record observations in a 2-column table: What we observed / What energy might be involved? See station suggestions below.
    c. After the activity, have students answer these questions:
        i. Which observations in today's lesson are measurable, and which are personal opinions? Why does that matter when investigating the crystal skulls?
        ii. What kinds of experts (scientists, historians, museum curators) might test a skull's authenticity, and what evidence would each one look for?

<u>Station 1 (Light): Shine a torch through/onto each object.</u>

a. What happens to the light: does it go through, partly through or not at all (transparent/translucent/opaque)?
b. Do you see a bright spot, a shadow or a reflection? Where is it strongest?
c. If this object were a crystal skull, how might light make it look 'mysterious'? What would you call that effect?

Station 2 (Heat): Hold each object for 30 seconds (teacher checks safety – no very hot/cold items).

a. Which object feels coldest first? Does it change after 30 seconds?
b. Is the temperature changing in your hand or in the object (or both)? What makes you think that?
c. Which material seems to move heat fastest (good conductor)? Which seems to move it slowest (insulator)?

Station 3 (Sound): Tap each object gently with a spoon and listen.

a. Is the sound high or low? Is it loud or quiet?
b. Does the sound stop quickly or keep ringing? Which object 'rings' the longest?
c. What might the sound tell you about the material (hard, soft, solid, hollow)?

Station 4 (Static electricity): Rub a balloon on fabric, then bring it near paper clips (don't touch at first).

a. How close does the balloon need to be before the paper clips move?
b. What changes if you rub the balloon longer (more/less movement)? Why might that happen?
c. Is this 'energy' something you can see directly or only through its effects? What is the effect?