The Mayan writing system is between 3,000 and 2,300 years old. The Mayans used both a complicated system of letters as well as hundreds of hieroglyphs (pictures that represented words.) The Mayan empire was actually made up of many groups of people with many different languages. Hundreds of Mayan symbols have been found from ancient times, but translating them has been difficult for archeologists because the symbols often come from many of these different languages. Listed below are some hieroglyphs that have been successfully translated.
The Maya also used two calendars. The first was called the **jaab** and it was a regular 365 day calendar that followed the movements of the sun. It had 18 months and each month had 20 days. There were also 5 unlucky days added to the end of the calendar. Look to the right to see the hieroglyphs that represent the months of the jaab.

The other calendar was a 260 days long and was called the **tzolk’in**. It was made of an inner circle of 13 days and an outer circle of 20 days. The inner circle was made up of numbers but the outer circle had its own symbols (see below.)

The jaab and the tzolk’in would line up every 52 years. This 52 year period is called a **calendar round**. The Mayans also counted time in a longer unit that lasted 5,000 called the **long count**. The long count is believed to end in 2012, leading some to believe that the world will end that year.
By the 1500’s, the Spanish ruled over the lands that were once part of the Mayan Empire. Though the empire had disappeared before the Spanish arrived, Mayan Indians still lived throughout the region (and still do today.) A Spanish Bishop named Diego de Landa set out to destroy all evidence of Mayan culture at the time, but recorded what he believed was the Mayan alphabet in his journals. The letters he wrote in his journal were Mayan symbols and parts of Mayan letters but the Mayans did not actually have a simple alphabet like Europeans. While scholars are still discovering how the Mayan language works, de Landa’s Mayan letters are often used in the region today. They are shown below.

Your assignment is to write a sentence or phrase using Mayan symbols.
- You may use hieroglyphs, letters or months from the Mayan calendars. You could also mix them together.
- Write a translation of your symbols as you draw them.
- Color the symbols when you have finished drawing them.

Projects will be graded on effort, coloring and your translation. Try to make a phrase that makes sense and relates to the Mayans.