



# Tabai and the Food of the Gods

Tabai kept close to his father as they raced between the trees and hanging vines. They had been tracking the deer since the sun was at its highest point. Now, it had sunk low in the sky; transforming the forest into a mixture of long shadows and deep green-golds.

His father raised his hand and Tabai froze. He tried his best to breathe quietly but his heart was racing.

The sound of flapping wings filled the air and bushes shook with scurrying animals.

“What is it?” Tabai hissed.

His father kept his hand raised and said nothing.

Tabai peered around. The scent had disappeared and he could no longer see the deer’s prints in the ground. The grunts and squawks of the forest animals dimmed and soon all that was left was the gentle rustle of leaves.

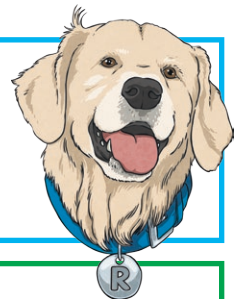
A strange feeling churned inside his belly. “What’s happening?” Tabai whispered.

His father took one step backwards and slowly tilted his head. “Tabai,” he said, quietly, “look to your left.”



**Q1:** Which animal had Tabai and his father been tracking?

---



**Q2:** *The sound of flapping wings filled the air and bushes shook with scurrying animals*

Why do you think that this was the case?

---



---



---



**Q3:** Give two words that the author uses to convey the noises made by the forest animals.

\_\_\_\_\_

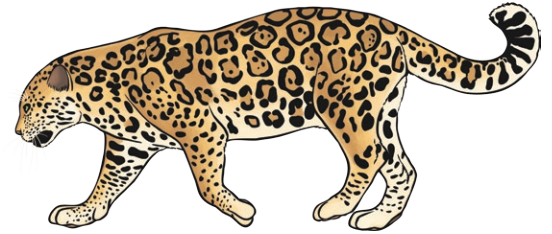


Tabai glanced over. He could sense the fear in his father's voice.

"Can you see the river?" his dad asked.

"Yes."

"Listen to me, Tabai," his father continued calmly. "When I say, I need you to run to the river. Run as fast as you can, Tabai, and don't look back. There is an island. You must swim to it. You are a Mayan, Tabai. You must prepare to defend yourself as one."



Tabai gripped the spear in his hand. He could feel his blood rising, his breathing quickening. "But—"

"Now!"

As soon as his father had shouted, a huge jaguar leapt from the forest darkness in a growling blur of yellow and black.

Tabai ran for his life. He bounded past fallen trees and thorny bushes; brushing aside branches, stumps and vines until he came to the water's edge. In one motion, Tabai launched himself into the river; his spear instantly being swept away in the water's current. He was a strong swimmer – he had been swimming in the forest's rivers and lakes since he was small – but jaguars were stronger. They were gods after all.

Tabai thrashed his arms and legs until they burnt. As soon as he reached the island, he scrambled to his feet and turned around. His father was in the middle of the river with the jaguar close behind. Tabai spun around and grabbed what looked like a large stone.

**Q4:** List two types of plant that Tabai passed as he ran for his life.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



**Q5:** *Tabai gripped the spear in his hand.*

Why do you think the author chose to use the word 'gripped' in this sentence?

---



---



**Q6:** *"Listen to me, Tabai," his father continued calmly.*

Why do you think Tabai's father continued to speak calmly?

---



---



---

**Q7:** *He could feel his blood rising, his breathing quickening.*

How was Tabai feeling after his father's instruction? Explain why he was feeling this way.

---



---



---



**Q8:** What do you think Tabai intended to do with the large stone?

---



---



The jaguar was closing in as the young Mayan aimed. He threw the stone and it landed to the side of the great cat with a splash. Not much time; the jaguar was even closer.

Tabai hurled another stone and this time it hit the predator right on its head! The stone instantly split in half and the jaguar roared in fury, lashing out in a frenzy of white, frothing water. His father scrambled onto the bank of the island as Tabai threw another stone. Again, it crashed against the jaguars' head. With a grumbly snarl, the cat turned and slunk to the shore.

Within seconds the jaguar had disappeared into the darkness of the forest.

Tabai fell to the floor. He was exhausted.

“You have proved yourself a true Mayan...” his father said, panting wildly at his side. “Beating a god with the food of the gods!”

“What do you mean?” Tabai said. He looked up. He was lying beneath a huge cacao tree. He sat up and peered around. The island was littered with cacao fruit. That must have been what he threw at the jaguar!

Before the long trek home, Tabai and his father spent some time cracking open the fallen cacao pods and drinking their bitter, chocolaty juice.

“Food of the gods!” Tabai’s father repeated, with a huge smile. “Come on,” he added, patting his son on the shoulder. “Wait until I tell the others!”



**Q9:** *The stone instantly split in half.*

What does this phrase imply about the jaguar?

---

---

---



**Q10:** Find and copy a phrase from the text which implies that the jaguar moves quickly.

---

**Q11:** Based on this text, comment on two things that Mayans valued.

---

---

---



**Q12:** Number the following events 1-5 to show the order in which they happened.  
The first one has been done for you.

Tabai's father ordered him to run to the island.

His father raised his hand and Tabai froze.

Tabai fell to the floor, exhausted.

A strange feeling churned inside Tabai's belly.

Tabai thrashed his arms and legs until they burnt.



# Tabai and the Food of the Gods **Answers**

**Q1:** Which animal had Tabai and his father been tracking?

**Accept the answer 'a deer' only.**

**Q2:** *The sound of flapping wings filled the air and bushes shook with scurrying animals*  
Why do you think that this was the case?

**Accept answers which discuss the fact that the animals were all moving out of the way of the predator they could see in the bush, such as:**

- **This was the case because all the other animals were running away from the predator that was coming.**

**Q3:** Give two words that the author uses to convey the noises made by the forest animals.

**Accept 'grunts' and 'squawks' only.**

**Q4:** List two types of plant that Tabai passed as he ran for his life.

**Accept any two of the following only: trees; (thorny) bushes; vines.**

**Q5:** *Tabai gripped the spear in his hand.*

Why do you think the author chose to use the word 'gripped' in this sentence?

**Accept answers which discuss that the author's choice was to emphasise how firmly Tabai was holding the spear, such as:**

- **The author chose to use the word 'gripped' to show that Tabai was holding the spear firmly and tightly.**

**Q6:** *"Listen to me, Tabai," his father continued calmly.*

Why do you think Tabai's father continued to speak calmly?

**Accept any answer which infers that Tabai's father kept calm so that he did not attract any attention to themselves from the predator. Alternatively, accept answers which state that Tabai's father kept calm so that he did not worry Tabai more than he needed to be, e.g.**

- **Tabai's father kept calm so that the predator would have less chance of seeing or sensing them.**
- **Tabai's father did not want to worry Tabai so he put on a brave face.**

**Q7:** *He could feel his blood rising, his breathing quickening.*

How was Tabai feeling after his father's instruction? Explain why he was feeling this way.

**Accept answers which infer that Tabai was feeling panicked, worried, anxious or scared provided that a reasonable explanation of the choice is also given, such as:**

- **Tabai was feeling panicked. I know this because his breath got quicker. He felt panicked because he knew that he and his father were in danger.**

**Q8:** What do you think Tabai intended to do with the large stone?

**Accept any reasonable prediction about what Tabai was intended to do with the stone, such as:**

- **I think that Tabai was going to use the stone to defend himself.**
- **I think Tabai wanted to throw the stone to scare the jaguar.**

**Q9:** *The stone instantly split in half.*

What does this phrase imply about the jaguar?

**Accept answers which infer that the jaguar must have been strong, well-built or powerful if a stone was split by hitting him, such as:**

- **This sentence implies that the jaguar must be really strong and muscular.**

**Q10:** Find and copy a phrase from the text which implies that the jaguar moves quickly.

**Accept one of the following phrases only: the jaguar was closing in; not much time; the jaguar was even closer; within seconds the jaguar had disappeared.**

**Q11:** Based on this text, comment on two things that Mayans valued.

**Accept answers which discuss any two of the following themes: they valued jaguars as they viewed them as gods; they valued the gods of their culture; they valued the cacao plant as they viewed it as food of the gods; they valued a Mayan's ability to defend themselves, e.g.**

- **From this text, I can tell that Mayans valued the gods of their culture and they valued the cacao plant as a special food.**

**Q12:** Number the following events 1-5 to show the order in which they happened.

The first one has been done for you.

Tabai's father ordered him to run to the island.

3

His father raised his hand and Tabai froze.

1

Tabai fell to the floor, exhausted.

5

A strange feeling churned inside Tabai's belly.

2

Tabai thrashed his arms and legs until they burnt.

4