

Mayans Knowledge Organiser

The Mayan Civilization







An in-depth study into where the Maya lived, what their lives were like and how their society was organised.

Key Questions

- What do Mayan ruins and artefacts teach us about the Mayan way of life?
- Which gods did the Maya believe in and how did this affect their daily life?
- What do the Mayan number system, writing system and calendar teach us about the Mayan Civilization?
- Why did Ancient Mayan cities (which had been deserted) stay hidden so long?
- What brought about the end of the Mayan Civilization?



Timeline

<p>1,100 BC The first 'Mayan' settlements begin to appear in Mesoamerica along the Pacific coast.</p> 	<p>800BC Instead of foraging, maize farming begins and trade between villages begins.</p> 	<p>700BC Mayan writing begins to develop through the form of hieroglyphs.</p> 	<p>100BC – 450AD Maya constructs its first pyramids and developing cities, prompting the rapid rise of Tikal in the tropical lowlands.</p> 	<p>638AD Pakal the Great (King of Palenque) dies. His death mask made of jade is created.</p> 	<p>800AD – 1,502AD Mayan civilization begins to decline and vanish.</p> 
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Key Vocabulary

Chichen Itza	One of the best-preserved examples of a Mayan city.
Conquistador	A conqueror, especially one of the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru in the 16th century.
Deity	A synonym for god.
Hieroglyph	A picture of an object representing a word, syllable, or sound, as found in ancient Mayan and certain other writing systems.
Maize	Corn – a major resource of food for Mayan people. Part of their religious culture too.
Maya	The collective noun for the Mayan people.
Mesoamerica	The region in which the Maya lived, spanning over Mexico and parts of Southern America.
Pyramid	A 3D man-made structure that is built through large cuboids of rock piled upon one another to form a triangular shape.
Sacrifice	A slaughtering of an animal or human as an offering to please the gods.

Who?

The ancient Maya were a civilisation that lived between 2000BC to around 1500AD. They lived in Mesoamerica, which is now known as Southern Mexico and Central America. They were an extremely successful civilisation and were highly advanced in writing, art and science for a people living at that time. Temples and pyramids can still be seen today in the jungles of Central America.



Modern Mayans

Today, there are millions of people who are descendants of the ancient Maya living in Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. Their ancient Mayan heritage is still present in the languages that they speak and they are not completely westernised, despite the Spanish conquest of the Yucatan in the late 1600s.

Hieroglyphs

The Mayan writing system is made up of logograms and phonetic symbols that represent a sound made in the language. It is believed that there are over 1000 Mayan hieroglyphs, though no more than 500 were ever used together in one single Mayan language, as there were many.



Calendar

The Maya had managed to measure their years pretty accurately, as their calendars show. They used two different calendars: one for religion, which has 260 days a year, and one for farming, which had 365 days a year.

Farming

The great monuments and cities of the ancient Maya were created over thousands of years. Farming was the first step towards this. The Maya learned how to clear forests in order to turn it into farmland. The forests were burned and the nutrients created from the ash turned the soil into highly fertile land. This farming method is called 'slash and burn' and is still used in agriculture today. Because of this, the Maya became very successful farmers.

Though the Maya grew numerous crops, such as squash, avocados and beans, their staple crop and a huge part of their diet consisted of maize or corn. Corn was very important to the Maya and their creation story even goes to say that the first successful humans were made of corn! Corn was consumed in different ways. It was ground and made into flat breads, which have become today's tortillas, and it was also made into porridge and fermented into a type of beer.

Gods and Religion

Mayan gods were gods of nature. One of the most respected was the maize god, Hun Ixim. The maize god would decide whether a crop would fail or succeed that year. After a year, the Maya would capture the enemy survivors and bring them home as prisoners or even sacrifices to the gods to please them.

The *Popol Vuh* was almost like a bible of the ancient Maya. Stories of creation and life are written in this book.



Home Learning Suggestions



1. **Art** – Make some stamps of Mayan hieroglyphs, using cardboard and string. Use them to create some of your very own Mayan artwork.
2. **DT** – Research Mayan pyramids and construct your own using your choice of construction materials.
3. **Cookery** – Research what the Maya ate and write an ancient Mayan menu. You could even try cooking some of the dishes!

