

Who were the Mayas and what can we learn from them?

Year 5 & 6 History – Ancient Maya Civilisation Knowledge Organiser

Key Vocabulary

Agriculture: farming; growing crops or rearing animals.

Astronomy: the study of space, planets and stars.

City state: a city and its surrounding area which has its own ruler.

Code: a book written by the Maya using one long sheet of paper.

Glyph: a symbol used in writing.

Hierarchy: a system that ranks things, often in order of power or importance.

Maize: a crop, known as corn.

Sacrifice: giving up something as an act of worship.

Settlement: a place where people live and build homes.

Temple: a building devoted to the worship of a god or gods.

The Maya were an ancient civilisation in Mesoamerica (Central America) that existed from 2000BC to approximately 1697AD. They were considered an advanced civilisation due to their many achievements.



What did the Ancient Maya believe?

Religion was very important to the Ancient Maya, evidenced by their impressive temples. The Ancient Maya worshipped their kings like they were gods but they also worshipped their ancestors and a range of different gods and goddesses.



How was the Ancient Maya society structured?

Like many ancient civilisations, a clear social hierarchy formed. The Maya lived in many city states and each city state had its own ruler.

What was daily life like?

Ordinary Maya citizens lived in one room houses built from mud and timber. Men were responsible for providing for their families, women would prepare food and clothes and the children would learn these skills from their parents. Maya people would eat meat as well as their own grown crops, but maize was their staple food. The cacao bean was used to make a drink for the ruling classes.



This map shows the modern countries that the Maya once occupied, as well as the locations of the key Maya cities.

What were their achievements?

The Maya were an advanced civilisation who communicated using their own language (Mayan), had a written form of communication (glyphs), developed one of the most advanced complex numerical systems of their time and invented their own calendar, among many other things.



2000BC Civilisations first begin to emerge.	1100BC The hunter-gatherers begin to settle on the Pacific Coast.	800BC Farming begins and a basic trade system develops.	700BC Maya writing begins developing.	100BC The first pyramids/temples are built and cities begin forming around them.	250AD The Classic Era begins. Astronomy, mathematics and architecture are all developing.	800-925AD Chichen Itza becomes the most powerful city.	1000AD The Maya civilisation begins to decline and leave the cities. In the 1500s, the Spanish begin to colonise here.
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