



# MAYA



## Maya

The Maya civilisation is one of the longest ancient civilisations in history, lasting from around 2600BC up until as recently as AD1500. Whilst the Maya originated in the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, the civilisation spread to cover southern Mexico, Guatemala, northern Belize and western Honduras.

Today, many ancient relics and historical landmarks act as evidence of this interesting culture, such as Chichen Itza and its iconic El Castillo pyramid.

## Key vocabulary

**Ahau** – the main king or lord of a Maya city.

**Archaeologist** – a person who studies human history through the discovery and analysis of sites and artefacts.

**Cacao** – an non-roasted cocoa bean— the Maya often used this for trading/currency.

**Cenote** – a sinkhole filled with water. These were both sources of water and a place for sacrifice.

**Civilisation** – a society of people with its own culture and way of life

**Codex** – a book written by the Maya that was created on one long sheet of paper and folded.

**Hieroglyphs** – a symbol used in writing; Maya letters.

**Pok a Tok** – a popular Maya sport; this was a ritual game played with a hard rubber ball that was to be passed through a stone hoop using only padded elbows, hips and knees.

**Pyramid** – a large pyramid shaped monument but with steps and a flat top built to worship the gods.

**Sacrifice** – the act of slaughtering a person or animal as an offering to a god.

**Stela** – a tall monumental sculpture made from stone and covered in carvings.

Dear Year 6 parents/guardians,

This half term in Year 6, our history topic will be the Maya civilisation. Your child will learn about many aspects of Mayan life including architecture, sport, religion and sacrifice as well as creating their own Mayan god collage in art.

Please help your child with their learning by going through this fact sheet with them.

Many thanks, Year 6 teachers.

## Top 10 facts

1. Did you know that the civilisation is actually referred to as Maya—not Mayan! The language they spoke was Mayan but everything else was Maya!
2. There were around 40 Maya cities built across Meso-America and each had its own ruler (ahau). These cities were mainly built in the rainforests and are still being discovered to this day!
3. The Maya invented their own writing system (hieroglyphs) and number system including the number 0, which civilisations like the Romans never even thought of!
4. The Maya were great astronomers and used this to invent their own calendars.
5. In Maya religion, they believed in many gods and built different temples to honour and worship the different gods. Sacrifice was also part of this worship!
6. Speaking of sacrifice, the Maya very much believed in human sacrifice to please the gods. Often, enemy warriors were sacrificed by being thrown in a cenote to drown or having their hearts cut out at the top of a temple!
7. The Maya also had interesting ideas when it came to beauty. They would bind their heads to flatten them, hang cotton in front of babies' eyes to make them go cross-eyed and would drill holes in their teeth and fill them with jade (a semi-precious green stone).
8. The history of chocolate can actually be traced back to the Maya! They would mix cacao with water, honey and chilli to make a spicy drink.
9. No one is 100% sure why the civilisation came to an end! Common theories include drought and too much warfare between cities wiping each other out.
10. Finally, did you know that descendants of the Maya are still around today? You can find Maya people in Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador.