

# The Maya

YEAR 5 | Spring 1



## OVERVIEW

The Maya were an ancient civilisation who lived in **Mesoamerica** (now Central America). They are known as one of only five civilisations to create their own writing system. They also had a sophisticated culture in which they lived in **city states**.

They built spectacular monuments and stepped pyramids, like those at Chichen Itza (pictured, left).

They were also well-known for their advanced maths and calendars. Around 900 BC, Maya cities began to be abandoned. No one knows for sure why the civilisation declined. Despite popular belief, modern Mayans continue to exist today and remain an important part of the human geography of the Yucatan.

## MAYAN NUMBERS

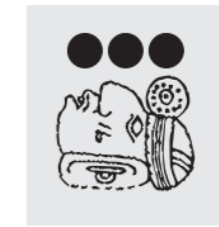
1 – “Jun”



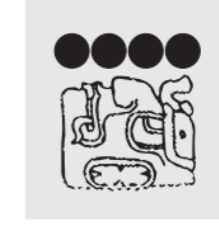
2 – “Cha”



3 – “Ush”



4 – “Chan”



5 – “Jo”



XIBALBA

“Place of fright” -the Maya underworld



CODICES

Folded Maya books made from the inner bark of fig trees



SACRIFICE

Ritual sacrifices played a significant role in Maya culture. They sacrificed both animals and humans.



## TIMELINE

2000BC First Central American civilisations begin to emerge

2000 BC

1100BC The hunter gatherers begin to settle on the Pacific Coast.

1000 BC

800BC Farming begins and a basic trade system develops.

700BC Evidence of Mayan writing developing

100BC First pyramids/ temples are built and cities begin forming around them

1 AD

250 AD The Classic Era begins: Astronomy, mathematics and architecture are all developing

800 – 925 AD Chichen Itza becomes the most powerful city

1000 AD

900 AD Cities in the rainforest begin to be abandoned due to drought

1000 AD Mayan civilization begins to decline and leave the cities

1502 AD The Spanish arrive in South America and set out to destroy the remaining elements of Maya civilisation

2000 AD

2014 AD The cities of Lagunita and Tamchen are rediscovered

Over 6 million people still speak a Mayan language today

## MAYAN BELIEF

- The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods – another example of polytheism, like the Anglo-Saxons
- They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and the gods could help them or hurt them.
- The Maya would sing, dance and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods.
- Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed they could communicate directly with the gods. They would perform different rituals during festivals or special ceremonies in order to appeal to the gods.



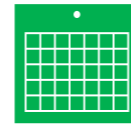
## SOCIAL HIERARCHY



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

## INVENTIONS

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 and complex numerical systems of their time (their symbol for 0 is below) and invented their own calendar.



*was born*



Maya's most famous game is 'Pok-a-Tok'. The game was sometimes used to settle disputes instead of going to war. This exciting ball game ends with a human sacrifice...

- There are two teams –with two to five players on each team.
- The players must keep the ball in the air without using their hands or their feet. This meant using your hips, knees, thighs, upper arms and elbows to keep the ball in the air.
- The ball must not touch the ground.

## DECLINE OF THE MAYA

Between 800 and 900 A.D., the major cities in the southern Maya region all fell into decline and were mostly or completely abandoned. There are several theories as to why this occurred: historians tend to believe that it was excessive warfare, overpopulation, an ecological disaster or a combination of these factors that brought down the Maya civilization.



Lost Secrets of the Maya

A tour around the remains of a Mayan city



Mayan Maths

Maths problems involving the Mayan number system



National Geographic:

Facts

Extra information about the Maya



UNIVERSITY OF  
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PRIMARY SCHOOL