



History Knowledge Organiser

Year 4: Spring Term

Maya Civilisation



Key Knowledge

Learn this information

Who were the Mayans?

The Mayan people still exist today and have survived numerous attempts to wipe them out over the course of their history.

When did Maya civilisation exist?

The ancient Maya 'Classic' period stretched from approximately 250-950AD, which is what we will study. There were also pre-classic and post-classic periods. During this time, society became more organised around urban areas and society became more organised. Advances were made in astronomy, maths and language, as well as architecture and agriculture.

During the Maya civilisation, Britain went through the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, including Stonehenge, to Roman Britain, Anglo-Saxon, Medieval and Tudor England.

Where did the Maya live?

The Maya civilisation began long ago in a place called *Mesoamerica*. This huge area is made up of Mexico and part of Central America.



What have the Mayans done for us?

- **Astronomy** - Very accurate charts of the moon.
- **Sculpture** - Mainly of the human form, highly advanced when compared to similar empires.
- **Architecture** - Amazing buildings such as stepped temples, helping us to understand their religion.
- **Medicine** - many natural cures used by the Mayans are still in use today.
- **Number system** - developed the idea of 'zero' as a placeholder.
- **Calendars** - Maya calendars were more accurate than the European calendars at that time.

The Ancient Maya Number System 0-19



Key Vocabulary

Understand these key words

Vocabulary	Definition
Maya society	Society was organised by local rulers with each city having important people - priests, farmers- rather than one main ruler.
Urbanisation	More and more people moving to live together in towns and cities rather than rural, country areas.
Priest	A person who held regular rituals around the temple, including sacrifices.
Ritual	A ceremony, often religious, with set actions performed in a set order.
Scribes	People paid to write things down, either as an official record or for someone else unable to write.
Codices	Ancient handwritten texts. Maya codices could be unfolded like a concertina. One text is called a codex.
Cacao beans	When pods from cacao trees were ripe, they would be broken open to reveal the beans, which were then dried, roasted and ground. The beans were used for medicine and as money.

Key Knowledge

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2000BC	The Maya civilisation comes into being in Central America.
250AD	The 'classical' period begins, urbanisation begins and continues.
300AD	Maya settlements become centres for trade across the region. Goods such as stone and chocolate are traded with neighbouring city states.
600AD	Maya settlements support an increasing population, growing at a fast rate due to plentiful food supply.
900AD	Cities in the rainforest are abandoned, possibly due to an extensive drought. People move north to the highlands of Guatemala and Yucatán.
1000AD	Cities like Chichén Itzá (which has two temple pyramids) are still thriving.
1500AD	The Spanish arrive in South America and set out to destroy the remaining elements of Maya civilisation as part of their conquest.

Why was farming important to the Mayans?

Farming was really important to the Maya. Most people grew their own crops in small fields. Farmers grew many kinds of crops at the same time, such as maize, beans and squash. If farmers grew more than they could eat, they traded the leftovers in markets.

The Maya made a lot of cotton, which was spun, dyed and woven into textiles. Cotton seeds were ground to make cooking oil.



Cocoa and vanilla were also produced. Cocoa was made into chocolate drinks for the royal family.

The Maya were so successful at farming because they studied the stars and the weather. This meant they were able to create very detailed calendars which told them what time of year to plant crops and when they should harvest them.

Key Concepts

Vocabulary	Definition
Nation	A large body of people united by history, culture, or language, all living in a particular country.
Civilisation	A group of people with their own languages and way of life.
Settlement	A place, usually one where nobody has lived before, where people create a community.
Culture	The ideas or behaviours of a particular group of people/society.
Religion	A particular system of faith and worship.
Trade	The actions of swapping, buying and selling goods.
Farming	The activity of growing crops or raising livestock.
Colonisation	The process of settling among and establishing control over the people of an area.
Migration	The movement of people to a new area or country in order to find work or better living conditions.

Chronology

