

The Maya

Civilisation

- Mayan society was based in what is known as Mesoamerica.
- The Mayan empire was organised into city states; each city state was ruled by a different noble family.
- Mayan people lived in settlements with a central temple/pyramid as a focal point.
- Mayan city states traded with each other - sometimes using cacao beans as money.
- Chichen Itza (what remains of it) is a popular tourist attraction.
- There are lots of different theories about what happened to the Maya...

Worship

- Mayan temples were stepped to create a route to the heavens.
- The Mayan religion was polytheistic (they believed in more than one god). Each god was associated with different areas of life.
- The Maya practised human sacrifice as well as animal sacrifice.



El Castillo, at Chichen Itza

Important dates

2500 BC– 910 AD	Start and end of the Ancient Mayan civilisation
250 AD	Start of classical period of Mayan civilisation
1605AD	Spanish invaders (conquistadors) arrive in Mesoamerica
21st December 2012	The Mayans predicted the end of the world would happen on this date - fortunately, they were wrong!

Food

- The Maya produced maize as their main crop.
- We need to thank the Mayan people for the discovery of the cacao plant. Hot chocolate was a sacred drink for the Mayans.
- The Maya ate pozole – a type of stew.

Culture

- Music and art were important to the Maya.
- Each settlement had a wide open plaza area used as a central meeting point to play games such as pok-a-tok.
- The Maya used hieroglyphs to inscribe in stone slabs (called stelae) and in books (called codices).
- The Maya observed the movement of the sun, moon and stars to create calendars.
- The Maya created a logical and advanced number system.
- Masks were used for many purposes, but mainly funerals to protect important people in the afterlife.

Maya Numerals

0	1	2	3	4
	•	••	•••	••••
5	6	7	8	9
	•	••	•••	••••
10	11	12	13	14
	•	••	•••	••••
15	16	17	18	19
	•	••	•••	••••

Vocabulary Dozen

civilisation	The society, culture, and way of life of a particular area
settlement	A place where people establish a community
temple	A building devoted to the worship of a god or gods
empire	A group of states or countries ruled over by a single leader
sacrifice	An act of slaughtering an animal or person as an offering to a god or gods
worship	To show love and devotion – usually to a god or group of gods
calendar	A system used to divide up and organise events in time
architecture	The design and construction of buildings
crops	A plant that is grown on a large scale - usually a cereal, fruit, or vegetable
agriculture	Farming – growing crops and rearing animals
astronomy	The study of space, planets, stars and the universe
hieroglyphics	Writing which is made up of pictorial symbols

