

# The Maya Civilisation

## History

### Pine

#### Previous Knowledge

What should I already know or be able to do?

##### KS1

- Food eaten throughout time covered in the periods studied in KS1.-
- Comparison of the lives of the rich and poor throughout periods studied.
- Know that we know about this period in history because of writers and artists.

##### LKS2 – Stone Age to Iron Age

- Know that most people believed that their lives and health were controlled by Gods/spirits.

##### LKS2 – Roman Britain

- Know that people would visit a healing shrine and pray to Gods if they were unwell.

##### UKS2—Ancient Egyptians

- A study of an ancient civilisation and the impact of their contributions.

#### Historical skills and knowledge

What will I know or be able to do by the end of this unit?

- Be able to explain how the Maya empire expanded (matured).
- Understand possible reasons why and how it ended.
- Describe the ideas, beliefs and attitudes of all groups of people in the Mayan civilisation.
- Describe how the Mayan civilisation has had an impact on modern society.
- Describe a range of Mayan achievements.
- Compare the Maya civilisation to England in the 8th—10th Century

#### Text Link

*The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry

#### Overview

##### Subject - History

As historians, the children will learn about a non-European society which contrasts with British history- the Maya. Continuing their learning from Year 5 (Ancient Egyptians) the children will consider when and where the Ancient Maya lived and the significance of the achievements of the earliest civilisations. Building on their learning from Year 3 (Stone Age to Iron Age) and Year 4 (Anglo Saxons) the children will deepen their chronological knowledge and understanding by making connections and considering similarities and differences between the culture and beliefs of the Ancient Maya and those prevalent within Britain at the time. They will understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources and will draw on this understanding to thoughtfully respond to our enquiry question.

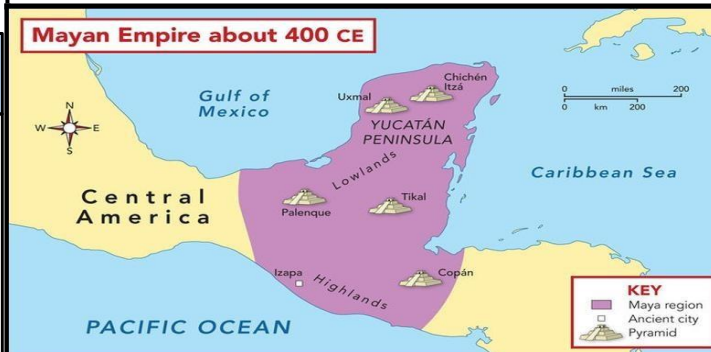
#### Enquiry question

What similarities and differences are there between the Maya Civilisation and England from the 8th to the 10th Century?

#### The Maya

- The Maya are native Americans of Central America.
- They built a great civilisation in the tropical rainforest that lasted over 2000 years.
- The golden age of the Maya was between 250 and 900 CE.
- The Maya people became expert mathematicians and were skilful astronomers and architects.
- Many Maya artefacts and clues have been lost because of the regrowth

#### Mayan Empire about 400 CE



There were around 40 Maya cities built across Mesoamerica. Famous Mayan cities include Palenque and Chichen Itza, which are found in Mexico.

#### Beliefs

The Maya were deeply religious and worshipped different gods related to nature. At the top of Maya society were the kings, or “kuhul ajaw” (holy lords), who claimed to be related to gods and followed a hereditary succession. They were thought to serve as mediators between the gods and people on earth and performed many rituals, including human sacrifice, to pay respect to their gods.



#### Settlements

The Maya lived in independent city-states. They were excellent architects and inventors and their magnificent cities, built in the rainforest, were important centres of trade, religious worship and entertainment. While the average Maya lived in small stone or thatched homes, the palaces and temples in the cities were decorated with beautiful murals and sculptures. The Maya people built sewer systems and there was even running water in the wealthiest people's homes.

### Significant person

#### John Lloyd Stephens (1805-1852)

John Lloyd Stephens was an American explorer, writer, and diplomat. Stephens was a pivotal figure in the rediscovery of Maya civilization throughout Middle America and in the planning of the Panama railroad.



### Cultures and Past Times

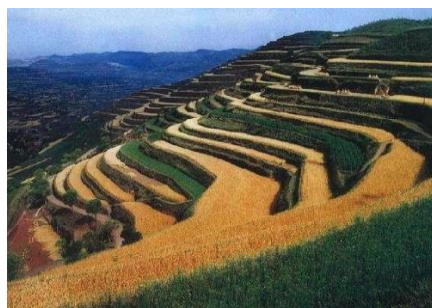
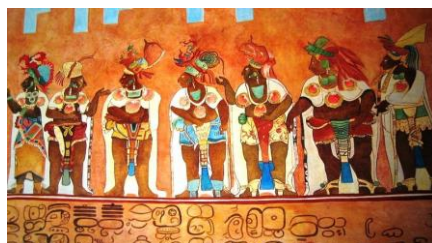
The Maya were skilful mathematicians and astronomers and used their knowledge to build an accurate calendar system. This was significant because it told the Maya when to plant crops, when to harvest, and even when to make a sacrifice to the gods.

The Maya was the only major civilisation to develop a writing system that was able to represent their spoken language in symbolic form. It had over 500 symbols or hieroglyphics to represent words and ideas. Only the most educated would have been able to use this writing system, so scribes became important and respected people. The symbols have been found in stone carvings, temples and palaces but there is also evidence that the Maya used a form of paper made from tree bark to create folded 'books' called codices.



### Food and Farming

The Maya had to overcome the challenge of growing food in the rainforest to feed the growing populations of their urban centres. They used a slash-and-burn method of farming, which meant cutting down trees and plants to make room for their crops. The soil they farmed was not very fertile, so the Maya used ash for fertiliser and rotated their crops. Crop rotation allows the soil time to recover before replanting and helps increase yields. Another characteristic feature of Maya agriculture was terracing. Built to increase the amount of land that can be farmed, terracing involved levelling out hilly and mountainous areas by building walls.



### Key Vocabulary

<b>anthropologists</b>	People who study societies and cultures.
<b>circa</b>	Latin meaning 'around'. C. 800 BC means around 800 BC.
<b>civilisation</b>	The society, culture and way of life in a particular area.
<b>conquistadors</b>	Spanish conquerors.
<b>dynasty</b>	A series of rulers or leaders who are all from the same family, or a period when a country is ruled by them.
<b>empire</b>	A group of countries ruled by a single government or country.
<b>hieroglyphics</b>	A system of writing using pictures not words.
<b>indigenous</b>	People or things which belong to the country in which they are found in.
<b>irrigation</b>	Supplying land with water.
<b>Mesoamerica</b>	Central America - the countries consist of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Belize; and the western sections of Honduras and Nicaragua, and northern Costa Rica.
<b>polytheists</b>	The worship of or belief in more than one god.
<b>terracing</b>	Steps built into sloping land.

### Timeline

<b>2000 BC</b>	The Maya civilisation comes into being in Central America.
<b>300 BC</b>	Cities, such as El Mirador, become large and powerful.
<b>AD 900</b>	Cities in the rainforest are abandoned due to an extensive drought. People move north to the highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatán.
<b>AD 1000</b>	Cities like Chichén Itzá (which has two temple pyramids) are still thriving.
<b>AD 1500s</b>	The Spanish arrive and set out to conquer the Maya. They destroy their books and Maya cities fall to ruin.
<b>AD 1839</b>	American explorer and writer, John Lloyd Stephens, and British artist, Frederick Catherwood explore Copán and extensively document what they find, reigniting interest in the Maya civilisation.
<b>AD 2014</b>	The cities of Lagunita and Tamchén are rediscovered.