

Year 4 Ancient Mayan Civilisation

What was the greatest achievement of the Maya?

This topic looks at the development of the ancient Mayan civilisation who settled in central America and Mexico as early as 2000BC. From groups of hunter-gatherers, society grew and the Maya became a skilled and organised population. This topic looks at the changes in daily life as people became more powerful and will look at how the rich showed off their wealth. We will learn about the importance of chocolate to the Maya and how they developed a complex but very effective system of trading across the region. The importance of architecture and the development of their own number system will be studied. Finally, the topic will be concluded by considering what the greatest achievement of the Maya might have been.

Vocabulary

Ancient From a very long time ago
Civilisation A group of people living in a town/ area in an organised way
Society A group of people living close to each other with common traditions and interests
Hunter gatherer People who sourced food by collecting what they found growing in the wild and hunting for meat and fish
Wealthy People who are wealthy have plenty of money and goods
Trading Buying, selling or swapping goods with other people
Trade route A network of pathways and stop points along which people travel in order to trade goods
Architecture The design of buildings
Settlement A place where groups of people live, a settlement can vary in size and includes towns and villages
Slash and burn Existing vegetation is cut down and burned off before new seeds are planted

Landscape The features of an area of land
Pok-a-tok A team game played with a solid rubber ball, the ball had to be knocked between players with any part of the body except the hands & feet and through a stone scoring ring
Temple A building devoted to worshipping gods and goddesses
Terrace farming Flat surfaces are cut into the side of a hill to create steps where crops can be grown
Priest A religious leader
Hieroglyphics A form of writing made up of letters or symbols
BC Before Christ
AD Anno domini or after Jesus was born
Maize A central American plant with large grains (corn or sweetcorn)
Cacao Seeds from a tropical American tree from which cocoa is made
Base 20 system A system where the place value of numbers all relate to 20 (rather than our base 10 system)

Cross- Curricular links

Art/DT – Mayan masks, weaving, temple construction, hot chocolate
 Maths – Mayan number system
 Music – Mayan musical instruments
 PE – Modern version of pok-a-tok
 Computing – Research

Key Dates

2000 BC Evidence of early settlers in Central America and Mexico
1000 BC Larger settlements begin to form
750 BC The first Maya cities were developed
700 BC The Maya began to develop writing
600 BC The Maya begin to farm
600 BC Settlement at Tikal is formed which grew to be one of the largest cities
300 BC The Maya created a monarchy and were then ruled by kings
100 BC First city states were established
100 BC The first pyramids were built
800 AD City of Tikal has a population of up to 100, 000
800 – 900 AD Building of stepped pyramid of Chichen Itza
822 AD City of Copan deserted
869 AD City of Tikal abandoned
909 AD Last recorded classic Maya scripture
1517 AD The Spanish arrived and took control of Central America

What I will know at the end of the topic

Change

Pok – a- tok field



A wealthy home



How did the Mayan way of life change as they became more successful?
 The Maya developed from early hunter gatherers to creating large cities. The wealthy Maya wore elaborate clothing and accessories. The popular game of pok-a-tok was created, this was more than just a game and was used to show power and honour the gods.

Why did the Mayans need to change their trading systems as the civilisation grew?
 To begin with the Maya would have lived on what they could hunt or gather from their immediate surroundings. As the civilisation grew they realised that different regions and cities had different resources and that goods could be traded.

Mayan Trade routes



Why did the Mayan create a new number system and how did it work?
 The Maya created a completely new number system. They used a shell – dot – bar system to represent all numbers. They created the first known use of zero. Numbers were written vertically and made use of a base 20 system.

Cause

Maya map

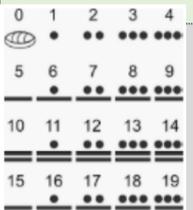


How was wealth and importance shown through home and other buildings? The wealthy Maya built large grand temples, palaces and pyramids in the centre of cities. Rich homes were large with impressive stone work.

How did the Mayans become effective farmers? The Maya used 'slash and burn' to clear areas of rainforest. They built terraces on hills to use as farm land.

What did the Maya trade and how did trade routes work?
 The Maya traded items such as cacao, honey, ceramics and cotton. They rarely paid for items, most things were swapped. The trading network which spanned the whole region was the most established of its time and involved a wide range of geographical landscapes.

Why was architecture so important within Mayan cities?
 The Maya had incredible skills in stone work which they liked to show off by building structures, pyramids and temples. The work would all have been done by hand



Mayan number system

Evidence

When and where did the Mayan people live?
 The Maya were people who settled in central America and Mexico. There is evidence of early settlements as far back as 2000 BC where people would have lived and hunted in the forest. The Maya developed into a civilisation with a highly organised society. Around 900AD the civilisation began to decline and around 1500AD the Spanish took over the region.

What evidence is there for the importance of chocolate in Mayan life?
 The Maya loved chocolate! They discovered that they could harvest the seeds from a cacao tree, remove the shell and ground them into a paste. They would combine the mixture with water and tip the drink between cups to make it frothy. They even had a god of chocolate.

What evidence is there about the religious beliefs of the Mayan people?
 The Maya were very religious and believed in many gods and goddesses (at least 30 are known by name). Priests were very powerful people, they had control over society and it was believed that they could talk to the gods.

What does the evidence from Chichen Itza tell us about the importance of the site?
 Chichen Itza is a World Heritage site. As a city it was powerful from around 600 to 1050AD. The city was wealthy and part of the trade route. The city was built on rough ground which had to be levelled. Located within Chichen Itza is a famous structure called 'El Castillo' which has a temple at the top.

Using all of the evidence that we have learnt about, what was the greatest achievement of the Maya?

