

St Peter's Catholic Primary School

Year 5 History Ancient Maya



What I should already know:

Some of the achievements of early civilizations – an overview of where and when the first civilizations appeared such as: Ancient Sumer; The Indus Valley; Ancient Egypt; The Shang Dynasty of Ancient China.

At the end of this topic, I will know:

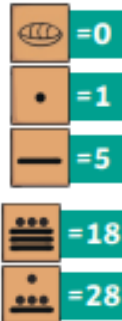
- Who the Maya are
- What they ate
- Where they lived
- What happened to them
- What their beliefs were
- How Ancient Maya was different from Britain

The Maya used a writing system made up of over 800 symbols called glyphs. Some glyphs were logograms, representing a whole word, and some were syllabograms, representing units of sound. They were carved onto stone buildings and monuments and painted onto pottery. Maya scribes also wrote books, called codices, made from the bark of fig trees. Only priests and noblemen would understand the whole language.

They also developed a complex number and counting system that was advanced for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero. The Maya people used just three symbols in their number system. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks and shells. The Maya used a base 20 number system, so after number 19, multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.

The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that they could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods. Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods.

The Mayans believed that the earth (the Middleworld) was large and flat and resting on the back of a creature, such as a turtle or crocodile. On the Middleworld grew a tree whose branches reached up into the heavens (the Upperworld) and whose roots grew down into Xibalba (the Underworld), which was guarded by gods of death who looked like jaguars. Ordinary Maya people believed that, after they died, their souls would travel through a series of caves and tunnels to Xibalba. Rulers and noblemen believed that they had a chance of getting to the Upperworld.



Key Facts and Events:

2000 BC – The Maya civilization came into being in Central America.

300 BC – Cities, such as El Mirador, became large and powerful.

900 AD – Cities in the rainforest were abandoned due to an extensive drought. People moved north to the highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatan.

1500's AD – The Spanish arrived in South America and set out to destroy the remaining elements of Maya Civilization.

2014 AD – The cities of Lagunita and Tamchen are rediscovered.

Vocabulary

Civilization	An organised society with its own culture and way of life, existing in a particular area over a particular period of time.
Drought	A long period with very little rain.
Ritual	A ceremony with set actions performed in a set order.
Jaguar	A big cat with yellowish fur and black spots. Sometimes can be black.
Scribes	People paid to write things down as an official record or for someone who cannot write.
Codices	Ancient handwritten texts. Maya codices could be unfolded. One of these texts is called a codex.
Maize	Another word for sweetcorn or corn on the cob. It can be made into dough and baked into tortillas.
Cacao beans	When cacao trees are ripe, the pods sprouting from their trunk can be broken open to reveal cacao beans. They can then be dried, roasted and ground.