

Together, We Flourish

Kindness • Respect • Perseverance • Curiosity • Hope • Community



Year 5 Summer 1 - History Medium-Term Plan: Maya Civilisation

Enquiry question: How did the Maya civilisation develop power, belief, knowledge and legacy?

Writing outcome: Non-chronological report - The Maya Civilisation
Schema focus: Chronology, Power, Movement, Legacy

What we already know, remember and can do:

Children have studied ancient civilisations, the Stone Age to Iron Age, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Ancient Egypt. They know that civilisations develop in different places and times, that evidence helps historians find out about the past, and that power, belief, movement and legacy can be compared across societies.

Topic overview / rationale

In this unit about the Maya civilisation, children learn who the ancient Maya people were and where and when they lived. They use maps and atlases to locate Maya cities and identify countries in Mesoamerica. They learn about Maya religious beliefs, rituals and gods, and consider how belief, priests and rulers shaped society. Children investigate the Maya number system, including the symbols for 0, 1 and 5 and the use of a base 20 system. They explore Maya writing through hieroglyphs, logograms, syllabograms and codices. They also learn how historians use evidence, including ruins, artefacts, artwork, maps and the work of explorers such as John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, to understand Maya cities. The unit concludes by considering Maya food, especially maize and cacao, and how food can have practical, cultural and religious significance.

Key vocabulary for this topic

Maya, civilisation, Mesoamerica, Central America, city, settlement, temple, priest, worship, ritual, sacrifice, Xibalba, upperworld, middleworld, base 10, base 20, vigesimal number system, zero, placeholder, evidence, primary source, secondary source, lithography, camera lucida, John Lloyd Stephens, Frederick Catherwood, Copan, Chichen Itza, Palenque, hieroglyphs, syllabogram, logogram, codex, codices, cacao, maize, significance, legacy

Christ Church values and spirituality links

Values: Curiosity, Respect, Perseverance, Community.

Spirituality: Children wonder at the achievements of a civilisation that developed cities, calendars, writing, number systems, farming and deep religious beliefs in a very different part of the world. They reflect on how people make sense of life, power, knowledge and community. They respond by respecting cultures, beliefs and ways of life that differ from their own.

Wonder: What does this topic make us curious about? Reflection: What does it teach us about people, belief and society? Response: How might this learning help us respect different cultures and legacies?

Inclusion and adaptive teaching

Suggested inclusive practice: pre-teach core vocabulary using visuals, artefact images, maps and oral rehearsal; provide word banks, sentence stems, modelled responses and completed examples; enlarge maps, source images and fact cards to A3 where needed; use mixed-ability pairs, adult-supported discussion and alternative recording such as labelling, drawing, voice notes or practical sorting; make timelines, maps and source packs visible and tangible; extend pupils by asking them to justify, compare and evaluate evidence. Teach sensitive aspects of Maya religion carefully and age-appropriately, avoiding sensational detail and giving pupils calm opportunities for questions.

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Lesson	Learning Intention / Activity	What will be known and remembered	Revisited vocabulary	New vocabulary	Adaptations / Inclusion	Deeper thinking
1	Meeting the Maya LI: To learn who the ancient Maya people were and when and where they lived. Activity: Children share prior knowledge and questions, locate Central America and Mesoamerica using maps/atlas, label key Maya cities such as Coba, Copan, Tikal, Chichen Itza, Uxmal and Palenque, then create an information guide to the Maya area.	✓ I know who the ancient Maya people were. ✓ I know that the Maya lived in Mesoamerica, including areas now in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. ✓ I know how to place the Maya civilisation in world history. ✓ I know how to locate and name some important Maya cities.	civilisation, ancient, chronology, map, atlas, city, settlement, society	Maya, Mesoamerica, Central America, Coba, Copan, Tikal, Tulum, Xunantunich, Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Palenque, Calakmul	✓ Provide labelled maps, atlases, enlarged map sheets and partner support. ✓ Use a fact grid or writing frame for the information guide. ✓ Pre-teach location vocabulary and model how to use map clues. ✓ Extend by comparing the Maya with another civilisation that existed at a similar time.	How does the location of the Maya help explain how their civilisation developed?
2	Gods and Religion LI: To learn about Maya religious beliefs, rituals and gods. Activity: Children explore religion as a central part of Maya society, discuss rituals and worship, learn about priests and the Maya view of the world, then create a fact file about selected Maya gods.	✓ I know that religion was central to Maya society. ✓ I know that the Maya worshipped many gods and believed gods could help or harm them. ✓ I know that priests had power because people believed they could communicate with the gods. ✓ I know how to name and describe some Maya gods and what they represented.	civilisation, belief, religion, worship, priest, god, society, power	sacrifice, blood-letting, ritual, Xibalba, upperworld, middleworld, festival, offering	✓ Teach sensitive content calmly and age-appropriately; avoid sensational detail. ✓ Use visual prompts, paired discussion and note-taking grids. ✓ Provide a reduced number of gods or a scaffolded fact-file template where needed. ✓ Extend by comparing Maya beliefs with beliefs from Ancient Egypt or another civilisation.	How did religious belief give priests and rulers power in Maya society?

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3	Maya Number System LI: To understand how the Maya number system worked. Activity: Children investigate shell, stick and pebble symbols for 0, 1 and 5, compare base 10 and base 20 systems, read and write Maya numbers, solve problems and create calculations for a partner.	✓ I know that the Maya developed an advanced number system. ✓ I know that Maya numbers used symbols for 0, 1 and 5. ✓ I know that the Maya used a base 20 system. ✓ I know that the Maya understood zero and used it as a placeholder.	number, symbol, place value, calculation, invention, achievement, civilisation	base 10, base 20, vigesimal number system, shell, stick, pebble, zero, placeholder	✓ Begin with 0-19 before moving to larger numbers. ✓ Provide worked examples, number mats and paired practice. ✓ Allow practical symbol cards before written calculations. ✓ Extend by using larger Maya numbers or creating addition/subtraction problems for others.	Why was the idea of zero such an important legacy of Maya knowledge?
4	Exploration and Discovery LI: To use sources of evidence to find out about Maya cities and how historians know about the Maya. Activity: Children discuss how we know about the past, sort examples of primary and secondary evidence, learn about Stephens and Catherwood, then study historical pictures of Copan and other Maya cities.	✓ I know that historians use evidence to build knowledge of the Maya. ✓ I know that evidence can include ruins, artefacts, maps, artwork, written records and later accounts. ✓ I know the difference between primary and secondary sources. ✓ I know that Stephens and Catherwood helped document Maya cities for later study.	evidence, source, artefact, historian, archaeologist, reliability, interpretation	primary source, secondary source, lithography, camera lucida, John Lloyd Stephens, Frederick Catherwood, Copan, Chichen Itza, Palenque	✓ Use a visual source pack and model one source-analysis example. ✓ Provide question stems: What can I see? What might this show? How reliable is it? ✓ Let pupils annotate enlarged images or record orally. ✓ Extend by judging which source is most useful and why.	Why might historians disagree about what Maya sources show us?
5	Maya Writing LI: To learn what the Maya writing system was and how it was used. Activity: Children complete a Maya writing fact hunt, learn about codices, read comprehension information, explore hieroglyphs, logograms and syllabograms, then construct Maya-style words or glyph blocks.	✓ I know that Maya writing used hieroglyphs. ✓ I know that Maya writing included logograms and syllabograms. ✓ I know that Maya codices were books containing information about astronomy, gods, war and history. ✓ I know that very few Maya codices survive today.	writing, hieroglyphs, evidence, Ancient Egypt, symbol, meaning, source	syllabogram, logogram, codex, codices, glyph, scribe, b'alam	✓ Provide enlarged fact cards and a vocabulary mat with examples of glyphs. ✓ Use paired reading during the fact hunt and comprehension. ✓ Let pupils copy or design simple logograms before constructing words. ✓ Extend by explaining how codices help historians understand Maya knowledge.	What would we know less about if Maya writing and codices had not survived?

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6	Food LI: To learn about Maya food and its cultural and religious significance. Activity: Children identify Maya foods, create a food inventory, investigate maize and cacao/chocolate, then use evidence to debate whether corn or chocolate was more significant to the Maya.	✓ I know that the Maya ate foods such as maize, beans, squash, chilli peppers, cacao, honey, turkey and deer. ✓ I know that maize was a main food crop and was deeply significant in Maya belief. ✓ I know that cacao was used to make a chocolate drink and had cultural importance. ✓ I know how to use evidence to argue which food was most significant.	food, farming, crop, diet, trade, evidence, significance, debate	cacao, maize, inventory, Popol Vuh, tortilla, significance, precious	✓ Check allergies and parental consent before any food tasting or recipe work. ✓ Provide prepared statements for pupils who need support in the corn vs chocolate debate. ✓ Use oral rehearsal and sentence stems for evidence-based argument. ✓ Extend by comparing the ancient Maya diet with food eaten by Maya people today.	Which Maya food had the greater legacy: maize or cacao? Explain your judgement with evidence.