

Dangerous Earth

History Y6: The Maya Civilisation

Key Vocabulary

- Civilisation** the society, culture and way of life in a particular area.
- Settlement** a place where people establish a community.
- Polytheism** the belief in more than one god.
- Cenotes** an underground cave which was the dwelling place of gods.
- Xibalba** the underworld.
- Itzamna** one of the creator gods, inventor of writing.
- Ix Chel** the wife of Itzamna, goddess of childbirth, healing, weaving and the Moon.
- Popol Vuh** a book that described Maya religion and mythology.
- Tikal** one of the most powerful city states during the Classic period.

Links to prior learning:

- Year 4 – Ancient Greece
- Year 5 – Indus Valley

Key Facts and Knowledge

The Maya civilisation began in Central America in 2000BC. In the years 200 – 900 AD, up to 40 city states developed, each with their own King, which were supported by surrounding farms. Their cities were characterised by temples and stepped pyramids in which they performed the bloodletting and human sacrifice which they believed was necessary to appease their gods. Around 800 AD, the civilisation began to decline as the Maya abandoned their cities in large numbers.

Agriculture - The Mayas main crops were maize and cacao (main ingredient in chocolate). They practised three types of agriculture: slash and burn, raised field and terrace farming. By studying the stars, they created detailed calendars to tell them when to plant and harvest crops. The Mayas ate pozole - a type of stew.

Culture = The Mayas built sophisticated city centres and understood astronomy, mathematics and had the most developed writing system in the Americas.

Religion - The Maya were polytheistic and believed in three separate realms – heaven, earth and the underworld. Each god was associated with a different area of life. Temples were stepped to create a route to heaven. Priests were very important as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods.

Chicken Itza



Terrace Farming



Extent of Maya Civilisation



Links to other subjects:
Ancient Egyptians

219 AD
First King of Tikal

250 AD
Classic period

300 AD
Mayan society booms

700 AD
Tikal at its height

869 AD
People leave Tikal

