

YEAR 6 - MAYA CIVILISATION FACTS

Where did the Mayans live?

Mayans lived in southern Mexico (and the Yucatan Peninsula) and northern central America including Guatemala, the very north of El Salvador, east of Honduras and Belize.

Key Maya civilisations:

- Uxmal
- Palenque
- Copan
- Tulum
- Tikal
- Chicken-Itza



Maya calendar

Time was extremely important to the Maya, they made elaborate and accurate calendars and used them in charting the movements of the sun, moon, stars and even planets. These calendars served a variety of purposes both practical and sacred. They were used in astronomical calculations, recording important events, the reigns of rulers and their conquests and also in divination.

The Maya used what is now known as the calendar round which is made up of 3 interlocking cycles. A cycle of 20 names, a cycle of 13 numbers (which forms the 260-day sacred calendar) and a 365 days solar year. 52 years will pass until the three cycles line up again.

TIMELINE OVERVIEW OF THE MAYA CIVILISATION:

1100BC

The first hunter gathers settle along the Pacific Coast and then expanding into the central highlands.

800BC

Village farming and trade becomes established throughout the Maya Region.

700BC

Mayan writing is developed in Mesoamerica.

400BC

Earliest solar calendars are carved in stone.

300BC

The social structure in Maya adapts to include Nobles and Kings as rulers.

AD450

The city-state of Tikal dominates the tropical lowland of the central region.

AD683

Pakal the Great of Palenque dies and is buried in the Temple of Inscriptions.

AD800

Sites in the rain forests and tropical lowlands are abandoned whilst northern lowland sites flourish.

AD1502

First contact with Europeans made.

Did you know?

Although it's possible to find mention of the 'Mayan' Civilisation, experts use 'Maya' to describe all aspects of the civilisation and people, 'Mayan' is used only to describe the language. 'Maya' is both singular and plural.

Maya Games:

The Maya played a lot of ball games. Maya players had to work together as a team. They built large ball courts and often played in front of crowds.

A particular ball game was Pok-A-Tok. Pok-A-Tok is a cross between soccer and basketball—except much, much more difficult to play.

The object of the game was for the two opposing side to try and hit the hard rubber ball into a stone hoop placed at both ends of the playing field. You could only pass and shoot the ball using your thighs and hips. At the end of a game, the captain of the losing team could be sacrificed to the gods with their head on a stake or being the next ball!



Maya Number System:

The Maya used a base 20 number system whereas we use a base 10 number system. They used dots and lines to represent numbers.

1	•	11	• =====	20	• • =====	30	• • • =====
2	••	12	•• =====	21	• • • =====	31	• • • • =====
3	•••	13	••• =====	22	• • • • =====	32	• • • • • =====
4	••••	14	•••• =====	23	• • • • • =====	33	• • • • • • =====
5	=====	15	=====	24	• • • • • • =====	34	• • • • • • • =====
6	• =====	16	• =====	25	• • • • • • • =====	35	• • • • • • • • =====
7	•• =====	17	•• =====	26	• • • • • • • • =====	36	• • • • • • • • • =====
8	••• =====	18	••• =====	27	• • • • • • • • • =====	37	• • • • • • • • • • =====
9	•••• =====	19	•••• =====	28	• • • • • • • • • • =====	38	• • • • • • • • • • • =====
10	=====			29	• • • • • • • • • • • =====	39	• • • • • • • • • • • • =====

For the numbers over 20 they are presented differently - vertically. Multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.

Key Vocabulary for the topic:

AD / CE	'anno domini' - Latin for "in the year of the lord," and refers specifically to the birth of Jesus Christ. CE = common era
ancient	Belonging to a very distant past and no longer in existence.
archaeologist	Someone who studies the past by exploring old remains.
architecture	The art of planning, designing and constructing buildings.
BC/BCE	BC = Before Christ (older term) BCE = Before common era (newer term).
belief	A trust, faith, or confidence in (someone or something).
Chichen Itza	A village in Yucatán state in Mexico: site of important Mayan ruins. A UNESCO World Heritage Site.
civilisation	A human society with its own social organisation and culture.
continent	A very large area of land that consists of many countries, e.g. South America is a continent.
deities	A god or goddess.
ruins	The remains of a building that has been destroyed or that is in disrepair or a state of decay.
sacrifice	A religious activity that involving either the killing of animals or members of the community, used during rituals held by priests to please the Gods.

Religion

The Maya believed in a large number of nature gods. Some gods were considered more important and powerful than others. They built a number of pyramid style temples to worship these Gods and believed in the power of sacrifice (including humans!) The most famous of these temples could be found in the city of Chichen Itza.

Maya Gods

Some were in human form, others in animal but the most supreme god was *Itzamna* (right), the creator god, lord of day and night and ruler of the heavens. Many looked after the weather or crops such as *Chac*, the rain god and *Kinich Ahau* the sun god. Priests would perform ceremonies (including sacrifices) to please them and Kings were thought to turn into gods after they died. They believed the world was divided into three parts (Heaven, Earth and the Underworld), linked together by a giant world tree.

