



The Ancient Maya



Prior Knowledge / Key Knowledge

The ancient Maya civilization was centred around the country now known as Guatemala. The Maya Empire was at its most powerful around 600 A.D. They are known for their skilled agriculture, pottery, hieroglyphic writing, calendar making and mathematics. They left behind an impressive amount of architecture and symbolic artwork. The Maya were deeply religious and worshiped various gods. They performed elaborate religious rituals and ceremonies in order to please them.

Unusual Maya Facts

1. Flat foreheads were fashionable so they would put a baby's head in a press to squash it flat.
2. It was considered beautiful to be cross-eyed so parents would hang balls in-between their children's eyes to make them look inwards.
3. Mayans sacrificed humans for religious and medical reasons. It was an honour to be sacrificed!
4. Noblewomen would file their teeth into sharp points.

Time Line

1100 BC	Hunter gatherers settle along the Pacific coast.
1100 BC	Settlements begin to appear
700 BC	Maya writing is developed
100 BC	The first Maya Pyramids are built.
900 - 1200 AD	El Castillo is built.
250 AD	Beginning of the Classic Period.
1000 AD	Chichen Itza is the most powerful city.
1502 AD	First contact with Europe.

Big Questions / Challenging Perceptions

The Maya were an advanced civilized society. Why do you think they abandoned their cities and disappeared?

The Mayans were inventors. Which invention do you consider the best and why?



Vocabulary

Ancient	Belonging to the very distant past and no longer in existence.
Astronomy	The branch of science which deals with space and the physical universe as a whole.
Cacao	Seeds that they Maya used to make chocolate.
Cenote	A sinkhole or pit filled with water, cenotes were sources of water for the Maya.
Chichen itza	The most powerful city.
Civilisation	The society, culture and way of life of a particular area.
Classic Period	The golden age of the Maya civilization.
Code	A book written by the Maya that was created by one long sheet of paper.
Glyph	A symbol used in writing.
Itzamma	The main god of the Maya who created the Earth.
Popol Vuh	A book or codex that described Mayan religion and mythology.
Pyramid	The Maya built step pyramids with flat tops. At the top, they built a temple to their gods.
Sacrifice	To give up something valued for the sake of something else.
Settlement	A place where people have come to live and have built homes.
Temple	A building devoted to the worship of god or gods.
Yutcan Peninsula	An area in south-eastern Mexico where some of the Maya civilization lived.