

Y5/6 – If the Mayans were so civilised, why then did they carry out human sacrifice?

Procedural knowledge

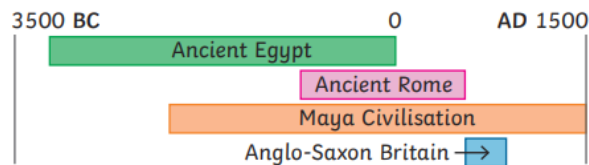
Use a range of sources of evidence to make inferences about Mayan society.

Answer and devise own historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity, difference and significance.

Compare events from the Mayan civilisation with those in Britain at that time and with the Ancient Egyptian and Greek civilisations.

Factual and Conceptual knowledge

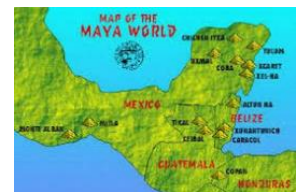
When was the Mayan civilisation?



Who were the Mayans and where did they live?

The Maya were a civilisation, found in Central America from 2000 BC to 900 AD.

Mayan cities were often found near trade routes and good farmland. They had similar layouts to each other. They would have a palace for the ruler, a plaza for the marketplaces and temples, in the form of pyramids.



What were the key events within Mayan civilisation?

Timeline				
AD 250: By this stage, the Maya had many established cities. They had many monuments, pyramids and devised a writing and maths system.	AD 600: The Mayan population exceeded 5,000,000 people. Excessive farming and deforestation were common and this led to land becoming less fertile.	AD 840: The quality of the fields is poor, and this combined with land erosion, leads to a drought.	AD 900: Many Mayan cities are deserted due to deforestation, drought and war.	Today... there are still 7 million indigenous Mayan people living in Central America.

What was the main religion of this civilisation?

Mayans were polytheists, believing in and worshipping many deities. They believed the gods had a good and a bad side and that they could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing and make offerings of blood to the gods. Mayans sacrificed humans for religious and medical reasons. It was an honour to be sacrificed!

Priests were considered the most important people in Maya society and were at the top of the hierarchy. It was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods.

What did they produce?

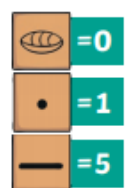
Farmers, workers and slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy. They grew maize, which was an important crop that formed up to 80% of the Maya people's diets.

The Maya made a bitter chocolatey drink from cacao beans that was enjoyed by the rich and used for medicines and in ceremonies. The beans were highly valued and even used as a form of money.

What did the Mayans develop?

The Maya developed a writing system made up of over 800 symbols, called glyphs. They were carved onto stone buildings and monuments and painted onto pottery. Scribes wrote books, called codices, made from the bark of fig trees.

The Maya also developed an advanced number and counting system. They used just three symbols in their number system, thought to represent items that they might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks and shells.



Key Vocabulary

polytheists, Mesoamerica, Mayan, indigenous, hierarchy, fertile, drought, ritual, plaza, Chichen Itza, codices, cacao beans,

Links

Vertical link with Ancient Egypt Y3/4 B
Diagonal links with Stone Age to Iron Age Y3/4 B and Ancient Greeks Y3/4 A