



# THE MAYA KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Word	Definition
Civilization	An organised society with its own culture and way of life, existing in a particular area over a particular period of time.
Ancient	of or from a long time ago, having lasted for a very long time.
Historical	Belonging to the past.
Artefact	An historical object.
Primary Source	An immediate, first-hand account of a topic/event from someone who had a direct connection with it.
Secondary Source	Evidence created by other people based on primary evidence.
Hieroglyph	A picture or symbol that represents the word, phrase or sound.
Warrior	A person who fights or has experience in battle.
Ahau	The king or lord of a Maya city-state.
Tribe	A group of people, families, or villages that share the same language, social customs, and ancestors.
Dynasty	A series of rulers from the same family or group.
Maize	A grain that is common in central America.
Codex	An illustrated book made by the Maya.
Stela	A tall monumental sculpture made from stone with relief carvings made by the Maya.
Scribe	A person who copies out documents or writes down the words of others.
Haab	The Maya solar calendar that was used to measure time and had 365 days.
Jade	A hard stone that is usually green. The Maya often used jade to make jewelry.
Sacrifice	The gift of something to a god as an act of worship.
Peasant	Individuals of a low social status, including, smallholders and agricultural labourers (farmers).
Terraced	Forming part of a continuous row.
Pyramid	A large monument with four sides that tapers at the top. The Maya build step pyramids with flat tops. At the top they built a temple to their gods.
Bloodletting	A ritual where the ruler of a city state offered their blood to the gods.
Cacao	A tree whose bean-like seeds are used to make chocolate.
Cenote	A sinkhole or pit filled with water, cenotes were sources of water for the Maya and were also used as places of sacrifice.
Huipil	A traditional garment worn by Maya women.
Popol Vuh	A book or codex that described Maya religion and mythology.
Tzolk'in	The Maya religious calendar used to track religious fays and ceremonies. It had 260 days.

## The rise of the Maya Empire

The Maya were an ancient civilization of people who lived in an area that used to be known as Mesoamerica. People had lived in the area from around 5000 BC but it wasn't until around 300 BC that the first cities started to form. Before this people were hunter gatherers, or lived in small villages.

The Maya lived in an area of North America that was known as Mesoamerica but which is now the countries of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize. This area is often referred to as Central America today.



## Creation story of the Maya

The main source of information about Mayan myths is a book called Popol Vuh. It tells of cunning Hunahpu and Xbalanque, twin sons of the maize god, Hun Hunahpu. The Hero twins famously outsitted the gods of the underworld in a ball game. The Popol Buh also describes the Mayan view of the universe. They believed it was made up of three layers – the underworld, the earth, and the upper realm, which was held up by Pauhauntun, the drunken god of thunder and wind.



## Maya Culture

The Maya produced some of the finest art from the Mesoamerica (the region of Mexico and Central America that was once occupied by the Maya and Aztecs). They used a variety of materials, such as stone, wood, ceramics, jade and bone to decorate their buildings to make objects that were either sacred or served a specific function. Particularly striking works of art are the Maya's portraits of themselves, which help us understand their way of life.



## Maya Society

Mayan society was organised into city states. Each city has its own king who had complete control over his subjects. City states would often trade with each other but would also go to war frequently to try and gain power, wealth and glory for their city state.

Mayan society was structured a bit like a pyramid. The higher up the pyramid you were, the more important you were.



### Progression:

A3: Begin to use appropriate historical vocabulary to communicate, including Dates, Time Period, Era, Chronology, Continuity, Change, Century, Decade & Legacy. Understand the concepts of continuity and change over time, representing them, along with evidence, on a timeline. Use dates and terms accurately in describing events.

D3: Investigate and explain change and continuity within and across periods.

F3: Understand and explain / analyse diverse experiences and ideas, beliefs, attitudes of men, women, children in past societies



## Maya Chocolate

Cocoa originates from the Maya area and was grown mainly in Guatemala. A highly valued product, the bean of the cacao tree when processed, became the chocolate used in chocolate drinks. Like us, the Maya loved chocolate, but rather than eat it in bars, they drank it. They flavored their chocolate drinks with spices such as chili and sometimes they would use honey or cinnamon.



## Daily Life

Architecture:

Maya cities were characterised by huge monumental buildings and sculptures. Although the Maya were able to use metal, they preferred to carve into stone. They built elaborate temples, steeped pyramids, observatories and palace complexes. These were very detailed with artistic designs.



Houses:

The most common houses had walls made of stone or mud. They had thatched roofs. Mayan houses were oval in shape and had just one room. Families would all live and sleep in one room. Extended family members would build their houses next to each other and would often share a kitchen garden to grow fruits and vegetables to eat.



Food:

The Maya ate a wide variety of food. They grew crops such as maize, cacao, avocado and beans. Squash and chilli were also regularly grown. They kept animals such as dogs and turkeys for meat. They were also able to hunt very well, capturing animals like rabbits and deer for food.



Clothing:

Clothing was normally made from woven cotton or sisal (a fibre made from a local plant). For the rich, quetzal feathers were extremely popular for elaborate headdresses. The Maya also wore jewellery – highland areas provided stones such as jade and ores such as hematite for decoration.



## Religion

The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that the gods could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing, and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods.

Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. They would perform different rituals during festivals or special ceremonies in order to appeal to the gods.



## Maya letters

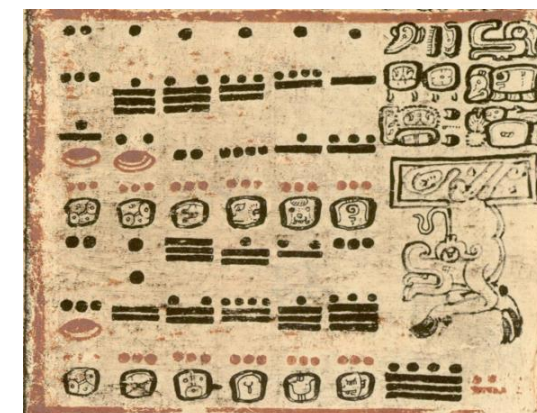
Maya writing, also known as Maya glyphs, was one of the earliest forms of writing in the world, and the earliest in Mesoamerica. A series of pictures represented different words and letters. The earliest date back to around 2000BCE. They were carved onto stone buildings and monuments and painted onto pottery. Maya scribes also wrote books called codices, made from the bark of fig trees. Only priests and noblemen would know the whole written language.



## Maya numbers

The Maya developed a complex number and counting system that was advanced for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero. The Maya people used just three symbols in their number system. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks, and shells.

The Maya used a base 20 number system, so after number 19, multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.



## Maya Timeline

2000BCE – The first Maya people emerge.

750BCE – The first Maya cities are built.

250BCE – The first Maya hieroglyphics were used.

100BCE – City states begin to form, with powerful leaders.

219CE – The first King of Tikal: Yax Moch Xok

615-683CE – The rule of Pakal the Great in Palenque.

800CE – The City of Tikal has around 100,000 people.

800-850CE – The huge stepped pyramid, El Castillo, is built at Chichen Itsa.

800-870CE – Many city states (e.g. Copan, Tikal) are deserted.

909CE – The last recorded evidence of Classic Maya