'Bringing Learning to Life: No Limits.No Barriers.'

Ocean Academy Poole
an Aspirations Academy
Self-Worth | Engagement | Purpose

Learning Journey Map

Year: 5 Term: Autumn 2

Subject: History Topic: The Maya

Driving Question: What can archaeological evidence tell us about the lives, beliefs, and achievements of the Ancient Mayans?
Power Skill: Communication and Creativity - Create the exhibit for a living museum

National Curriculum Learning Objectives

- a non-European society that provides contrasts with British history
- Construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection and organisation of relevant historical information.

Key Vocabulary

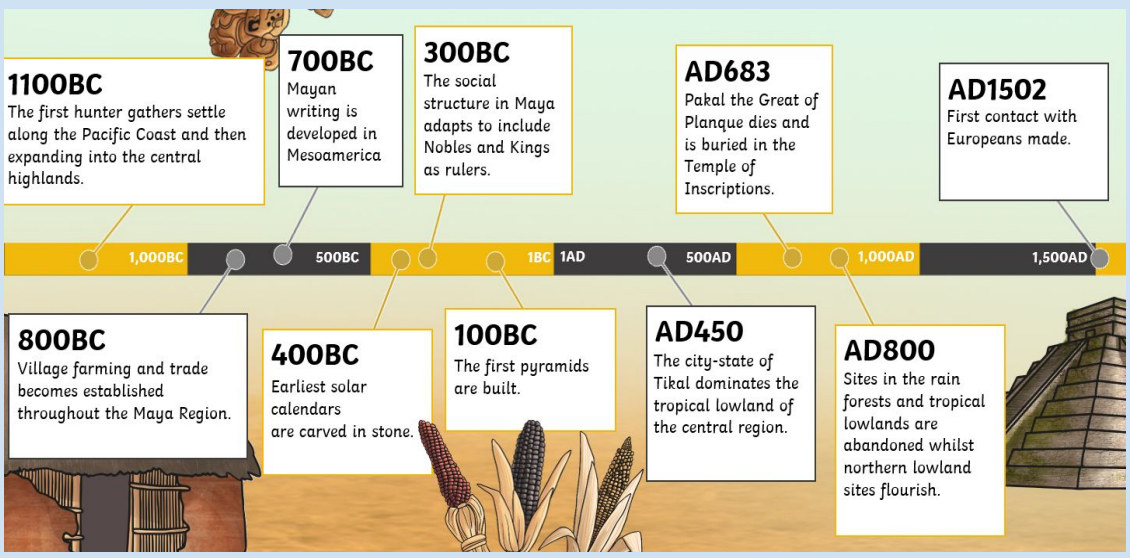
Ancient Maya	Mayan Pyramid	Chichén Itzá	Mesoamerica	Maize
Slash and burn	Cacao bean	Pok-ta-pok	Glyph	Codice
Stelae	Sacrifice	Mayan Beliefs		

Key Learning



The Maya Timeline

The Maya civilisation began long ago in a place called 'Mesoamerica'. This huge area is made up of Mexico and part of Central America.
The Maya built amazing cities like Chichen Itza (which they called 'Yax Mutal') and Palenque. Even though they lived in different cities, ruled by different kings and queens, the Mayas shared a lot of common beliefs and traditions. They were experts at reading the stars and even built their cities as a map of the sky! They were also inspired by the creatures of the forest and shared many legends about animals, plants and nature spirits.
Mayan culture was well established by 1100BC, and it lasted until 1542AD (that's 2642 years!) All Maya shared a common culture and religion, but each city governed itself and had its own noble ruler. These cities never came together to form a single empire. Mayan kings were constantly at war with each other, fighting for tribute (gifts) and prisoners to sacrifice to the gods.



In 1,100BC, at roughly the same time as early humans were occupying Britain during the British Bronze and Iron Age (Year 3), the Maya civilisation was being developed by humans living in central America.
As the Roman Empire colonised and occupied most of Europe and Britain in 43AD – 410AD, the Maya were creating and developing their own cultures, civilisations and lifestyles in central America.
The Maya civilisation was prominent in Central America for nearly 2,700 years until the early 1500's when the Maya were discovered by Spanish explorers. After many years of battles and invasion, the Spanish eventually conquered Central America in 1542AD spelling the end for Mayan civilisation.

Thinking Point
What other ancient and more recent civilisations existed at the same time as the Maya?



Enquiry lesson
Use pictures of artefacts and sites to identify why the Maya are worth studying and what is most significant about them. Then, use Chichen Itza as a way to explore how archaeological sites can demonstrate what was important to a civilisation.

Resources: eg. atlases etc
Replica artefacts, timeline cards

Key Learning

Mayan Civilisation and Settlements: Chichen Itza

The Maya erected hundreds of ceremonial cities in the rainforests of Mesoamerica. These cities were designed in a similar pattern. There was a palace for the ruler, a plaza for the marketplace, and several giant stone step pyramids. The cities shared the same culture, but remained separate from each other. There was never a single Mayan empire, but rather a widespread, interconnected civilization. Huge palaces and pyramids were built with religious structures on top of them as the Maya believed that this brought them closer to the gods. Some pyramids were also used for observing the Sun, moon and stars. The movement of these was very important to the Maya.



The Mayan city of Chichén Itzá, is a well-preserved site. Chichén Itzá is famous for a large, pyramid temple. The temple, called Castillo by the Spanish who rediscovered it, is about 1 km in diameter. It is dedicated to Kukulkan, the plumed serpent god. Every year on the autumn and spring equinox, the sun hits the side of the building making a show of light and shadow which looks like a snake along the steps of the building. There are also the remains of the 'Great Ballcourt', where the Mayan sport 'pok-ta-pok' would have been played. There is also 'The Cenote'. This is an underground lake or river. This Cenote is where royalty gave gifts to the gods, which included human sacrifices.





Thinking Point
How do Mayan cities compare to our towns today?

Food and Farming

The Maya civilization ate simple food. Maize was the central food in their diet, along with vegetables such as beans and squashes. Potatoes and a tiny grain called quinoa were commonly grown. Avocados and tomatoes were also grown and eaten along with a wide variety of fruit. Corn (maize) was the staple of their diet and was used in many different ways, including being made into a sort of porridge, called 'atole' in Mesoamerica. Maize cakes were eaten in both regions, but only the Mesoamerican peoples ate maize pancakes, known as tortillas, with every meal. Hunting and fishing were important for the Inca, Aztec, and Maya civilizations. Meat and fish were part of the diet.





One of the many crops that the Maya farmed was the fragrant cacao bean. These beans grew on trees from the soils of El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize. They were a precious crop; prized for their chocolatey flavour and used in drinks for the rich and noble. Unsweetened cacao is deeply bitter and the Maya would spice it up with some chillies; a drink still enjoyed today! The cacao bean was so valuable to the Maya civilisation; it was even used as currency.



The Maya learned how to clear forests and turn this space in to farmland. The forests were burned and the ash was used to fertilise the ground. This technique is called 'slash and burn' and is still used in farming today. They also developed a way of farming marshy wetland called 'raise fields'. They dug canals to allow the water to flow as small streams, and piled the soil up to make very fertile islands, which they could grow crops on. They could even fish in the canals they made!

Thinking Point
What do you think was the most precious crop the Maya grew? Why?





Pok-ta-pok – a Mayan Ball Game:

The ball game pok-ta-pok was played throughout Mesoamerica. As well as being a sport, it had a religious significance. Although there were many versions of the game, it was always played on a court shaped like a capital "I". Two teams would compete against each other to get a large rubber ball through a stone ring. The ball had to be kept off the ground using only knees, elbows, or hips, never the hands or feet. The largest ball court has been found at Chichén Itzá. Every Mayan city had an pok-ta-pok ball court. The Maya believed that the more they played pok-ta-pok, the better the harvest would be. Sometimes they even used it to settle wars!

Thinking Point
Have a go at playing this game - is it as easy as it sounds?!

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Key Learning



The Maya Writing System:

The Maya created a writing system using symbols called glyphs. Each symbol represented a word or a sound. Glyphs were used to record events on stone slabs called stelae. The Maya also created books, known as codices. These were made from soft inner bark and folded like a fan. The four Mayan codices that still exist today tell us little of their history, but deal mainly with subjects such as rituals, astronomy, and calendars.



Thinking Point
Does this writing system remind you of any other ancient civilisations?

The Maya Number System:

The ancient Maya created their own number system using only a few symbols to represent numbers.

Their system was based on the number 20 and they were one of the first civilisations of people to devise and represent the number zero. With these symbols, the Maya were able to do sums, record dates on calendars, trade with a form of currency and keep track of their history and culture.



Thinking Point
Which number system do you think is more successful, this or Roman Numerals? Why?

The Mayan Gods:

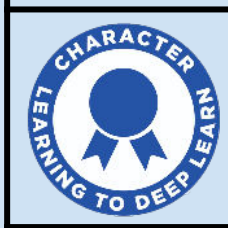
The Maya thought the world was divided into three parts: The Heavens, the Earth, and the Underworld, which were linked together by a giant World Tree. Mayan religion focused on a number of gods who were associated with the natural world:

	**Itzamna:** The ***supreme god***, he was the ***creator*** of ***mankind*** and invented ***writing*** and ***learning***. He was depicted as a toothless old man and was always kind; unlike some other gods.		**Kukulkan:** Known as the Feathered Sepent, he is the god of the four elements: water, air, fire and earth.
	**Ix Chel:** The wife of Itzamnaaj. She is the goddess of childbirth, healing, weaving and the moon. She has a snake in her hair and her toes are like jaguar claws.		**K'nich Ajaw:** The sun god or sun-faced lord travels across the sky during the day. At night, he becomes the fearful Jaguar god and enters the Underworld.
	**Hun Hunahpu:** Another child of Itzamnaaj and Ix Chel, Hun Ixim is the maize god. From his head sprouts an ear of corn. He is very important to the Mayan people as maize is such a vital source of food.		**Kisin:** The god of death. He is the most gruesome god as he has a skeletal nose, jaw and spine and his body is covered in hideous spots.

The Mayan civilisation believed that the Sun would not continue its journey across the sky if they did not make human sacrifices. Special ceremonies were held in temples to make these sacrifices. Victims usually included men, women, and children, but also sometimes animals. Mayan kings were also thought to become gods after death.

Thinking Point
Are there other ancient religions that are similar to the Maya?

Power Skills

	Design visual timelines, maps, calendars, or illustrations of Maya gods, sport (Pok-ta-Pok), and archaeological sites like Chichen Itza.
	Compare Ancient Maya with other civilizations (Iron Age, Egyptians, Greeks) to analyse development, achievements, and differences in culture, technology, and chronology.
	Develop curiosity, perseverance, and respect for other cultures while researching religion, daily life, and archaeology.
	Work in groups to investigate food, farming, sport, and architecture; discuss findings and organise information coherently.
	Present informed responses and explanations clearly using oral discussion, written work, timelines, and visual displays.