



History Knowledge Organiser

Year 5

The Maya



Summary Statement

The first Mesoamerican civilisation, the Maya lived in central America around 4000 years ago (2000 BC). They developed sophisticated cities with fine monumental buildings and stepped pyramids. The Maya were advanced in their use of mathematics and renowned for the accuracy of their calendar. The school concepts of 'society – ranking', 'religion – gods' and 'culture – food, rules and laws' are embedded.

By the end of the unit children will know:

- At the top of Maya society were the King and Royal family who were believed to be closely linked to the gods. An educated elite of scribes, priests and nobles formed the ruling class. They occupied the finest buildings in the city.
- The Maya were sophisticated mathematicians who made use of the number zero.
- Maya religion was extremely bloodthirsty, demanding human sacrifices and blood-letting rituals.
- 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.



A Maya calendar

Key Vocabulary

Spelling	Definition
Blood-letting	'Blood Letting' was the ritualised sacrifice of blood to please the Gods.
Cacao	Seeds that the Maya used to make chocolate.
Glyph	A symbol used in writing.
Haab'	The Maya solar calendar that was used to measure time and had 365 days.
Ritual	A ceremony, often religious, with set actions performed in a set order.

Key Knowledge

- 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 Mayan 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.
- 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.

