

Who were the Maya and what can we learn from them?



Key Vocabulary	
civilisation	A human society with well – developed rules and government, often where technology and the arts are considered important.
drought	A long period of time with little or no rain.
scribes	People trained to write things down, either as an official record or for someone unable to write.
codices	Ancient handwritten texts. Maya codices could be unfolded like a concertina. One text is called a codex.
maize	Another word for sweetcorn or corn on the cob. It can be made into a dough and baked into tortillas.
cacao beans	Cacao trees sprout pods directly from their trunks. When they are ripe, the pods can be broken open to reveal the beans, which can then be dried, roasted and ground.

Maya Numbers

The Maya developed an advanced number system for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero as a placeholder.

The number system used three symbols in different combinations.

	= 0
	= 1
	= 5

Writing

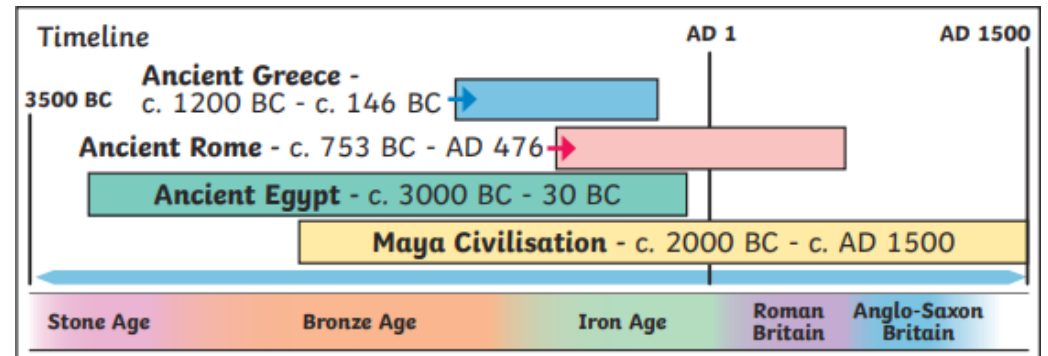
The Maya writing system was used to write several different Maya languages. It was made up of many symbols called glyphs. Logograms are glyphs representing whole words. Syllabograms are glyphs representing units of sound (syllables)

The glyphs were carved on stone buildings and monuments and painted on pottery. Maya scribes also wrote books called **codices**.

Food

The Maya people mainly ate **maize** (corn). **Maize** was very important to them as they believed that the first humans were made from **maize** dough by the gods. The Maya made a bitter chocolatey drink from **cacao beans** that was enjoyed by the rich. It was used for medicines and in ceremonies. The **cacao beans** were highly valued and even used as a form of money.

Key Dates (c. stands for circa, which means approximately)	
c. 2000 BC	The Maya civilisation comes into being in Central America
c. 300 BC	Cities, such as El Mirador, become large and powerful.
AD 900	Cities in the rainforest are abandoned due to a drought . People move north to the highlands of Guatemala and the Yucatán.
AD 1000	Cities like Chichén Itzá (which has two temple pyramids) are still thriving.
AD 1500s (16 th century)	The Spanish arrive in South America and set out to destroy the remaining elements of Maya civilisation as part of their conquest.
AD 1839	American explorer and writer, John Lloyd Stephens, and British artist, Frederick Catherwood, explore Copán and other cities including Chichén Itzá, reigniting interest in the Maya civilisation .
AD 2014	The cities of Lagunita and Tamchén are rediscovered.



Religion

The Maya believed in many gods and goddesses. They thought that the gods/goddesses had a good side and a bad side and that they could help or hurt them. The Maya people would dance, sing and make offerings to the gods/ goddesses.

Maya priests were believed to be able to communicate directly with the gods/goddesses. As a result, they were very important in society.

The Afterlife

The Middleworld – The Maya people believed that the Earth, which they called the Middleworld, was large and flat and resting on the back of a creature, such as a turtle or crocodile.

The Upperworld – The Maya believed this was in the sky or heavens was connected to the Middleworld by the branches of a tree.

The Underworld – A tree connecting its branches to the Upperworld was also believed to grow its roots down to the Underworld.