

# Ancient Mayans

Who were the Maya and what did they believe in?



Year 5 Term 3  
History Knowledge Organiser



## Who were the Maya? Where did they come from?



The Maya civilisation began about 1000 years ago in a place called 'Mesoamerica'.

One of the most famous Maya rulers was K'inich Janaab Pakal, whom we know today as 'Pakal the Great'.

## What was everyday life like in Mayan times?

There was a class system/social hierarchy: Adults worked as **farmers, warriors, hunters, builders, teachers** and many other things.

Children from noble families could learn **maths, science, writing** and **astronomy**, but poorer children were only taught their parents' jobs.

## What did the Mayas believe in?

The Mayas believed in **many gods**, each representing a different aspect of life. Communities made regular offerings to them, in the form of animal (and sometimes human) **sacrifices**.

Each of the ancient Maya cities was ruled by a **different king or queen**. The Mayas believed these rulers had the task of keeping the gods happy. To achieve this, the rulers offered sacrifices (sometimes human), conducted mass prayers and held parades through their cities.

They built pyramids which they painted **red** to denote that they were alive, like blood.



## How were Mayan myths created?

Mayan Myths were written in **iconography** (images). The key details were also shared orally for hundreds of years.



## Why are the Maya significant? (What are the Maya people famous for?)

The Mayans invented many things, such as; rubbers, the number **zero**, ball games, **chocolate**, writing systems, books, **calendars** and much more.

## Find out more...

- Check out BBC Bitesize - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zq6svcw>
- Watch the Mayan Creation Myth - <https://youtu.be/NIhx4Nu9bP8>
- Visit the Bristol Museum – compare and contrast the Mayans to the Egyptian exhibit

## Key Vocabulary

Mesoamerica  
Sacrifice  
Hieroglyphics  
Observatory  
Polytheism  
Zero  
Irrigation system  
City state  
Calendar  
Scribe  
Gods/goddesses  
Social hierarchy  
Merchant  
Priest  
Labourer  
slave

