

History Knowledge and Skills Organiser: The Maya—why were so many cities abandoned?

Important things I will know and understand:

The achievements of the Maya—writing system, number system, astronomy, calendar.

The Maya farmed using mountain terraces which meant that they were able to support cities with tens of thousands of inhabitants.

The Maya city of Chichen Itza had temples, a ball court, stepped pyramids.

Pok-a-tok was a ball game and was important for social and religious reasons.

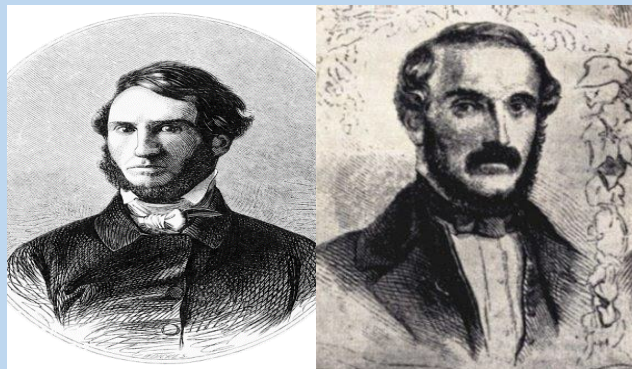
The likely cause of the gradual abandonment of the ancient Maya jungle cities might be due to famine as a result of drought (not enough rain).

The Maya were in many ways more advanced than the Anglo Saxons living in Britain at the same time.

John Stevens and Frederick Catherwood discovered many of the cities of the Maya people.

John Stevens

Frederick Catherwood



Where we are studying: Central America

The Maya were people who made their homes in an area known as Mesoamerica which is the strip of land joining North and South America together. They shared a common culture and religion but they lived in different city-states, each with its own ruler.

		
Tikal	Chichen Itza	Palenque
Tikal is the ruin of a great Ancient Maya city which may have been called Yax Mutal. It is located in a rainforest in modern day Guatemala and was one of the most powerful Maya cities. The Tikal Temple is 47 metres high.	Chichen Itza was built by the Ancient Maya in the Northern Lowlands. It was one of the largest cities and in the centre is the Temple of Kukulcan.	Palenque was an Ancient Maya city-state found in modern day Southern Mexico. It is smaller than Tikal and Chichen Itza but has some of the best architecture and carvings. Pakal the Great ruled here.

Vocabulary and concepts

Maya—indigenous people of the Yucatan peninsula and Central America

Ancient—something in the very distant past

Civilisation - an advanced society, culture and way of life in a particular time period

Temple—a building devoted to the worship of a God or Gods

City-state—a city and the surrounding area with its own ruler

Maize - a crop originating in Central America—known as sweetcorn to us

Cacao—seeds from a tree that you can make chocolate from

Codex—Codices—an ancient text in the form of a book

Glyphs—a character or symbol that stands for a word or part of a word

Timeline

- 2000BC
- c.1750BC – First settlements.
- 1000BC – Maya begin to form larger cities.
- 600BC – Successful farming means cities grow larger.
- 500BC – First pyramids built.
- 400BC – Evidence of writing.
- 300BC – Cities are now ruled by kings and queens.
- 400AD to 900AD – Maya golden age.
- 900AD – Some cities abandoned, new cities built.
- 1500AD – Europeans arrive.
- 2021AD – Descendants of the Ancient Maya still live today.

How I will know that I am thinking like a historian

I can explain how it is possible to know about the past, even though there is no one alive today who has experienced the Maya civilisation

I understand that people's claims about what happened in the past have to be supported by evidence.

I know that historians may interpret and explain evidence in different ways so there can be differing opinions for example why the civilisation declined.

I am able to build a picture of the past by placing the Maya within a timeline of events I have previously studied.

I show respect for people in the past even though their ideas, beliefs and way of life may seem very strange to us today.

I know the difference between a primary source and a secondary source.

Prior learning

Compare and contrast life in the Maya civilisation with that of the Anglo-Saxons.

There is some overlap in time between these societies but they were from different continents.

Historical sources I will use

Photographs, pictures, artefacts, history books, journal entries, newspaper report

Timeline

