

## Year 5 and 6 Geography and History Curriculum: Rites and Rituals

Within this topic the children will explore countries in Mayan civilization of Central America. Looking at the religious rights and the legacy of an empire that lasted over 1000 years.

### Core Knowledge

#### The Maya

This term we shall be learning about the Mayan Empire of Central America. For over a 1,000 years this civilization prospered and dominated the area of the Yucatan Peninsula (a vast area covering many modern countries such as Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras). From their amazing stone cities and temples they held sway over vast stretches of the rain forests. Then around 900 AD their civilization collapsed and faded only to be discovered by archaeologists centuries later.

#### Religion and Sacrifice

Among their many legacies, the Maya have left us intriguing glimpses into their religious beliefs which centred on their grand stepped pyramids and often involved human sacrifice to their many gods and deities, chief among these was the fire god 'Itzamna'. Priests were powerful individuals within society.

#### Mayan Society

With maize as their staple food, the Mayan were innovative farmers building terraces on steep hillsides to prevent water and soil flowing away. Water was stored in giant bottles known as Chultuns or gathered in underground caves (Cenotes). Obsidian (a volcanic glass) was highly prized, and their understanding of mathematics and record keeping was far advanced. The Haab calendar split the year into 17 months. Records were kept in books known as 'codex' using pictorial hieroglyphs known as glyphs.



### Key Vocabulary

<b>archaeologist</b>	- Someone who finds evidence from the past by digging artefacts
<b>Cenotes</b>	- Underground caves with fresh water in them
<b>codex</b>	- A book record keeping
<b>human sacrifice</b>	- The deliberate killing of people for religious reasons.
<b>innovative</b>	- New ideas, creative in thinking
<b>intriguing</b>	- Fascinating
<b>legacy</b>	- Something left or handed down by someone
<b>maize</b>	- A food crop (corn on the cob)
<b>prospered</b>	- Became successful
<b>terraced</b>	- Land cut to allow crops to grow

## Context Quiz

### Question

### Answer

Where did the Mayan empire exist?

The Yukatan Peninsula in Central America an area which is now home to modern countries Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras.

How did the Mayan farm on steep hillsides?

They used terraces to prevent water and soil flowing away.

Who was Itzamna?

Itzamna was the chief god of the Maya. He was considered the creator of the earth.

How would Mayans store rainwater?

It would be collected in large clay pots called Chultuns.

What was the staple food of the Maya?

Maize (Corn on cob).

What are glyphs?

Glyphs were a pictorial form of writing similar to hieroglyphs.

How would Mayan priests appease their gods?

By offering human sacrifices.

Water was often taken from underground caves. What were they called?

Cenotes.

We know much about the Mayans understanding of astronomy and mathematics through their books. These were given a special name. What was it?

A pictorial book known as a codex.

Whilst they calculated the length of a year as 365 days with great accuracy, Mayan year was split into 19 months and known as.. ?

The Haab.

## Useful websites to support your child with this topic



[https://www.ducksters.com/history/maya/religion\\_and\\_mythology.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/maya/religion_and_mythology.php)

<https://www.dkfindout.com/uk/history/mayans/>

[https://kids.kiddle.co/Mayan\\_civilization](https://kids.kiddle.co/Mayan_civilization)

<https://www.theschoolrun.com/homework-help/the-maya>