

Year 6 - Summer	History Knowledge Organiser
Unit of work:	Ancient Mayan Civilisation
Links to other year groups: Y5 Ancient Egypt, Y3 Stone Age	

HISTORICAL CONTEXT (within the whole school narrative)



Key Vocabulary:

civilisation—an organised society with its own culture and way of life, existing in a particular area over a particular period of time

ritual—a ceremony, often religious, with set actions performed in a set order

scribes—people paid to write things down, either as an official record or for someone else unable to write

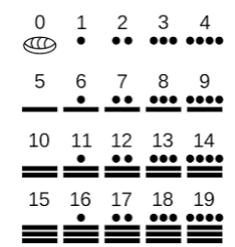
codices—ancient handwritten texts. Maya codices could be unfolded like a concertina. One text is called a codex

Mesoamerica—a historical region and cultural area in North America. It extends from approximately central Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and northern Costa Rica

artefact—an object that is made by a person, such as a tool or a decoration, that is of historical interest

The Maya were a civilisation who lived in Mesoamerica (now Central America) between approximately 2000 BCE and 900CE. They are known for being the first Mesoamericans to develop writing. They also had a sophisticated culture in which they lived in city states. They built spectacular monuments and stepped pyramids – some (e.g. Chichen Itza) have become world tourist destinations in the modern day. They were also well-known for their advanced maths and calendars. Around 900CE, Maya cities became abandoned. No one knows for sure why this happened.

Mayan Numbers 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. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks and shells. The Maya used a base 20 number system, so after number 19, multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.



Religion 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 Maya 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.

Timeline of Events:

2000 BC The Maya civilisation comes into being in Central America.

300 BC Cities, such as El Mirador, become large and powerful.

AD 900 Cities in the rainforest are abandoned due to an extensive drought. People move north.

AD 1000 Cities like Chichén Itzá are still thriving.

AD 1500s 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 document what they find, reigniting interest in the Maya civilisation.

AD 2014 The cities of Lagunita and Tamchén are rediscovered.

Sequence of Lessons	
	Brief summary of lesson content
Lesson 1	Who were the Mayans?
Lesson 2	Life in Mayan cities
Lesson 3	Religion
Lesson 4	Mayan writing
Lesson 5	Mayan number system
Lesson 6	What happened to the Mayans? Mayan legacy

