

HISTORY · Y4–Y6

The Maya Civilisation

Knowledge Organiser — Y4–Y6

Key facts and vocabulary

1

When and where

The Maya lived in Mesoamerica (present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras). Their civilisation peaked in the Classic Period (AD 250–900).

2

City-states

The Maya were organised into independent city-states, each with its own ruler (called an ajaw or king). Major cities: Tikal, Palenque, Chichen Itza.

3

Writing (glyphs)

The Maya developed one of the world's few fully developed writing systems — hieroglyphic symbols called glyphs, carved on stone monuments.

4

Mathematics

The Maya independently invented the concept of zero, and used a base-20 number system. Their calendars required advanced astronomical calculation.

5

Calendar

The Maya had two calendars running simultaneously: a 260-day ritual calendar and a 365-day solar calendar.

6

Architecture

The Maya built massive stone pyramids, temples, and palaces without metal tools, the wheel, or draft animals.



Key achievements

What made their civilisation remarkable?

- Astronomy: they tracked the movements of Venus, the moon, and the sun with extraordinary accuracy
- Mathematics: independently invented zero (like India — neither knew about the other)
- Writing: one of the only writing systems in the ancient Americas
- Agriculture: built raised fields and canals to farm wetlands
- Architecture: stone pyramids without metal tools — some align precisely with astronomical events
- Trade: long-distance networks from Mexico to Central America
- Medical knowledge: used plants for remedies, including some still used today

