

TOPIC PACKS · GRADES 4–6

The Mayans

A cross-curricular themed week

Suggested timetable

Day	Subject	Activity
Monday	Geography	Where the Mayans lived — Mesoamerica today
Tuesday	Maths	Mayan number system — base 20
Wednesday	History	Mayan achievements — astronomy, calendar, writing
Thursday	Art	Mayan glyph design and stelae
Friday	English	Mayan myths — write your own creation story

Day 1 — Mayan civilisation

Aspect	Detail
Where	Mexico (Yucatán), Guatemala, Belize, parts of Honduras and El Salvador
When peak	250–900 CE — the 'Classic Period'
Population	Estimated 2 million at peak
Cities	Tikal, Palenque, Chichen Itza, Copán
Languages	Over 30 Mayan languages — still spoken by 6 million people today



Aspect	Detail
Famous for	Pyramids, astronomy, calendar, hieroglyphic writing, mathematics

Day 1 — A misconception to fix

DEBUNK: 'The Mayans disappeared.' No they didn't. The CITIES were largely abandoned around 900 CE — possibly due to drought, war, or environmental damage. But Mayan PEOPLE are still here. Around 6 million people in Central America speak a Mayan language today, and many practise traditional Mayan customs. The Mayans never disappeared — their civilisation just changed form.

Day 2 — Mayan numbers (45 min)

The Mayans had a brilliant number system using just THREE symbols: • A DOT (•) = 1 • A BAR (—) = 5 • A SHELL (∞) = 0 (the Mayans invented zero independently!) Numbers stack from bottom to top. • 1 = • • 4 = •••• • 5 = — • 7 = ••— • 12 = —•• • 19 = —————•••• ABOVE 19 they used PLACE VALUE in base 20 (we use base 10). So 20 was a dot in the second row, with a shell underneath. ACTIVITY: Children write the numbers 1 to 20 in Mayan glyphs, then try writing their birthday (day, month, year) using base 20.

Day 3 — Three big Mayan achievements

<p>Astronomy</p> <p>The Mayans tracked the movements of Venus, the Moon and the Sun with extraordinary precision — without telescopes. Their predictions of eclipses were accurate to a single day.</p>	<p>The Calendar</p> <p>Three calendars at once: a 260-day sacred calendar, a 365-day solar calendar, and a 'Long Count' that tracked thousands of years. The famous '2012 prediction' was just the end of one Long Count cycle — like our year 2000.</p>
<p>Writing</p> <p>The Mayans had the most sophisticated writing system in the Americas — over 800 unique glyphs combining sounds and meanings. Most was lost when Spanish conquerors burned their books.</p>	

Day 4 — Glyph design (60 min)

Mayan glyphs were carved on stone slabs called STELAE. Each glyph could represent a sound, a word, or a whole idea. They often included pictures of faces, animals and gods. DESIGN YOUR OWN GLYPH: Each child invents a glyph for their own name. It should: • Be roughly



square or oval • Include a face or animal element • Use bold, strong lines • Have small decorative details
PRESENTATION: Carve the design into a slab of clay (or draw it on paper coloured to look like stone). Display together as a class
STELA — a tall stone monument that tells the story of the class.

Day 5 — Mayan creation myth (60 min)

The Mayan creation story (from the Popol Vuh) tells how the gods tried **THREE** times to make humans: 1. First they made humans of **MUD** — they fell apart in the rain. 2. Then they made humans of **WOOD** — they could move but had no soul or memory. 3. Finally they made humans of **CORN** — and these were the first true humans. **WRITING TASK:** Children write their own creation myth following this pattern. The gods try several times, with each attempt failing for a clever reason, until they finally succeed. Encourage rich detail and a wise lesson at the end. (This is exactly how myths work across cultures.)

