

MAYAN FACT FILE

by Anita Loughrey

Vocabulary

Grammar

Punctuation

Composition

Real Writing, Year 6, Unit 23

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The topic is introduced to the reader through an introductory paragraph.

The **ancient** Maya were a group of people who lived in Central America around 2000 BC to 250 AD.

They started as farmers, but their **civilization** expanded when they developed and built cities. They were highly skilled at making extravagantly coloured and decorated **clothing, jewellery and pottery**.

Commas used to separate items within a list.



Cities

Each Mayan city consisted of a ball court for sport and to honour their gods, a central plaza used for ceremonies, festivals and a market, and temples connected by sophisticated roads. Tikal was the largest of these cities. The Maya created large reservoirs to store rainwater. **The only tools they had were made of flint, obsidian, shell and wood.** They had no metal tools or **equipment**.

This report is written to inform its readers about the Ancient Mayan civilisation. It describes and explains aspects of Mayan society, using a range of layout devices to structure the report. It is written using the past tense, as it is about a historical civilisation.



Agriculture

To build farms the Maya cut down large areas of rainforest, burnt the land and made **terraces** in the mountains, surrounded by low walls to keep the soil in place. They also dug ditches to drain water from the soil. The ash produced would provide **essential nutrients to make the soil fertile enough to grow crops**. They grew beans, corn and squash together. Squash grew near the ground to prevent weeds, corn grew on tall stems between the squash and beans climbed up these corn stems.

Expanded noun phrases are used to add precision, giving the reader more information about the nouns described (nutrients, number system). The authors knowledge of synonyms is used to add emphasis (eg essential rather than important)

Society

The Mayan **society** was organised into classes. They did not have a single ruler. Each city was controlled by a **noble** family, or king. With help from their advisors, who were usually priests, they formed the **government**, which decided the laws. The priests and nobles were at the **top** of the **hierarchy**. Next were the craftsmen, merchants and soldiers. Then came the farmers and at the **bottom** of the hierarchy were the slaves (**mostly criminals,**

Antonyms are used to show contrast within the paragraph.

Brackets are used to indicate where parenthesis has been added.



Nobles

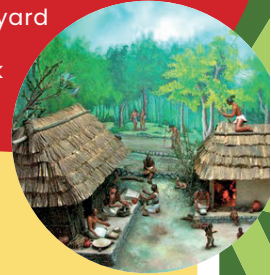
Nobles lived in stone palaces. The king lived in a raised palace at the centre of the city, decorated with carved murals of Mayan gods and geometric patterns. Mayans believed the king was the closest person to the gods, even above the priests.

orphans and prisoners captured through their constant wars). Slaves did all the manual labour.

People did not usually change class – sons of nobility became nobles, sons of merchants became merchants, sons of farmers became

Farmers

Farmers lived in wooden huts on the outskirts of the city, raised on stone or soil platforms to protect them from floods. The huts had thatched roofs made with hay and palm leaves. There were no windows, but air could pass through the wood used to make walls. If people were related, homes were built together around a shared courtyard where they would cook and eat.



Education

Nouns and pronouns are used to create cohesion across paragraphs.

The Maya developed a pictorial, base-20 number system, and were the first civilisation to use zero.

0	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24

Their writing system consisted of 800 different symbols called **hieroglyphs** that represented alphabetical sounds and ideas. They were written in pairs and columns.

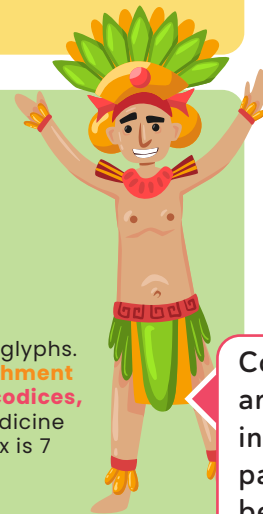


Most nobles could read and write hieroglyphs. They wrote on stone slabs or bark **parchment** folded in a zig-zag fashion, **known as codices**, on subjects like astronomy, history, medicine and nature. The oldest remaining codex is 7 metres long.



Children did not go to school. At the age of five they worked with their parents. The men would tend the farms. The women would make crafts and work at home, looking after children, cooking, and weaving clothes from cotton and alpaca wool.

Commas are used to indicate where parenthesis has been added.



Headings, subheadings, diagrams and illustrations are used throughout to structure the text.

Hyphens are used to avoid ambiguity.

Religion



Mayan pyramid with a temple on top

Buildings

Temples were built on top of **four-sided**, stepped pyramids, to be nearer to the gods. They were situated for the best views of the sky, as the Maya believed the gods could be read in the stars, moon and planets. Events were planned around times in the year when certain planets were visible. The city of Chichen Itza has its own observatory on top of a pyramid.



The observatory at Chichen Itza

Priests

The priests were powerful as they interpreted the will of the gods, decided whom people should marry, and when they should plant their crops or go to war. They buried their dead with valuables to offer to the gods, so they would be treated well in the afterlife.

Religious ceremonies would last over six hours. The Maya believed the gods would be angry if they did not perform each of their ceremonies at the right time.

Beliefs

By looking at codices and **murals**, archaeologists have found that the Maya performed human **sacrifices**. Blood gives life, so this was **the most precious gift to offer**. The heart and blood would be cut out whilst the sacrifices were still alive to keep the gods strong, so they would protect them. They worshipped over 165 different gods and goddesses that symbolised different aspects of life from the weather, to the harvest, through to death.

An expanded noun phrase is used. The noun 'gift' is expanded with determiners (the most), an adjective (precious) and prepositional phrase (to offer).



Chac - the god of rain, thunder and lightning;



Ix Chel - the goddess of childbirth, healing, weaving and the moon, wife of Itzamna, capable of causing floods and devastation;



The Maya played a ball game to honour their gods. The aim was to throw a heavy ball through the hoop at one end of the ball court. Players could only touch the ball with their hips, feet and arms. The losing team members



The ball hoop at Chichen Itza

Tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary, and statutory spelling words are used throughout the model text.

Mayan Calendars

A relative clause is used to add additional information about the calendar. In this example, the relative pronoun is omitted (which is).

The Maya would record important dates on a calendar, using their knowledge of astronomy. They had a religious calendar, **called the Tzolkin**, made up of 260 days, and a 365-day Haab calendar, used by the ordinary people. This was divided into 18 months of 20 days each, with 5 days at the end, which were considered unlucky.



These calendars were used to predict important events. Codices show the Maya believed the universe would be destroyed and recreated at the beginning of each long count cycle of 2,880,000 days. The last Mayan cycle fell on 21st December 2012 and some people believed the world would be destroyed by **a dramatic catastrophe** at that point, but nothing happened, and Earth survived.

A noun phrase is used to add precision. Vocabulary is carefully chosen to add precision and emphasis.

Bullet points are used as an organisation device to list important information. They are introduced using a colon and each bullet point is punctuated with a capital letter and full stop as it is a complete sentence.

What happened to the Maya?

The Mayan civilisation mysteriously disappeared after the Spanish conquests of the 16th century, but nobody knows why. **Archaeologists have many theories:**

- **Some say the Maya were all killed by war with neighbouring nations.**
- **Others suggest there was an environmental catastrophe like drought.**
- **Others think they died of a terrible pandemic.**
- **Some argue they ran out of resources and were unable to provide for themselves.**

Their disappearance may have been caused by combination of these factors.

The Maya have left many clues for historians to learn how they lived and worked, showing how highly skilled they were. Many temples and artefacts survive today, explored by tourists and archaeologists as we continue to learn about and understand this ancient civilisation.



Glossary

agriculture – practice of farming, including cultivation of the soil for the growing of crops and the rearing of animals to provide food, wool, and other products;

archaeologist – someone who studies human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts and other physical remains;

government – group of people with the authority to govern a country;

hierarchy – a system where people are ranked according to their status;

pandemic – a disease over the whole country;

sacrifice – the act of killing an animal or person or giving up a possession as an offering to a god;

society – a community of people living in a particular area with shared laws and customs.

A glossary is used to explain the meaning of key vocabulary used within the report.