

Ellie's Expedition: The Secrets of the Maya

Learning objective: To develop historical understanding of the Maya civilisation, focusing on their environment, achievements, and daily life.

Read the passage carefully, then answer the questions below. Ensure you use evidence from the text to support your answers.

Ellie the elephant, our expert historian, has trekked deep into the dense rainforests of Central America to uncover the wonders of the ancient Maya civilisation. Unlike a single kingdom, the Maya lived in independent city-states, each ruled by powerful kings. They were master builders, constructing enormous stepped pyramids that pierced the emerald canopy of the forest. To support their growing population, they developed advanced farming techniques, including clever irrigation systems to manage water during the dry seasons.

The Maya were also brilliant mathematicians and scientists. They developed a unique writing system made of complex symbols called hieroglyphs and were obsessed with the movements of the stars. By studying the night sky, they created incredibly accurate calendars. Every market day, people would trade goods like jade, colourful feathers, and cacao beans using a barter system. While we use £1 and £2 coins today, the Maya valued these natural resources highly. Ellie marvels at their ability to thrive in such a challenging environment without the use of metal tools or the wheel, leaving behind a legacy that still fascinates historians today.

Word bank: civilisation · rainforest · hieroglyphs · astronomy · temples · irrigation · architecture · basalt

1. Identify two items that the Maya people commonly traded in their markets. (2 marks)

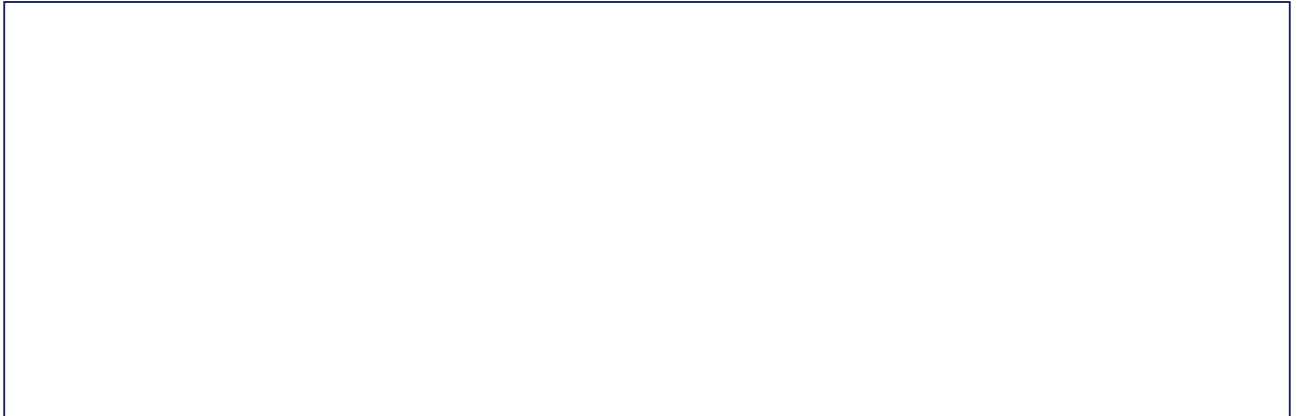
2. What type of structures did the Maya build that were so tall they reached the rainforest canopy? (2 marks)

3. Explain why the Maya had to develop advanced irrigation systems. (3 marks)

4. What does the text suggest about the importance of the stars and planets to the Maya people? (3 marks)

5. Ellie describes the Maya as a 'brilliant' civilisation. Do you agree with this statement? Justify your opinion using at least two examples from the text. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a bustling Maya market scene, including a tall stepped pyramid in the background and traders exchanging goods like jade and cacao beans.



Extension challenge: Greater Depth Challenge: 1. Compare and contrast the Maya method of trade with our modern system using £ sterling. 2. What might have happened to Maya city-states if they had not developed accurate calendars? 3. Justify why the lack of metal tools makes Maya architecture even more impressive. 4. If you were a Maya king, would you prioritise building temples or improving water systems? Explain why. 5. Imagine you have discovered a hidden Maya scroll. Describe three symbols you might find on it and what they represent. 6. Research and explain why the Maya civilisation is considered a 'civilisation' rather than just a small tribe.