

Ellie's Maya Mystery: Sorting the Civilisation

Learning objective: To identify, categorise, and analyse key features of the Ancient Maya civilisation, including their achievements, society, and environment.

Ellie the Elephant has been busy researching the Maya. She has collected a variety of facts about their lives in the rainforests of Mesoamerica. Sort the items in the list below into three categories: 'Daily Life & Farming', 'Achievements & Science', and 'Religion & Society'. Once you have categorised them, use your historical knowledge to answer the deeper thinking questions.

Word bank: Maize farming · Hieroglyphic writing · Step-pyramid temples · Observing the stars · Chocolate drinks · Kings and queens · Terraced farming · Complex calendars · Ball games · Stone carvings

1. Choose two items from your 'Achievements & Science' category. Explain why these suggest the Maya were a highly advanced society for their time. (3 marks)

2. The Maya lived in dense rainforests. Justify why 'Terraced farming' was a clever solution to the challenges of their environment. (2 marks)

3. Compare and contrast the role of a Maya King with a leader in a modern UK city. How are their responsibilities similar or different? (3 marks)

4. What might happen if the Maya had not developed a complex calendar system? How would this affect their agriculture and religious festivals? (3 marks)

5. If you were a Maya archaeologist, which of the items in our list would you be most excited to find in a ruin? Explain your reasoning. (2 marks)

6. Looking at the Maya diet, they used cacao beans to make a bitter chocolate drink. If this drink was sold in a market for £2.50, and you bought three cups to share with your friends, how much change would you receive from a £10 note? (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a scene of a Maya city square. Include one step-pyramid temple, a ball court, and a market stall selling maize and cacao beans.



Extension challenge: Design your own Maya-style hieroglyphic symbol that represents a modern object, such as a computer or a bicycle. Write a short paragraph explaining the meaning behind your symbols and why they are important to your 'civilisation'.