

The Secrets of the Maya Civilisation

Learning objective: To develop reading comprehension skills by retrieving information, inferring meaning, and evaluating historical concepts regarding the Maya civilisation.

Read the passage carefully, then answer the questions below using full sentences. Think like Ellie the elephant—remember the details and look for the deeper meaning in the history!

Deep within the dense rainforests of Central America, the Maya civilisation built a magnificent society that thrived for centuries. Ellie, our history expert, explains that the Maya were brilliant innovators. Instead of one single kingdom, they lived in independent city-states, each ruled by powerful kings. They are perhaps best known for their towering stone temples, which rose high above the canopy to reach the heavens. The Maya were also expert mathematicians and astronomers. They developed a complex writing system using symbols called hieroglyphics and created a highly accurate calendar by observing the movements of the stars. They grew crops like maize, beans, and squash, which allowed their population to flourish in the tropical climate. While their cities were eventually abandoned, the legacy of the Maya remains. Today, archaeologists still uncover hidden tombs and colourful murals that tell the story of a people who were masters of engineering and art. By studying these ancient ruins, we learn how human ingenuity can transform even the most challenging environments into a thriving home.

Word bank: civilisation · archaeologist · hieroglyphics · astronomy · temples · rainforest

1. Identify two types of crops that the Maya people grew to help their population flourish. (2 marks)

2. What two scientific or academic fields were the Maya people experts in, according to the text? (2 marks)

3. Why do you think the Maya built their stone temples so high that they rose above the rainforest canopy? (2 marks)

4. Based on the text, what does the word 'abandoned' suggest about what happened to the Maya cities? (2 marks)

5. Why is it important for archaeologists to continue studying the ruins of the Maya civilisation? Justify your answer. (3 marks)

Draw: Draw a towering Maya temple surrounded by lush rainforest trees. Include some hieroglyphic symbols carved into the stone walls.



Extension challenge: Research the Maya number system. Can you write your age using their symbols for dots and lines?