

The Maya Civilisation: History Assessment

Learning objective: To evaluate understanding of the social structure, technological achievements, and daily life of the ancient Maya civilisation.

Read each question carefully. Use your historical knowledge to provide detailed answers. Remember to use formal historical vocabulary where appropriate.

Ellie the elephant has been studying the ancient Maya, who lived in the tropical rainforests of Central America. Unlike a single country with one ruler, the Maya lived in independent city-states, each with its own king. They were masters of mathematics, astronomy, and complex writing, building towering stone structures that rose above the jungle canopy to touch the sky.

Word bank: Hieroglyphs · Chichen Itza · Astronomer · Maize · Stepped pyramid · City-state · Polytheism · Obsidian

1. Identify two staple foods that were essential to the Maya diet and explain why they were important for sustaining large populations. (2 marks)

2. Describe the political structure of the Maya civilisation. Why is it inaccurate to describe the Maya as a single unified empire? (3 marks)

3. Explain the significance of Maya hieroglyphs. How did this system of writing allow the Maya to preserve their history? (2 marks)

4. Compare and contrast the role of a Maya priest with that of an astronomer. How did their duties often overlap in Maya society? (4 marks)

5. Justify your answer: Why were the Maya able to build such massive stone structures like stepped pyramids without the use of metal tools or pack animals? (4 marks)

6. What might happen to a Maya city-state if a prolonged drought occurred? Consider the impact on the ruler's authority and the daily lives of the farmers. (5 marks)

7. If you were an archaeologist discovering a new Maya site, what item would you hope to find to tell you the most about their trade networks? Explain your choice. (5 marks)

Draw: Draw a labelled diagram of a Maya stepped pyramid, including the temple at the top and the surrounding plaza. Label at least three features.



Extension challenge: Total: /25. Write a short journal entry from the perspective of a young Maya scribe living in a city-state, describing a day spent recording events on a stone stela.