The Maya Civilisation: People of the Rainforest

Learning objective: To understand the location and lifestyle of the ancient Maya people.

Read the text carefully and answer the questions below using full sentences.

Ellie the elephant has been reading about the Maya people, who lived over a thousand years ago in the thick, green rainforests of Central America. Unlike one single country, the Maya lived in many different city-states. Each city was built around a large central plaza where people met to trade items like jade and colourful feathers. The Maya were famous for building huge stone pyramids with temples on top, which touched the clouds above the trees. They were clever farmers who grew maize, beans, and squash to feed their families. They even had their own way of writing using beautiful symbols called hieroglyphs. The Maya studied the stars and created very accurate calendars to help them know when to plant their crops. Their civilisation was full of mystery, art, and incredible buildings that still stand hidden in the jungle today. Ellie loves how they used the natural world to build such a powerful society without modern machines.

Word bank: civilisation · rainforest · temple · pyramid · maize · hieroglyphs

1. What are the three main crops that the Maya farmers grew? (2 marks)

2. What were the special symbols used by the Maya for writing called? (1 mark)

3. Why do you think the Maya needed to study the stars and create calendars? (2 marks)

4. What does the text suggest about how the Maya cities were organised? (2 marks)

5. If you were a builder in an ancient Maya city, what part of their architecture would you find most impressive and why? (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a tall Maya pyramid rising above the green trees of a rainforest. Add some colourful birds or plants nearby.

Extension challenge: Research one other ancient civilisation, such as the Ancient Egyptians or the Romans, and write three facts comparing them to the Maya.