

## Knowledge Organiser—Year 6

How does modern life compare with that of the Ancient Mayans?

### Vocabulary

**Maize:** a cereal grain (corn) which was the staple food of the Mayans. It was so important that they even had a maize god.

**Pok-a-tok:** a game where large rubber balls were aimed at stone hoops. Losers were sometimes sacrificed to the gods!

**Cacao:** these are beans which come from cacao trees. The trees sprout pods directly from their trunks, which are used to make chocolate.

**Currency:** a system of money used in a particular country or civilisation.

**Vigesimal number system:** the Mayan number system was based on the number 20.

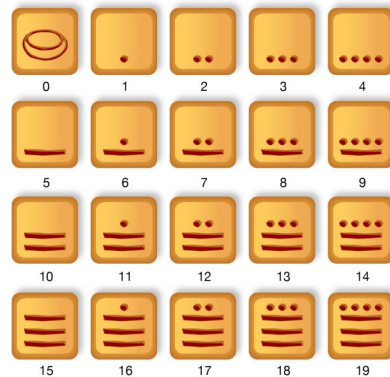
**Civilisation:** human society which is organised.

**Artefact:** an object that is made by a person, such as a tool or a decoration, especially one that is of historical interest.

**Sacrifice:** the slaughtering of an animal or human as an offering to please a god or gods.

**AD:** the Latin phrase 'Anno Domini' which is used in dates and means 'In the year of our Lord'. In the western calendar, this is used to date any event that happened after the birth of Jesus.

Mayan numeral system



Cacao pod

Maize



### Key facts

**The Maya and numbers:** the Maya had a good understanding of numbers and they developed a complex number and counting system which was advanced for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero and this allowed them to develop a place value system where a zero could act as a place holder in large numbers. This enabled the Maya people to distinguish between numbers like 23 and 203. This is a very important concept which many civilisations did not understand until much later than the Maya.

**Maize:** maize (or corn) was the main food of the Maya people and made up to 80% of their diet. To plant the maize, holes would be made in the soil with a sharp bladed, wooden digging stick called a dibble. The soil was very dry and if the May rains didn't come, a whole year's crop would be lost.

**Chocolate:** the Maya were using cacao beans to make a chocolatey drink from as far back as the fourth century AD. However, it was not the sweet, chocolate flavour we like today, but a more bitter tasting version, often laced with chilli or vanilla and other spices. The drink was enjoyed by the rich and noble members of society, and the cacao beans were highly valued. They were even used as a form of currency later on in Maya history (after 1100 AD). The Maya also used chocolate in religious ceremonies, and they also mixed cacao with herbs to make medicines.

**Chocolate fact:** the Maya word for chocolate was 'Kakaw'.

**Number system fact:** the Mayans only used three symbols in their number system, which are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with such as pebbles, sticks and shells.