



Knowledge Organiser—Year 6

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

Vocabulary

Mesoamerica: the name of the area in which the Mayans lived. In modern times this is southern Mexico and Central America.

Civilisation: an advanced society with laws, culture, common language, established food provisions and protection for people.

City state: a city with its own ruler, government and laws. The Maya civilisation was based on city states.

Archaeologist: someone who studies history by excavating sites and examining artefacts

Drought: a long period of time with very little or no rain

Maize: a cereal grain also known as corn. It was the most important part of the Maya diet.

Priest: a religious leader who performs the sacred rituals of a religion

Ritual: a ceremony where specific actions are performed in a set order

Stelae: tall carved pillars found in Maya cities. The singular is **stela**.



Where the Maya lived



Chichen Itza



Maize

Key facts

The Ancient Maya civilisation began thousands of years ago, starting around 2000BCE and lasting until around 1500AD. It was brought to an end when the Spanish invaded and conquered during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Maya were a very advanced society in their time—writing, science and art were all part of their lives. The Maya were one of only two civilisations to recognise and record the concept of zero when using number.

The Maya built large pyramids with steps up the faces and a flat surface at the top where a temple was built. Rituals would be carried out here by the priest so that everyone could watch. Chichen Itza, in modern Mexico, is one of the most famous pyramids still standing.

Religion was important to the Maya and they had many gods. One of the most important ones was Hun Ixim, the maize god, as maize (corn) was one of their main foods. The Maya believed that the Earth was a large, flat disc resting on the back of a crocodile.

The Maya were very successful farmers—they learnt to clear forests so that they could create farmland to grow crops and they understood how to look after the soil to keep it fertile.

Maya is used to describe the people, artefacts and culture of the civilisation. There is no difference between plural and singular. The word *Mayan* is used when referring to the language spoken by the Maya people.

Although the Maya were conquered by the Spanish, much of their civilisation had disappeared long before this. No one knows for sure why this happened, but there are various theories including war, not being able to trade with other cities and drought.