



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.

Climate: what the weather is like generally over a long period of time

Tropical zone: the area of the Earth around the equator that lies between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn

Cenote: a large, naturally formed hole in the ground filled with water

Crop: plants grown on a large scale that are harvested to be sold or eaten.

Staple crop: a crop that makes up the main part of the food eaten in a region or country

Deforestation: the deliberate clearing or cutting down of forests over an area of land to make way for other land use.

Rainforest: an area of tall, mostly evergreen trees with a high level of rainfall

Slash and burn: a farming method where the land is burnt to produce ash to fertilise the soil.

Terracing: cutting land on a slope into flat areas so that crops can be grown more easily



Mesoamerica



Cenote



Jade mask of Pakal the Great

Key facts

Originally, the Maya were hunter gatherers who did not stay in one place. It was only when they learned how to farm that they began to build the magnificent cities we know of today.

Some of the biggest cities in the south were abandoned about six hundred years before the Spanish invaded. The people who lived there moved north, but no one knows for sure why this happened.

The area the Maya lived in is now the modern countries of Belize, Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador and Honduras.

Maya territory was divided into three main regions. The southern lowlands were covered in tall trees and lush jungle; the northern lowlands were very hot and dry while the southern highlands were a mountainous area with volcanoes.

The Maya were forgotten about for many years until a pair of explorers, John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, found the ruins of some of the great Maya cities such as Copan and Tulum.

The Maya did not have vehicles with wheels or animals, such as horses or oxen, to help them move heavy objects like stone for building. We think they may have rolled blocks of stone along on log rollers which were pulled along.

There are still about six million Maya living in Central America today. They speak the same language as the ancient Maya and still use the ancient calendar of their ancestors.

Farming presented a challenge due to the variety of different terrains: some were very steep hills while some were swamps. They developed three main methods of farming to suit the different terrains.