KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

HISTORY YEAR 4

How did the achievements of the ancient Maya impact their society and beyond?

MY LEARNING JOURNEY

1. How did Maya people settle in a rainforest?
2. What do remains reveal about cities?
3. What did the ancient Maya believe?
4. How did beliefs influence inventions?
5. Why was cacao important?
6. Why did some Maya cities decline?

Previously, I learnt to…

- Locate ancient Egypt in time and place.
- Explain how landscape shaped life.
- Use sources to explore Egyptian beliefs.
- Explain how evidence helps historians.

In this unit, I am learning…

- ❑ Sequence Maya periods alongside British history.
- ❑ Explain rainforest settlement challenges.
- ❑ Describe Maya cities, beliefs and inventions.
- ❑ Make inferences from archaeological remains.
- ❑ Compare possible causes of city decline.
- ❑ Explain how archaeologists, archivists and historians build knowledge.

Looking ahead: In Year 5, I will learn…

- Compare Maya and Greek civilisations.
- Investigate Greek beliefs and government.
- Explain the impact of Greek achievements.

VOCABULARY

Word	Meaning
achievement	A significant accomplishment or contribution that had a lasting impact.
ancient	From a very long time ago.
archaeologist	Someone who studies the buildings, graves, tools and other objects of people who lived in the past.
civilisation	A large group of people with a common language, way of life or governance.
creation	Something being made.
currency	The type of money that a country uses for buying and selling goods and services.
decline	A situation where something becomes less important or successful.
Mesoamerica	A historical region covering parts of Mexico and Central America.
ritual	A set of actions or ceremonies performed in a fixed way, sometimes for religious purposes.
theory	An idea that is intended to explain facts or events, often based on some evidence.

Maya · Year 4

Maya and Britain: overlapping histories (periods are approximate)

Maya period	Dates	Britain at the same time
Pre-Classic	c.2000 BC–AD 250	Bronze Age, Iron Age, then Roman Britain
Classic	AD 250–900	Roman rule, Anglo-Saxons and early Vikings
Post-Classic	AD 900–c.1524	Later Anglo-Saxons, medieval and early Tudor England

Rainforest cities

Maya communities lived in Mesoamerica. Farmers cleared land and grew maize and cacao. Cities such as Tikal had temples, palaces and ball courts around plazas: large open squares. Archaeological remains reveal their layout.



Beliefs and achievements

Maya people worshipped many gods. Creation stories, ceremonies and the ball game expressed beliefs. Calendars supported festivals and farming. Writing, mathematics and astronomy helped record and understand their world.

Why cacao mattered

Cacao made a valued drink and featured in ceremonies. Beans also served as a means of exchange. Decorated vessels and residues provide evidence of its use. What can the vessel tell us, and what needs more evidence?



Why some cities declined

From around AD 800–900, some Classic cities lost people and power. Possible causes include drought, warfare and pressure on resources. Historians compare evidence for several explanations. Other cities continued; Maya people live today.

How we build knowledge

Archaeologists investigate material remains. Archivists care for records and help people find them. Historians interpret and compare evidence. New discoveries can change an explanation. Spanish conquest was a later process, from the 1500s, not the cause of the earlier Classic city decline.

My judgement: Which explanation is best supported? Identify evidence, an alternative and a remaining uncertainty.