Maya Civilisation

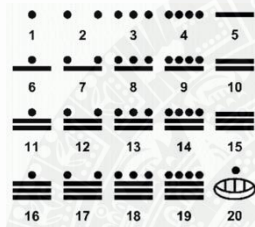Continents and Oceans

MAP OF THE MAYA WORLD

Key Information

Climate in Central America
The weather of Central America is dominated by distinct wet and dry seasons. All of the countries are generally hot and humid all year-round. Thunderstorms are a normal spring and summer occurrence.

Physical Geography of Central America
It is mostly made up of a series of mountainous areas with fertile valleys in-between.

Their numerical system was possibly the most advanced at the time.

Maya Calendar
Time was extremely important to the Maya, they made elaborate calendars and used them in charting the movements of the sun, moon, starts and even plants. These calendars served a variety of purposes both practical and sacred. They were used in astronomical calculations, recording important events, the reigns of rulers and their conquests and also in divination.
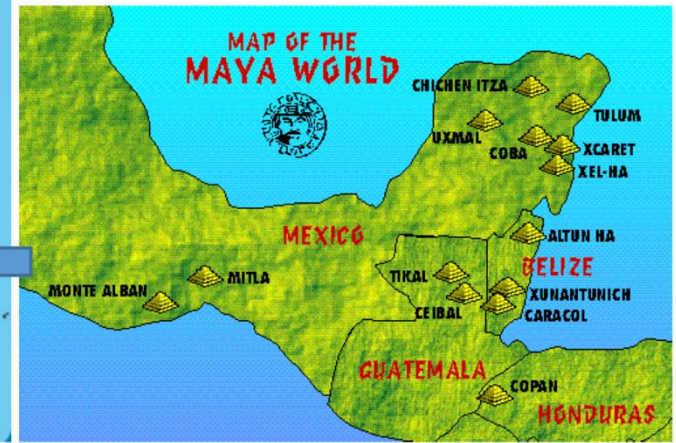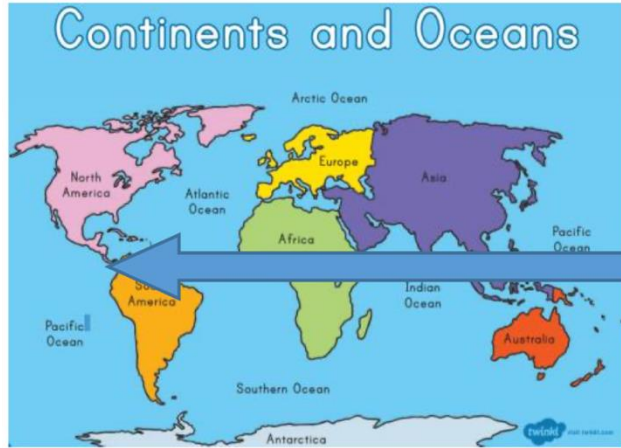They Maya used what is now known as the calendar round which is made up of 3 interlocking cycles. A cycle of 20 names, a cycle of 13 numbers (which forms the 260-sacred calendar) and a 365 days solar system. 52 year will pass until the three cycles line up again.

Religion
The Maya believed in a large number of nature gods. Some gods were considered more important and powerful than others. They built a number of pyramid style temples to worship these Gods and believed in the power of sacrifice (including humans!) The most famous of these temples could be found in the city of Chichen Itza.

Social Class
There were 5 social classes in Maya times. These were Rulers, followed by nobles and priests, then craftsmen, peasants and finally the slaves. Each major city had a ruler and the position was passed down through the family. Priests were actually the most powerful people in Maya society. The peasants were generally the farmers who lived outside the city.

Summary

- The Maya were a civilisation who lived in Mesoamerica (now Central America) between approximately 2000 BCE and 900 CE.
- They are known for being the first Mesoamericans to develop writing. They also had a sophisticated culture in which they lived in city states.
- They built spectacular monuments and stepped pyramids – some (e.g. Chichen Itza) have become world tourist destinations in the modern day.
- Around 900CE, Maya cities became abandoned. No one knows for sure why this happened.

Key Words

Maya – The name to the people of that time in Central America.
Mayan – The language spoken by the Maya people.
Maize – A grain that made up 80% of the Maya diet.
Hieroglyphs – Symbols or pictures used to represent words.
Vigesimal – Number system based on 20s used by the Maya people.

Key Figures

Maya Gods – The Maya worshipped many Gods including: Itzamna (God of fire who created the earth), Kukulkan (The feathered Serpent) and Chac (God of rain and lightning).

Top 5 Maya Facts

1. The Mayans predicted that the world would end in 2012.
2. Flat foreheads were fashionable, so they would put baby's heads in a press to squash them.
3. It was considered beautiful to be cross-eyed so parents would hang balls in-between their children's eyes to make them look inwards.
4. Mayans sacrificed humans for religious and medical reasons. It was an honour to be sacrificed!
5. Noblewomen would file their teeth into sharp points.