

HISTORY



YEAR 3

WHO WERE THE MAYANS?

The Big Picture

We talk about the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, but that is giving him a little bit too much credit as there were already people living there – surely they had noticed a huge continent beneath their feet! In this unit, we explore this ancient civilisation and “discover” how they lived in the tropical forests of Central America.



End Point Knowledge

- The Maya were a civilisation that developed in what is now Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. The Mayan civilisation began in 2000 BC and lasted until the Spanish colonised this area in around AD 1500.
- The Spanish Empire sent out colonisers after Columbus “discovered” the new world in AD 1492 and had seen how much gold there was.
- Religion was very important to the Maya and they had many gods, who all had a good and a bad side. The most supreme god was Itzamná, the creator god. Many gods looked after an aspect of life, such as Chac, the rain god and K'inich Ahau the sun god.
- Around AD 900, the civilisation declined and southern cities were abandoned. Historians and archaeologists do not understand exactly why, though have suggested drought, over-farming, disease, endemic warfare, mistrust of leaders or overpopulation.
- We know about this period because we have found evidence of their writing, as well as archaeological artefacts and the remains of their cities, including stepped pyramids.

Key Vocabulary

Civilisation, Maya, Mayan, Chichen Itza, archaeology, codex/codices