



1. Can I place the Maya Civilisation on a timeline in relation to other historical events?

- **Vocab:** duration, timeline, chronological order, sequence, place
- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** timeline is a useful way of sequencing events in chronological order. Last term, WW2 was placed on timeline of learning
- Know that historians use dates to place historical events on a timeline
- Know Maya Civilisation lasted from 2000BC and ended at approximately 1500AD.
- Recap: 'BC' means Before Christ and AD means 'Anno Domini', which is Latin for 'in the year of our Lord'. AD starts at the year 0
- The duration (how long something lasts) of Maya Civilisation was 3500 years
- Know what was happening in the world at the same time:
 - **Ancient Egyptians**(3100BC-332BC): building pyramids a long time before the Maya cities
 - **Bronze Age** (2500BC – 800BC): in Europe and Asia.
 - **Iron Age** (800BC-43AD)
 - **Ancient Greeks (3000BC-31AD):** writing stories and building temples while Maya were starting to grow
 - **Romans (43-476AD):** Romans were ruling Europe when Maya were building cities
 - **Anglo-Saxons (410 – 1066 AD)** arrived in Britain from Scandinavia, after Romans left
 - **Vikings (410– 1066AD):** raiding Europe while Maya cities were still strong
- **Chronology:** Place Maya Civilisation on timeline (use school history timeline of curriculum topics)

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3. Can I understand the short term and long term impact of the Maya number system?

- **Vocab:** impact, significance, short term, long term, astronomy
- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** understand why the significance of The Blitz has changed over time and understand different perspectives on its importance
- Know the Mayans developed a sophisticated mathematical system

Key facts:

Base 20 system: Maya's used a base-20 system (e.g. 1, 20, 400, 8000 etc...) whereas today we use a power of 10 (10, 100, 1000 etc...)

Symbols: Dot (•) = 1 Bar (—) = 5 Shell symbol = 0

Vertical Place Value: Numbers were written vertically, with the lowest place value at the bottom.

Zero Concept: The Maya were among the first civilisations to use zero as a placeholder, which was crucial for complex calculations and calendar tracking.

Used in Calendars and Astronomy: Know the Maya number system was essential for their Long Count calendar, which tracked vast spans of time: Know the Maya used it to calculate astronomical cycles, such as lunar phases and planetary movements (this helping with planting and harvesting crops)

Short Term Impact/Significance: The Maya could keep track of crops, trade, and taxes because they had a way to write numbers. number system helped them measure and plan huge buildings accurately. Used numbers to make very clever calendars, which helped them know when to plant crops and hold festivals.

Long Term Impact Significance: The Maya were one of the first to use the number zero that we use in science and maths today. It also helped with binary code (which runs computers for us!) The Mayan system used place value (like our tens, hundreds, thousands etc...) that helped complete big calculations Mayan maths helped create accurate calendars. Today, we base calendars and time using same approach of counting in cycles. Because they wrote numbers on stone and in books, we can learn about their dates and events now.

- **Historical Significance of Mayan number system**

0	1	2	3	4
	•	••	•••	••••
5	6	7	8	9
	•	••	•••	••••
10	11	12	13	14
		••	•••	••••
15	16	17	18	19
	•	••	•••	••••

2. Can I explain the causes and consequences of events during The Maya Civilisation and understand how they are connected?

- **Vocab:** cause, consequences, connection, 'Pre-Classic Period, Classic Period, Postclassic Period
- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** explained how the causes and consequences of World War 2 were connected
- Know key introductory facts: based in S. America, lived nearly 4000 years ago, known for building cities with pyramids, own writing system, mathematicians, astronomers, farmers, invented concept of zero
- Recap: definition of cause (why events happened) and consequences (what happened as a result) and connection
- Know the Maya Civilisation is divided into 3 main time periods (below).

2000BC-250BC: 'Pre-classic Period'

- **Cause:** Early Maya civilisations began forming. They developed agriculture (farming), villages and early forms of writing (teachers: explain there is more to learn in upcoming lessons). As they were such good farmers, there was surplus food
- **Consequence:** The population grew and people started to live in larger groups, meaning cities started to form.
- **Connection:** Farming caused extra food. Extra food meant people didn't need to move around, so they stayed in one place and built villages. Villages grew into cities.

250BC-900AD: 'Classic Period'

- **Cause:** The height of the Maya Civilisation. Some cities became very powerful e.g. Tikal (political and military power, trade route); Palenque (the religious centre)
- **Consequence:** Large temples were built and Maya culture grew
- **Connection:** Power and wealth from trade allowed rulers to build big temples to show off their strength and please the Gods.

900AD-1500sAD: 'Postclassic Period'

- **Cause:** Southern cities weakened due to droughts/climate change (impacted farming) and wars between cities
- **Consequence:** Northern cities like Chichen Itza and Mayapan became important as they joined trade routes between coasts and inland regions. Mayapan became political centre of the region
- **Connection:** When farming failed and wars broke out, people moved to places with better trade and resources.

1500-1600s: Spanish Conquest (end of Maya civilisation)

- **Cause:** 1517-1524: Spanish explorers arrived looking for gold, land and power. They had horses, guns and metal armour, which the Maya people had not seen before. The Maya fought to protect cities over a number of years but Spanish had stronger weapons
- **Consequence:** Spanish took control of Maya cities. Disease spread (e.g. smallpox), which made Maya people sick as they had not been exposed before. Eventually, the Spanish tried to change Maya religions and traditions. Maya books and temples destroyed.
- **Connection:** Spanish technology and diseases caused the Maya to lose their independence and much of their culture.

- **Cause and Consequence:** connections between the causes and consequences of events



4. Can I use evidence when comparing the similarities and differences between the Maya writing system and the modern alphabet?

- **Vocab:** similarities, differences, hieroglyphs, evidence
- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** used evidence to explain the similarities and differences between life in Britain and Germany during World War 2
- Know that as historians, evidence helps us to explain why things are similar or different
- Know key facts about Maya writing system:
 - writing system was called hieroglyphs—it was one of the most advanced writing system in Ancient America.
 - symbols represented sounds, words, or ideas — just like letters or emojis today
 - they carved glyphs into stone monuments, painted them on codices (books made of bark), and used them in temples.
 - the writing was often read in pairs, top to bottom and left to right.
 - a single glyph might mean: a syllable (like “ka” or “ma”), a whole word (like “sun” or “king”, an idea (like “time” or “war”))
- **Similarities:** Mayan had symbols that looked like meaning (e.g. sun). Modern letters have an individual sound that together make a word e.g. s-u-n.
- **Differences:**

Feature	Mayan Writing Symbol	Modern Alphabet
Type	Logograms and syllables	Letters (A-Z)
Symbol	Over 800 glyphs	26 letters
Used for...	Recording history, religion, kings	Reading, writing, communication
Appearance	Artistic and detailed	Simple and uniform
Direction	Top to bottom, left to right	Left to right (in English)

• Evidence (why are there similarities and differences)

- **Similarities:**
 - **Communication:** both forms of writing developed because people everywhere need to share ideas, record history, and live everyday lives
 - **Symbols Represent Language:** Both use symbols (glyphs or letters) to represent sounds or meanings because this is an effective way to store information.
- **Differences:**
 - **Geography:** The Maya lived in Central America, far from Europe, so their writing was developed by themselves and they didn’t borrow alphabets from other cultures (e.g. Greeks or Romans)
 - **Technology:** Maya wrote on bark-paper codices and carved glyphs into stone, so their writing was based more on pictures/images. Our modern alphabets developed alongside the printing presses and digital technology, so simple letters were more practical.
 - **Beliefs:** Maya writing was deeply tied to religion and kingship—glyphs often recorded rituals and rulers. Modern writing is mostly for everyday communication, education, and global trade.
- **Similarities and differences:** use evidence when comparing similarities/differences

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5. Can I...

- **explain what stayed the same and what changed during the Maya Civilization,**
- **show how change and continuity can happen at the same time**
- **understand the impact the changes had on people’s lives?**
- **Vocab:** change, continuity, impact,
- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** explained why some aspects of life changed during World War II while others stayed the same (food, work, school, family life)
- As historians, we know some aspect of life remain constant (continuity), while others change in history. This is the same during the Maya Civilisation

Change (Things that changed over time)

- **Cities:** At first, Maya people lived in small villages. Later, they built big cities with huge temples and palaces. After many years, some cities were left empty.
- **Rulers:** At the start, there were small leaders. Later, powerful kings ruled big areas.
- **Writing and Calendars:** The Maya started with simple writing. Over time, they made very detailed writing and clever calendars. (link back to lesson 4)
- **Trading:** At first, trade was small. Later, they traded lots of things like jade, chocolate beans (cacao), and shiny stones called obsidian.
- **Religion:** They always believed in gods, but their ceremonies and temples became bigger and more complicated.

Continuity (Things that stayed the same)

- **Beliefs:** The Maya always believed in many gods, like the sun god and the rain god.
- **Farming:** They always grew maize (corn). It was their most important food.
- **Social Classes:** Rich people and priests were always in charge. Farmers and workers stayed at the bottom.
- **Art:** They always made beautiful carvings and pictures, even though styles changed a bit.

How Change and Continuity Happened Together

- **Temples:** The Maya always built temples (same), but later they made them much bigger and taller (change).
- **Writing:** They always used symbols called glyphs (same), but they added more and made them harder to read (change).
- **Farming:** They always grew maize (same), but they learned new ways to farm like building terraces (change).

Impact of the Changes

- **Big Cities:** Life became busier and more exciting, but it also used up lots of resources.
- **Strong Kings:** Kings made cities powerful, but they also fought wars, which caused problems.
- **Environment:** Cutting down too many trees and farming too much hurt the land.
- **Collapse:** Because of wars, less food, and land problems, many cities were abandoned.

• **Continuity and Change:** understand they can happen at the same time, know the impact over long periods



6. Can I create my own historical question for investigation linked to Maya ruins?

- **Vocab:** historical enquiry, investigation, sources, architect/architecture
- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** evaluated the purpose, reliability and perspective of primary sources (propaganda posters) from World War 2
- Know that as historians, we must think of questions as it helps us to learn about the past, it makes us think critically (we don't just accept what we see straight away), it helps understand different point of view

- Know how an historian may create a question by

- Looking closely at the source and ask what it is telling them and what it is missing
- Looking for gaps, mysteries or missing/unusual details
- Thinking about the information it gives about daily life at the time
- Making it answerable with evidence (sources, not opinions)

- 3 sources that historians can use to ask questions about Maya Civilisation:

- **Source 1:** El Castillo — a carefully restored pyramid that rises up 80ft and has 365 steps
- **Source 2:** Palenque, a Late Classic Maya city known for its detailed hieroglyphic inscriptions and sculpted stone
- **Source 3:** <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crmznzkly3go>

- Note for teachers: use subheadings (possible examples below) to guide children to create their own questions

Architecture & Purpose

- Why did the Maya build pyramids like this?
- What were these buildings used for?
- How did they build such large structures without modern machines?

Daily Life & Culture

- Who lived near these ruins?
- What ceremonies happened here?
- What do these ruins tell us about Maya beliefs?

Technology & Skills

- How did the Maya design these buildings so precisely?
- What tools did they use to carve stone?

Decline & Mystery

- Why are these ruins abandoned?
- What happened to the people who built them?

- **(Task: Children stick in images of the sources and write historical questions)**

- **Historical Enquiry:** create historical questions for investigation,

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Source 1



Source 2



Source 3: (screenshot)

7. Can I show how interpretations of the Maya civilisation have changed over time and use evidence to explain which interpretation is more convincing?

ex-

- **Vocab:** interpretation, evidence, convincing, archaeologists

- **Prior learning (Autumn Term):** understand why historians' interpretations of a source could be different when researching evacuation (WW2)

- Know/recap information about the meaning of 'interpretation': the way historians understand/explain what happened in the past
- Know different historians might have different interpretations because they use different evidence or ask different questions
- Know historians use evidence to build pictures of the past, but these pictures can change as new evidence is found or as perspectives shift.

Interpretation 1: 1800s-early 1900s

- **What people thought:**

- They were peaceful people who lived in isolated jungle cities and spent most of their time studying the stars and building temples
- Their cities were thought to be quiet places, focused on religion, calendars, and learning.
- People believed the Maya didn't fight wars or have kings like other ancient civilisations.

- **Evidence:**

- Explorers like John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood (1840s) described Maya ruins as mysterious and abandoned.
- These ideas continued into the early 1900s before modern archaeology changed the view.

- **Why they thought this:**

- Early explorers found beautiful temples and pyramids deep in the jungle, often covered by trees. Many Maya cities were hidden in jungles, so they seemed isolated.
- They saw star charts and calendars carved into stone and thought the Maya were mainly interested in space and time.
- The writing system hadn't been fully understood yet, so historians couldn't read/decode the stories the Maya left behind. There was therefore little evidence of warfare or kings

Interpretation 2: Modern View of Archaeologists (late 1900s and 2000s):

- **What people think now:**

- The Maya were not just peaceful astronomers—they were builders, warriors, rulers, and traders.
- Their civilisation was connected across many cities, with governments, armies, and leaders.
- They had conflicts and alliances, just like other ancient civilisations (e.g. Romans/Egyptians)

- **Evidence:**

- Murals and carvings: Paintings and stone carvings found in temples and buildings show warriors, battles, and kings. These images tell stories of fighting between cities, showing that the Maya were not always peaceful.
- Human remains (bones). Archaeologists have found injuries on skeletons that suggest people were hurt in battles or sacrifices. Some bones show signs of violent deaths, which tells us more about Maya warfare and rituals.
- Glyphs (Maya writing): Historians have now decoded the Maya writing system, called glyphs. These glyphs tell us about rulers, wars, alliances, and important events. We now know the Maya had dynasties (families of rulers) and political rivalries.
- Lidar technology: LiDAR is a special laser scanning tool that can "see" through trees. It has revealed huge cities, roads, and farms hidden under the jungle. This shows the Maya had large populations living in cities.

- **Why this view changed:**

- We have better tools, more evidence, and we respect ancient cultures more now.

- **Reason for Interpretation:**

- Scientific excavation, deciphering of glyphs, and technological advances (e.g., LiDAR mapping).

(Task 1: explain how interpretations have changed)

Task 2: children explain which interpretation is more convincing and why)

- **Interpretation of the Past:** recognise that interpretations change overtime. Evaluate which interpretation is more convincing and why