

The Mayas

"The Rainforest Civilization"

History

- Archeologists believe the Mayas began working the land as early as 1800 B.C.E. The Mayas thrived from 250 C.E. to 900 C.E.

Geography

- The Maya civilization spread throughout southern Mexico and Central America. The Maya mainly lived in the Yucatan Peninsula.
- Land: rainforests and coastal areas.

Cities

- Cities had large central plazas and many were guarded with walls.
- The pyramid temples were the most well-known structures in Mayan cities. They were built from limestone.
- Tikal and Chichen Izta were important cities.
- They spoke a common language, but the Mayas were not unified. City-states sometimes went to war and conquered each other.

Job Specialization

- Craftsmen made jewelry, pottery, statues from limestone, weavers
- Skilled farmers; traded extra food

Agriculture- When Mayans learned to plant crops, they moved inland.

- Slash and Burn- Men cut forests down with stone axes. After the trees dried, the men cleared the land by burning the trees. The ashes provided fertilizer for the soil. Slash and burn wore out the soil quickly and the fields had to rest for 2-3 years before replanting.
- The main crop grown was corn (maize).
- Cacao plants were hard to grow, and its beans were valuable. The cacao beans were made into chocolate, and the beans were used for money.

Government

- No central government
- The Maya Empire was a collection of independent cities known as city-states. One noble family controlled each city. The ruling families had a lot of power because they had large armies.
- Control passed from father to son.
- Mayan Warriors defended the city.

Social Class

- Caste System is a social system in which you are born into a social position and cannot leave that position. In a caste system you are required to marry within your own caste.
- The rulers were at the top of the social class, and the farmers and the slaves were the lowest social class.
- Peasants made up the largest class.

Arts and Architecture

- Pottery- brightly colored
- Statues made of limestone
- Pyramids and temples

Religion

- The Maya worshipped many gods. Examples:
Itzamana- head god; believed he invented books and writing
Chac- rain god
Ahmun-corn god
- Priests were powerful and people believed they had the ability to communicate with the gods.

Writing

- The Mayas used the most advanced system of writing of the ancient Americans. They did not use an alphabet; instead they used hieroglyphs, or glyphs. Glyphs are pictures and symbols. The Mayas wrote on stone slabs called stelas.
- Mayan book is called codex. They used a fiber paper or deer hide for pages.
- Mayan Math- more advanced mathematics than what the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans used. They were the first people to use the zero. A picture of a shell was used to equal zero. A dot was used to equal one, and a bar equaled five. The number system was based on units of 20.

Public Works

- Cement- used to make strong buildings
- Roadway- layered stones, pebbles, and soil, built through jungles
- Chultunes- big hole in the ground that collected and stored rain water for the dry season
- Archway- allowed homes to be more open

Mayan Achievements

- Hieroglyphs- writing system
- Astronomy- They knew the moon phases
- Calendar- Mayas created a 365 day calendar for harvesting
- Mathematics- Created an advanced number system

End of the Mayas

- It is a great mystery of what happened to the Mayas.
- Possible theories:
 - Natural Disaster- earthquake, hurricane, diseases
 - Agricultural failure
 - Peasant revolted against the rulers
 - Outside attack