

Name: _____

Elements of Culture Worksheet

Find examples of as many elements of culture from the Maya civilization worksheet provided.

Culture being studied:

Mayan Empire

1. Food & drink: _____
2. Tools: _____
3. Shelter: _____
4. Language: _____
5. Trade (Commerce) _____
6. Beliefs: _____
7. Education: _____
8. Weapons: _____
9. Medicine: _____
10. Laws: _____
11. Recreation: _____
12. Art & Music: _____
13. Relationships: _____
14. Transportation: _____
15. Clothing: _____

Name: _____

An Introduction to the Maya Civilization

Maya Civilization Study Guide

The Maya Civilization—also called the Mayan civilization—is the general name archaeologists have given to several independent, loosely affiliated city states who shared a cultural heritage in terms of language, customs, dress, artistic style and material culture. They occupied the central American continent, including the southern parts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, an area of about 150,000 square miles. In general, researchers tend to split the Maya into the Highland and Lowland Maya.

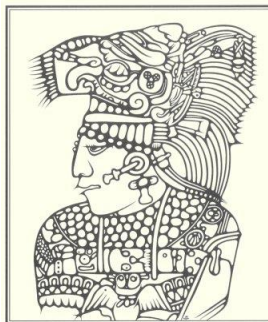
By the way, archaeologists prefer to use the term "Maya civilization" rather than the more common "Mayan civilization", leaving "Mayan" to refer to the language.

Highland and Lowland Maya

The Maya civilization covered an enormous area with a large variation of environments, economies, and growth of the civilization. Scholars address some of the Maya cultural variation by studying separate issues related to the climate and environment of the region. The Maya Highlands are the southern part of the Maya civilization, included the mountainous region in Mexico (particularly Chiapas state), Guatemala and Honduras.

The [Maya Lowlands](#) make up the northern segment of the Maya region, including Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, and adjacent parts of Guatemala and Belize. A Pacific coastal piedmont range north of the Soconusco had fertile soils, dense forests and mangrove swamps.

The Maya civilization was certainly never an "empire", inasmuch as one person never ruled the entire region. During the Classic period, there were several strong kings at [Tikal](#), Calakmul, [Caracol](#) and Dos Pilas, but none of them ever conquered the others. It's probably best to think of the Maya as a collection of independent city states, who shared some ritual and ceremonial practices, some architecture, some cultural objects. The city states traded with one another, and with the Olmec and Teotihuacan polities (at different times), and they also warred with one another from time to time.



Important Facts about the Maya Civilization

Population: There is no complete population estimate, but it must have been in the millions. In the 1600s, the Spanish reported that there were between 600,000-1 million people living in

Name: _____

the Yucatan peninsula alone. Each of the larger cities probably had populations in excess of 100,000, but that doesn't count the rural sectors that supported the larger cities.

Environment: The Maya Lowland region below 800 meters is tropical with rainy and dry seasons. There is little exposed water except in lakes in limestone faults, swamps, and [cenotes](#)—natural sinkholes in the limestone that are geologically a result of the [Chicxulub crater](#) impact. Originally, the area was blanketed with multiple canopied forests, and mixed vegetation.

The Highland Maya regions include a string of volcanically active mountains. Eruptions have dumped rich volcanic ash throughout the region, leading to deep rich soils and [obsidian](#) deposits. Climate in the highland is temperate, with rare frost. Upland forests originally were mixed pine and deciduous trees.

Writing, Language and Calendars of the Maya Civilization

Mayan language: The various groups spoke nearly 30 closely related languages and dialects, including the Mayan and Huastec

Writing: The Maya had 800 distinct [hieroglyphs](#), with the first evidence of language written on stela and walls of buildings beginning ca 300 BC. Bark cloth paper [codexes](#) were being used no later than the 1500s, but all but a handful were destroyed by Spanish

Calendar: The so called "long count" calendar was invented by Mixe-Zoquean speakers, based on the extant [Mesoamerican Calendar](#). It was adapted by the classic period Maya ca 200 AD. The earliest inscription in long count among the Maya was made dated AD 292. Earliest date listed on the "long count" calendar is about August 11, 3114 BC, what the Maya said was the founding date of their civilization. The first dynastic calendars were being used by about 400 BC



Aztec Calendar Stone

Extant written records of the Maya: [Popul Vuh](#), extant Paris, Madrid, and Dresden [codices](#), and the papers of [Fray Diego de Landa](#) called "Relacion".

Astronomy

The Dresden Codex dated to the Late Post Classic/Colonial period (1250–1520) includes astronomical tables on Venus and Mars, on eclipses, on seasons and the movement of the tides. These tables chart the seasons with respect to their civic year, predict solar and lunar eclipses and tracked the motion of the planets.

Maya Civilization Ritual

Name: _____

Intoxicants: [Chocolate](#) (Theobroma), blache (fermented honey and an extract from the balche tree; morning glory seeds, pulque (from agave plants), tobacco, intoxicating enemas, [Maya Blue](#)

Sweat baths: Piedras Negras, San Antonio, [Cerén](#)

Astronomy: The Maya tracked the sun, moon, and Venus. Calendars include eclipse warnings and safe periods, and almanacs for tracking Venus.

Observatories: built at [Chichén Itzá](#)



Maya Gods: What we know of Maya religion is based on writings and drawings on codices or temples. A few of the gods include: God A or Cimi or Cisin (god of death or flatulent one), God B or [Chac](#), (rain and lightning), God C (sacredness), God D or Itzamna (creator or scribe or learned one), God E (maize), God G (sun), God L (trade or merchant), God K or Kauil, Ixchel or Ix Chel (goddess of fertility), Goddess O or Chac Chel. There are others; and in the Maya pantheon there are sometimes combined gods, glyphs for two different gods appearing as one glyph.

Death and Afterlife: Ideas about death and the afterlife are little known, but the entry to the underworld was called Xibalba or "Place of Fright"

Maya Politics

Warfare: The Maya had [fortified sites](#), and military themes and battles events are illustrated in Maya art by the Early Classic period. Warrior classes, including some professional warriors, were part of the Maya society. Wars were fought over territory, slaves, to avenge insults, and to establish succession.

Weaponry: axes, clubs, maces, throwing spears, shields and helmets, bladed spears

Ritual sacrifice: offerings thrown into [cenotes](#), and placed in tombs; the Maya pierced their tongues, earlobes, genitals or other body parts for [blood sacrifice](#). animals (mostly jaguars) were sacrificed, and there were human victims, including high ranking enemy warriors who were captured, tortured and sacrificed

Mayan Architecture

Name: _____

The first steles are associated with the Classic period, and the earliest is from Tikal, where a stele is dated AD 292. Emblem glyphs signified specific rulers and a specific sign called "ahaw" is today interpreted as "lord".

Distinctive architectural styles of the Maya include (but aren't limited to) Rio Bec (7th-9th centuries AD, block masonry palaces with towers and central doorways at sites such as Rio Bec, Hormiguero, Chicanna, and Becan); Chenes (7th-9th centuries AD, related to the Rio Bec but without the towers at Hochob Santa rosa Xtampack, Dzibilnocac); [Puuc](#) (AD 700-950, intricately designed facades and doorjambs at Chichén Itzá, [Uxmal](#), Sayil, Labna, Kabah); and Toltec (or Maya Toltec AD 950-1250, at [Chichén Itzá](#)).

Mayan Economics

[Mayan](#) economics were based primarily on trade and agriculture. Here are some details of some of that system.

Currency: Cacao beans, copper bells, marine shells, jade beads were used as exchange media, although calling them "currency" is a bit strong, since the production of any of them wasn't controlled by a specific government

Mines and quarries: [Obsidian](#), jadeite, limestone

Lapidary arts: jadeite, marine shell, turquoise, specialized workshops, schist, in an elite context

Metallurgy: Didn't develop in Mesoamerica until 600 AD (Late Postclassic), and then it was west Mexico that developed it

Trade systems: The Maya had a fairly extensive trade network, with obsidian, jade, serpentine, feathers (quetzalcoatl birds), and ceramic vessels being traded throughout Mesoamerica. Trade connections were established with [Olmec](#) and [Teotihuacan](#); there were markets in most of the cities.

Polychrome Ceramics: Prudence Rice [argued in 2009](#) that during the Late Classic period, elite personages were the painters of the figural specialized polychrome wares, and the painting of them represented a specialized expression of state control.

Agriculture: Begins in the highlands about 3000 BC, with maize and beans, the Maya were arranged into small communities of farmers by ca 900 BC. First villages had pole and thatch houses and a few community buildings. Fields were slash-and burn at first, then home gardens and raised terraces.

In the Maya highlands, irrigation canals and terraces were constructed to adapt the local environment to agriculture; in the the lowlands, the people grew crops on raised platforms called chinampas.

Cultivated crops: [maize](#) (domesticated ca 7000 BC), beans (5000 BC), cucurbits (squash), [chili peppers](#), manioc (3000 BC), amaranth, chenopodium, palms, [cacao](#), [vanilla](#); ramon, avocado (500 BC), agave; Domesticated animals: hairless god, [turkey](#), honeybee