

DK findout!

Maya,

Incas, and Aztecs



What do you want to **findout?**

Fun Facts, Amazing Pictures, Quizzes

 **findout!**

Maya, Incas, and Aztecs



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A WORLD OF IDEAS:
SEE ALL THERE IS TO KNOW

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BCE/CE

When you see the letters BCE, it means
Before the Common Era, which began
in the year 1CE (Common Era).

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Macaw, kept
as pets by
the Incas

Maya pyramid

How to say it

Learn how to say words and the names
of gods and places from the Maya,
Inca, and Aztec civilizations using the
guide at the back of this book.



Rabbit's foot fern, used by the Aztecs for healing

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Inca ruler



Passion flower, used in Aztec medicine



Gold llama



Quechua dolls

Three civilizations

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs were great civilizations of the American continents. A civilization is a society that shares the same way of life. You can still visit the remains of their cities today, deep in jungles and high on mountains.

! WOW!

The **Incas** ruled an empire of more than **6 million** people.

Aztecs

The Aztecs were powerful people who lived in Mexico from around 1300–1500s CE. The Aztecs believed that gods controlled the world. They sacrificed humans to feed the gods, giving them energy.



Sun stone showing the Aztec Sun god, Tonatiuh, in the centre



These three civilizations stretched from southern North America to South America.

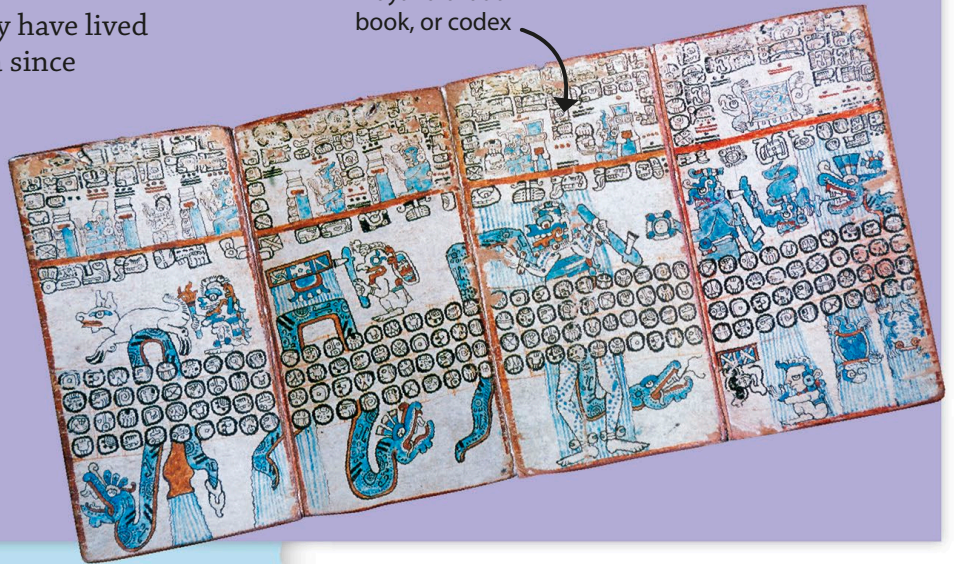
KEY

-  Aztecs
-  Maya
-  Incas

Maya

The Maya people are still around today. They have lived in Central America since around 2000BCE. They built jungle cities and created early systems of maths, science, and writing.

Maya fold-out book, or codex



South America

Incas

The Incas had an empire in South America. This means they ruled neighbouring lands. The empire began in around 1200CE and lasted until the early 1500s CE. They built cities in the Andes mountains in Peru.



The Incas mined gold to make objects such as this figure, which was left inside a tomb.

Maya

We've stepped back in time to Yucatán, Mexico, in 1500CE. This is the land of the star-gazing, pyramid-building Maya. Let's ask a couple of them about Maya life, which stretches all the way back to around 2000BCE.

Q: Is there a king of the Maya?

A: No, the Maya civilization is divided into cities, and each city has its own king. Sometimes the kings battle with each other.


Q: Can you tell us about your pyramids?

A: We hand-cut stones into blocks and slot them together. We build temples on top of the pyramids for our gods.

Q: Why do you worship gods?

A: Our gods control what goes on in the world, such as the weather. If they are upset, they might make bad things happen.





Q: How do you keep the gods happy?

A: We have festivals and make human sacrifices to different gods. To bring rain, we make sacrifices to the rain god.



REALLY?

After a battle between Maya cities, the winning king might sacrifice the losing king.

Q: How do you keep track of your history?

A: We record the days and times of battles, kings' deaths, and other events. We write the information on paper, and carve it on stone columns.

Q: Can you tell us more about your writing?

A: Our writing system is made up of glyphs, which are small pictures representing words.

Q: What are you wearing on your heads?

A: We are wearing huge headdresses. We often make them look like animals or birds.

Incas

We've time-travelled all the way back to the Inca Empire, South America, in 1500CE. At this time, the Incas have been around for about 300 years. Let's ask a couple of Incas about their world of gods, mountain-top cities, and llamas.

Q. What is an empire and how big is yours?

A: An empire is a group of lands ruled by the same leader. Our people have conquered many lands in western South America.

Q. Who is your leader?

A: Our leader is the Sapa Inca. He is sacred and has many wives, including the Mama Coya. Her son will be the next Sapa Inca.

Q. How do you build mountain-top cities?

A: We cut stone into blocks and fit them together. All ordinary Incas have to spend some time helping to build Inca roads or cities.

A: This is a spindle whorl for spinning llama fur into wool.

Q. What's that you're holding?





A: His body will be made into a mummy, or preserved. The mummy will be kept in a special store, and brought out for ceremonies.

Q. What will happen when your leader dies?

A: This set of strings is a *quipu*. It has knots to record numbers and other information.

Q. Can you tell us what you're holding?

Q. What is your most important animal?

A: We have millions of llamas for meat, milk, and wool. Llamas can also carry packs on their backs up hills.

Q. Do you mix with people from other lands?

A: We trade, or swap, goods such as cloth with other people. Some of our neighbours hate us and we sometimes go to war with them.

Aztecs

The final stop in our time-travelling adventure is the Aztec Empire, in Mexico. The year is 1518CE. The Aztecs had started out, in the 1000s CE, as a people who wandered from place to place. But they now live in bustling, built-up cities. Let's ask a warrior and a teacher about their lives.

Q: What is the Aztec Empire?

A: An empire is made up of multiple lands with the same ruler. Our ruler lives in the city of Tenochtitlan.

Q: Who is the Aztec leader?

A: Our current leader is the mighty emperor Moctezuma II. No ordinary person dares look at his face.

Q: What's it like being an Aztec warrior?

A: We fear no one in battle, and we have good weapons. If we capture enemies, we sacrifice them to the gods.



REALLY?



Aztec warriors dressed as eagles and jaguars – to look like gods and terrify enemies.

Q: Do you follow a religion?

A: We believe in many gods, who control the world. Priests keep the gods happy through human sacrifice.

Q: What kind of jobs do your people do?

A: Warriors and priests do important jobs. Local leaders run schools, food stores, and temples. Many women run their homes.

Q: How do you record Aztec history?

A: We tell stories and write them down in books. We also paint pictures and carve images in stone.

Q: Are your books like ours?

A: Not really. Our type of book is called a codex, with pages folded like a fan. We make paper from bark, and every page is handwritten.



Society

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs were all well-organized societies, divided into different levels, or classes. While the Incas and Aztecs each had an emperor at the head, Maya society was divided into cities with their own rulers, and had no single leader.

Inca society

Inca society was shaped like a pyramid. There was the emperor and family at the top. Then came the priests and nobles. Most people were at the bottom.



Wives

The emperor had many wives and children. Wives were chosen from noble families.



High priest

The high priest, or Willac Umu, was a nobleman, and was often related to the emperor.



Clan groups

Other relatives of the Sapa Inca were called *panacas*. They wore gold plugs in their ears as a mark of bravery in battle.



Emperor

The emperor was called the Sapa Inca, or great Inca. He had supreme power over land and people. The Incas believed he was a descendant of the Sun god, Inti.

Chief wife

The Sapa Inca's chief wife was often his sister. She was called the Mama Coya. Only one of her sons could be the next Sapa Inca.



Aztec men and women

Men ruled in Aztec society, but women had rights, too. A woman could inherit property after her husband died, and ask for a divorce if her marriage was unhappy. Both boys and girls went to school.



A page from a codex (book) showing Aztec parents teaching skills to their children

Priests

Men and women could be priests. The women that were chosen were called *mamakuna*. They were picked as children, and trained as temple priestesses.



Mamakuna

Lords

Local lords, or *curacas*, helped run the empire, along with officials such as accountants and tax collectors.



Curacas

Ordinary people

Ordinary people included craftspeople, farmers, soldiers, and servants. Slaves, usually prisoners of war, were right at the bottom.



Soldiers



Servants



One piece of Inca royal clothing was made out of bat hair.

Home

Most people lived in small, simple houses, either in cities or villages. While most Maya and Aztec houses had walls made from dried mud, Inca houses were made from stone.

Aztec and Maya

Forests provided wood for houses. A roof of palm leaves and branches kept out rain and sun.

Inca

Family groups lived together in stone houses. They had small windows to keep out rain and wind.

Daily life

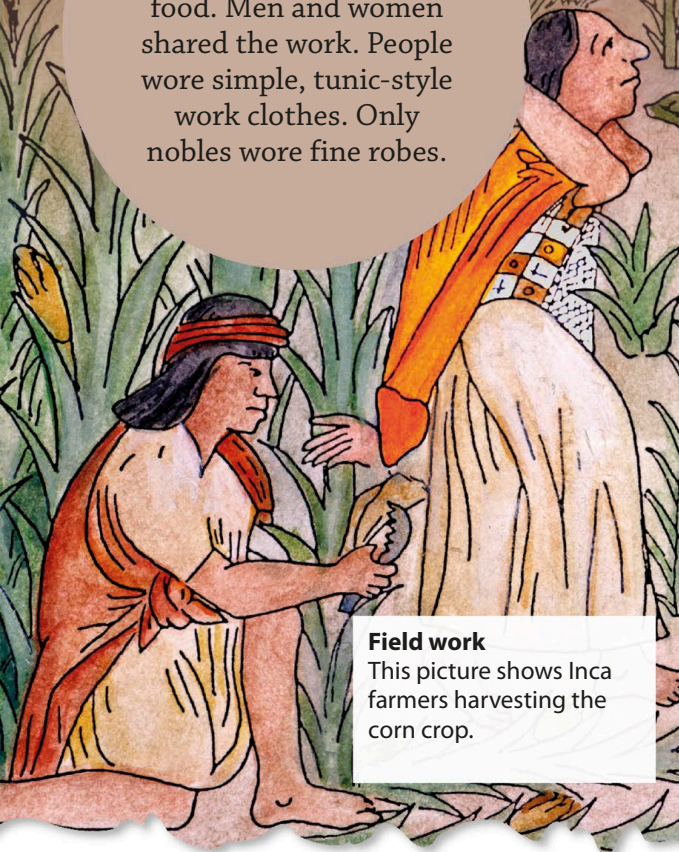
For most people, whether Maya, Aztec, or Inca, daily life meant hard work and obeying the rules. Everyone knew their duties and their place in society – men and women, rich and poor, young and old. If the gods were kind, families had a home, clothes, and enough food to live on.

! WOW!

Inca houses were specially built so that they did not collapse in earthquakes.

Work

Every day, people worked out in the fields to grow food. Men and women shared the work. People wore simple, tunic-style work clothes. Only nobles wore fine robes.

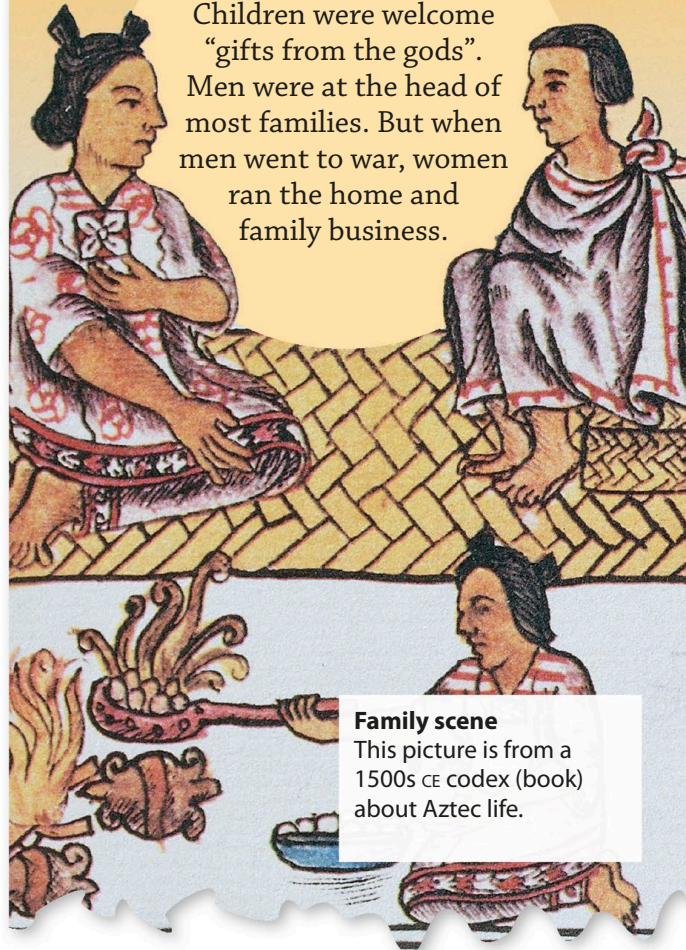


Field work

This picture shows Inca farmers harvesting the corn crop.

Families

Children were welcome “gifts from the gods”. Men were at the head of most families. But when men went to war, women ran the home and family business.



Family scene

This picture is from a 1500s CE codex (book) about Aztec life.



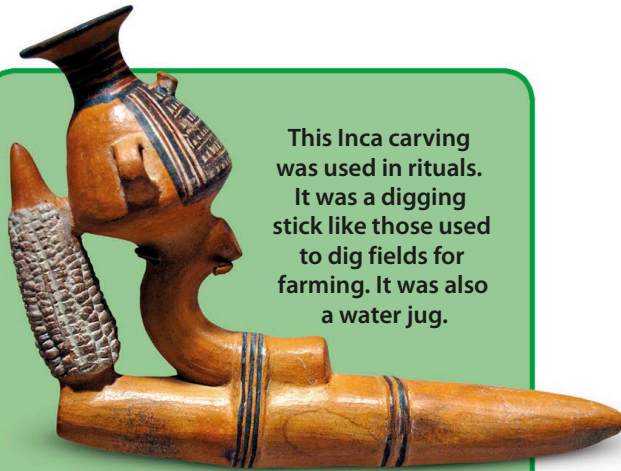
Slavery

The Aztecs and Maya owned slaves. Many Aztec slaves were captured during wars. Some very poor Aztecs chose to become slaves, and others were made slaves as punishment. Generally, slaves were not treated badly. Aztec slaves could marry. They could also buy their freedom and even own other slaves.

Aztec slaves

Farming

The Maya, Aztec, and Inca peoples were expert farmers. They tended crops on farmland ranging from warm, wet lowlands to cold, dry highlands. They farmed in the middle of lakes and on steep mountain slopes. All three civilizations grew a wide variety of plants for food, but the most important was maize.



This Inca carving was used in rituals. It was a digging stick like those used to dig fields for farming. It was also a water jug.

Farming by hand

Maya, Inca, and Aztec farmers had no machines and no horses or oxen to help them. Workers dug the land with wooden sticks. They also used foot-ploughs – these were pointed poles with foot rests. Cutting tools were made from stone or copper.

Maya

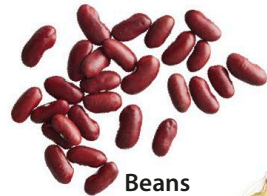
With about 10 million people to feed, Maya farmers had to work hard. Villagers got together and worked in teams. Nobles acted as farm managers. Because they lived in a warm climate, the Maya could grow all sorts of food, including hot and spicy chili peppers. This meant that their food was full of flavour.



Avocado

Aztecs

The Aztecs, too, lived in a warm land. Here, beans, pumpkin, tomatoes, and maize all grew well. They ate maize in lots of different ways, including as a paste. They also made it into a drink. They picked cacao beans to make their nobles' favourite drink: chocolate.



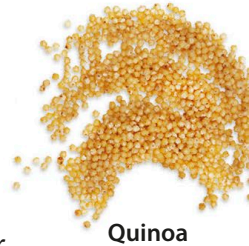
Beans



Maize

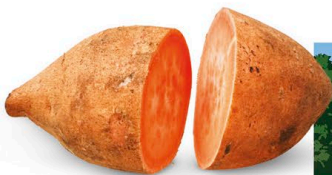
Incas

Inca men and women worked hard in teams in the Andes mountains. They often sang as they planted potatoes, a grain called quinoa, and other crops that could survive the harsh weather. Higher up in the mountains, they herded llamas and alpacas. Lower down, farmers grew squash, fruit, and nuts.



Quinoa





Sweet potato



Chili peppers



Canals

The Maya dug ditches and built canals to carry water to their fields. This farming method is called irrigation, and the Maya people were skilled at it. By making sure their crops were well watered, Maya farmers could grow enough crops to feed all their people.



Pumpkin



Tomatoes



Floating fields

The Aztecs used Lake Texcoco and marshland as extra farms. They made "floating fields" called *chinampas*. Male and female farmers planted these muddy islands with crops. The *chinampas* were kept rich and fertile with animal dung, brought by canoe from the city.



Potatoes



Terraces

To make extra farmland, the Incas built terraced fields. They had stone walls that absorbed the Sun's heat by day, and so helped to keep plants warm at night. Farmers planted in layers in the earth: first maize, then beans that would grow up the maize stalks, with squash at the bottom.

Food

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs ate some foods that you'll recognise, and some you probably won't! Growing food was a daily job for most people. They also kept animals, hunted, or went to a market to get meat and fish.

Algae



Vanilla



Flavourings

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs used chili peppers to make spicy food. The Aztecs added algae, which grows on top of water, to bread. The Aztecs and Maya loved sweet vanilla.



Chili powder

Armadillo



Iguana



Maguey worms



Insects

Crunchy grasshoppers were roasted or added to soups and stews by the Maya and the Aztecs. Caterpillars called maguey worms were also used in Maya and Aztec cooking, or as quick snacks.



Grasshopper

Quinoa



Grains

The Incas cooked quinoa seeds in porridge and stews. They also ground the seeds into flour to make bread. The Aztecs made similar dishes and breads with amaranth seeds.

Opossum



Meat

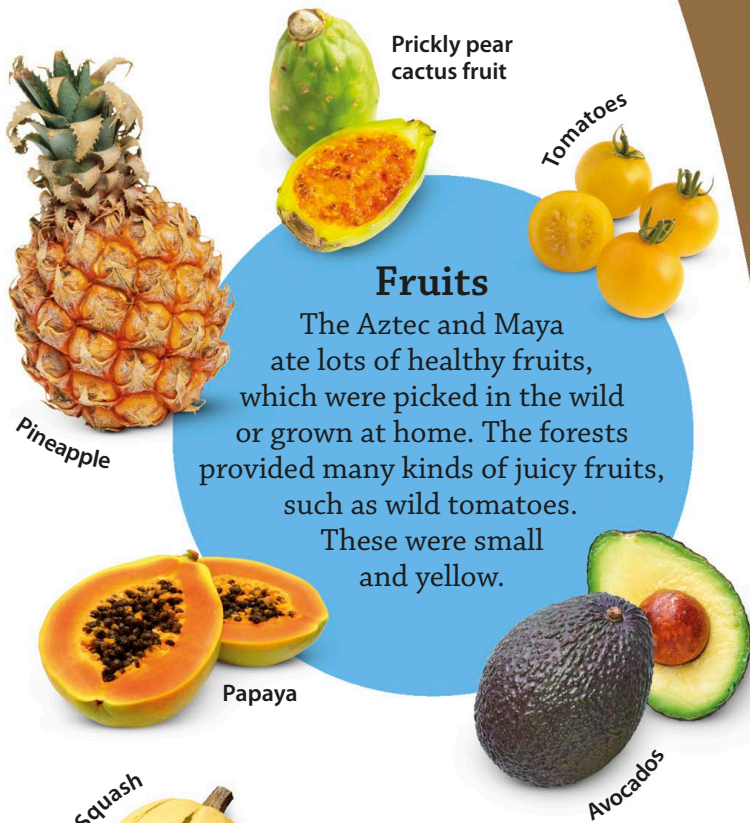
People caught fish and hunted birds and deer. The Incas lived off llamas and guinea pigs. More unusual meat included iguanas and opossums, which both the Aztecs and Maya enjoyed. The Aztecs even ate armadillos!

Amaranth



Llama





Prickly pear cactus fruit

Tomatoes

Pineapple

Fruits

The Aztec and Maya ate lots of healthy fruits, which were picked in the wild or grown at home. The forests provided many kinds of juicy fruits, such as wild tomatoes. These were small and yellow.

Papaya

Avocados



Squash



Mushrooms

Vegetables

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs all ate maize. It was eaten from the cob, or ground into flour to make tortilla bread. The Incas ate lots of potatoes, while both the Maya and Aztecs cooked squash, and all three ate mushrooms.



Maize cob



Potatoes

Chocolate

The Maya and Aztecs were the first people to turn beans from the cacao tree into drinking chocolate. Here's how they made a delicious chocolate drink!



1 Preparing the beans

Cacao beans were picked and dried in the hot sun.



2 Grinding up

The shells were peeled off and the beans were crushed into an oily powder.



3 Mixing

The powder was mixed with water. The mixture was stirred to make a foamy paste.



4 Spices and flavours

Spices were added for flavour, or honey to sweeten, and the drink was then ready!



Honeycomb

Chilies



Children

It was tough being a Maya, Inca, or Aztec child. From toddler-age, boys were taught their father's work, such as fishing, and girls learnt household skills, such as weaving. Bad behaviour was punished by parents, but families were still loving to each other.

Aztec girl with a broom



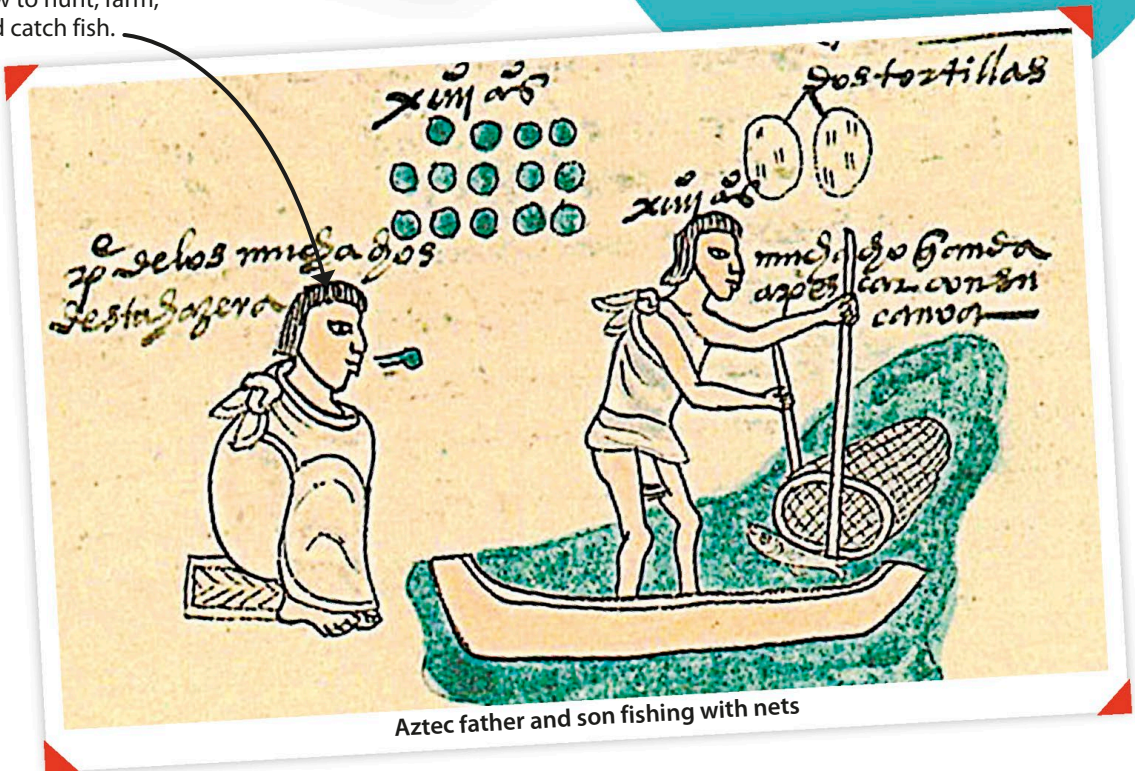
Aztec

A tiny model broom was given to baby girls as a sign of their future work – to clean the house. Girls would also do other housework, such as cooking. They were trained to do jobs such as teaching, and a few learned how to be priestesses. Children often learned their parents' jobs, such as farming. All boys trained to be warriors at military school.

Grain-grinding stone



Fathers taught sons how to hunt, farm, and catch fish.

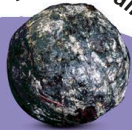


Aztec father and son fishing with nets



Inca girl holding some flowers

Rubber ball



Inca

By age nine, most young Incas could sow and harvest crops, hunt birds for feathers, and keep guinea pigs for food. They also herded llamas high in the mountains and kept pets such as macaws. When they grew up, they became more important in the community and were given new adult names.



Pan pipes

Pan pipes were made from reed, bone, or a bird's feather-quills.



Wheeled toy



Pet macaw



Maya boy practising stone carving



Stone tools

Maya

Maya boys learned crafts such as stone-carving, while girls learned weaving. There were games and toys, too, including stone marbles, rubber balls, and wheeled toys – the only wheeled vehicles the Maya had! Children sang and danced to drum and pan pipe music.

Spindles for spinning wool into thread



Weaving materials

Wool, cotton, and maguey plant thread were woven into cloth.

! WOW!

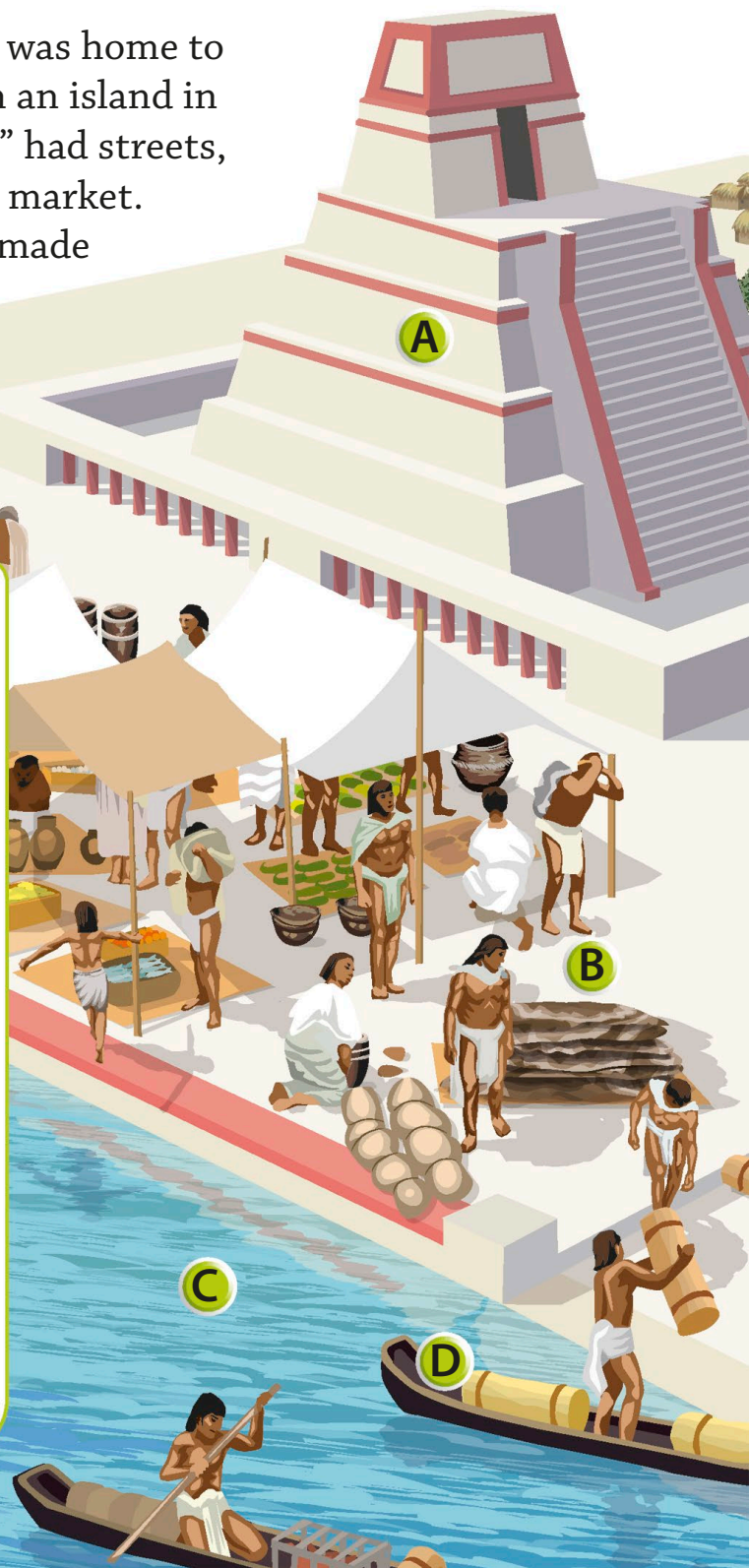
The Incas left **babies** outside in the **cold** as a test to see if they were healthy enough to **survive!**

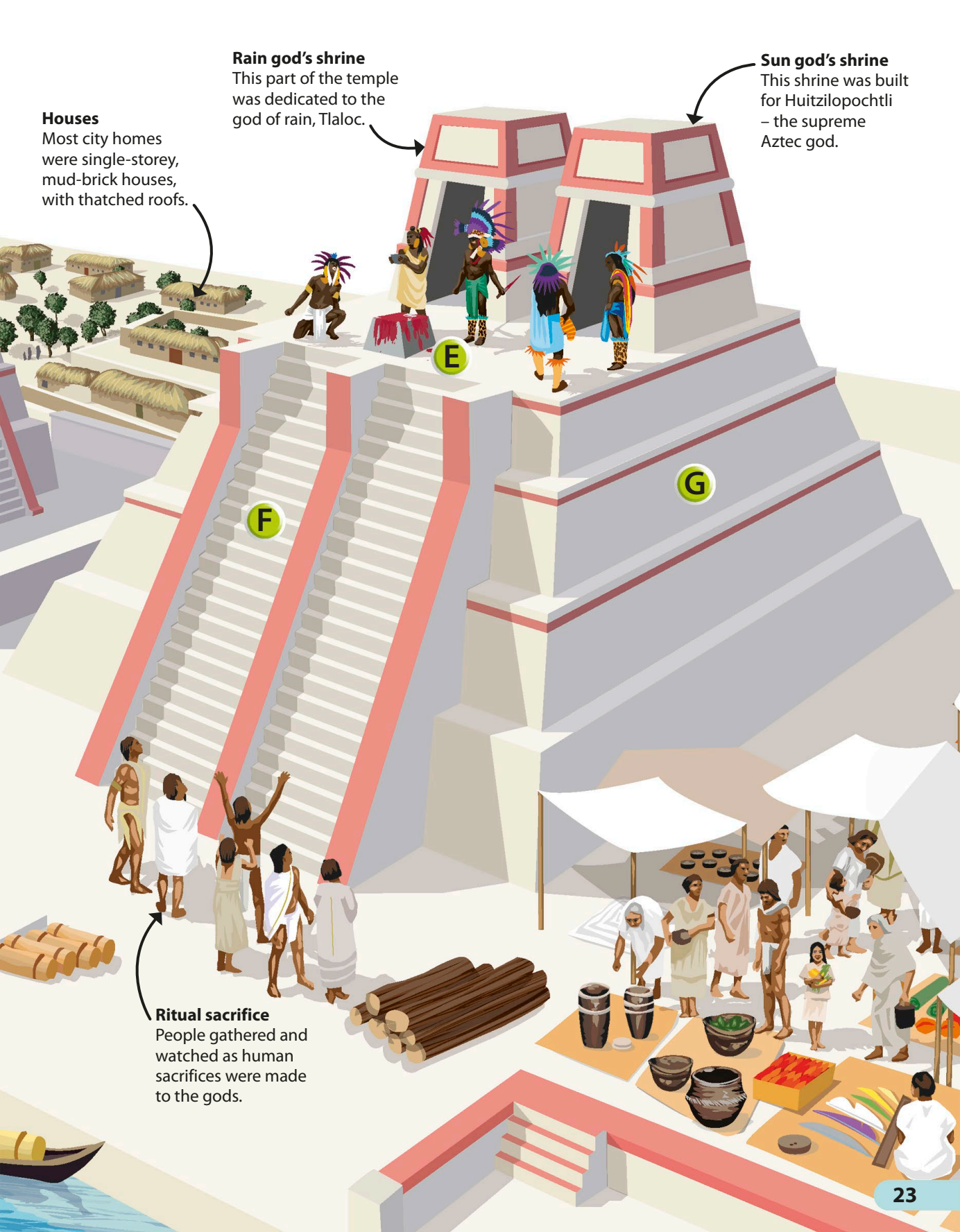
Tenochtitlan

The Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, was home to around 200,000 people. Built on an island in Lake Texcoco, this “floating city” had streets, canals, royal palaces, and a busy market. On top of high temples, priests made sacrifices to the gods.

AROUND THE SITE

- A Sacred centre** At the heart of the city were pyramid-shaped temples, and palaces for the emperor and his relatives.
- B Market** People came here to trade goods such as food, feathers, animal skins, cloth, pottery, and gold.
- C Canals** The Aztecs built canals from the centre of the city to the outskirts. They were used to transport people and goods.
- D Canoes** People paddled dugout canoes, made by hollowing out trees. Some canoes were 15 m (50 ft) long.
- E Sacrificial altar** Priests performed human sacrifices on the altar in honour of the gods.
- F Temple steps** A flight of steep steps led to the sacrificial altar at the top of the temple.
- G Great Temple** At 60 m (196 ft) high, this was the biggest of the city’s temples. It was also one of the last, finished in 1487CE.





Houses

Most city homes were single-storey, mud-brick houses, with thatched roofs.

Rain god's shrine

This part of the temple was dedicated to the god of rain, Tlaloc.

Sun god's shrine

This shrine was built for Huitzilopochtli – the supreme Aztec god.

F

E

G

Ritual sacrifice

People gathered and watched as human sacrifices were made to the gods.

Machu Picchu

This magnificent Inca site nestles high up in the Andes mountains in Peru. Built in the 1400s CE, it may have been used as a royal estate and a sacred religious place for Inca leaders. Today, visitors come to wonder at Machu Picchu's 200 buildings linked by 3,000 stone steps.



Hiram Bingham and his mule

Hiram Bingham

In 1911, US explorer Hiram Bingham trekked high into the Andes. He was searching for the lost city of the Incas, called Vilcabamba. He was led to Machu Picchu by local people.





AROUND THE SITE

- 1 Sun stone** Called Intihuatana, this stone was used like a sundial. It had four points (north, south, east, and west).
- 2 Terraces** Farmers made terraced fields, like steps cut into the mountain, to grow crops of maize and potatoes.
- 3 Building stones** Stones were fitted together without mortar so neatly that a knife blade couldn't slide between them.
- 4 Central square** This open square separated religious from living areas. It was surrounded by buildings.
- 5 Huayna Picchu** The peak behind Machu Picchu is 2,667 m (8,750 ft) high. On top were once temples watched over by Inca priests.
- 6 Houses** Most houses would have had thatched roofs. Only the stone walls remain today.
- 7 Aqueducts** Stone channels carried water from mountain springs and streams. Because of this, the town's people never went thirsty.

Gods

People believed gods controlled all life on Earth, from the weather to wars. They worshipped gods in temples and offered sacrifices to keep the gods happy. Each civilization had their own gods, but some gods were shared.

! WOW!

The Aztecs gave **maize** its own gods – such as Cinteotl, which means “**Dried Ear of Maize God**”.



Viracocha

This stick-carrying man was the Inca creator-god. He made the Earth, Sun, Moon, people, and other gods. He left everyday matters such as the weather to gods of less importance.



Ixchel

This old woman with a headdress in the shape of a snake was the Maya goddess of midwives, medicine, and the Moon. She is often shown with a jug of water, which she could pour as rain.

Quetzalcoatl

He was a chief Aztec god, but the Maya also worshipped him under the name Kukulcan. He controlled the wind and was in charge of priests, learning, and death. He could take the form of a man, or a huge serpent with feathers.



Huitzilopochtli

This Aztec god was in charge of war and the Sun. He was also said to have guided the Aztecs to their first city, Tenochtitlan. He was quick and fierce, and he could appear as an eagle.



Tlaloc

Tlaloc was the Aztec god of rain and water. He made crops grow, but could also bring droughts. He was painted with goggle-like eyes. The Maya had a similar god, named Chac.

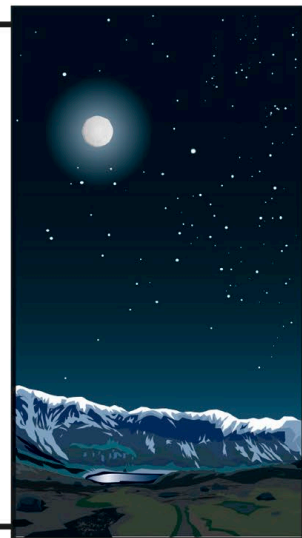
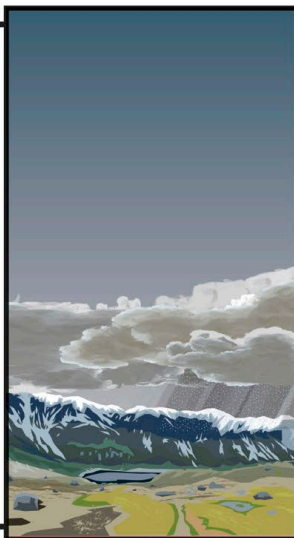
Inca mythology

Like many peoples, the Incas told stories, or myths, about their gods and how the world was made. Every Inca child was told the story of how two Inca heroes, Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, founded the Inca Empire.



Viracocha

At the start of time, the supreme being, Viracocha, created the world. He put three chief gods in charge of Earth: Inti, the god of the Sun; Illapu, the god of rain and thunder; and Mama Quilla, the goddess of the Moon.



The first people behaved badly. This made the gods angry, and so they sent a great flood. Water covered the Earth.

Families escaped up mountains with their llama flocks. Many other wild animals managed to get away, too.



However, over time, people started to misbehave again. The land became wild and dangerous. Manco Capac, son of Inti, and his sister-wife Mama Ocllo set out to find a better place to live.



Inti gave Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo a gold stick for the journey. After a long trek, they reached a valley. Manco tested the ground with the stick, and it vanished into the soil. This was the sign that they had found the fertile Cusco Valley.



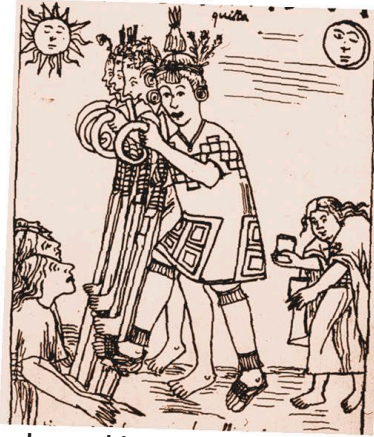
Manco and Mama Ocllo settled in the valley. They taught people how to live a civilized life. People learnt how to herd llamas, grow maize, dig canals, and make pottery. Mama Ocllo showed women how to sew, spin wool, and weave cloth.



They built a great city, Cusco. It had a mighty stone fortress, Sacsayhuaman, and a temple to Inti the Sun god. And so that was how the Inca Empire began, with Manco Capac its first emperor.

Ceremonies

For the Maya, Aztecs, and Incas, ceremonies were important events in the yearly calendar. Religious festivals took place when crops were planted and harvested. Emperors and priests made sacrifices to gods. There were celebrations held in honour of new babies, young people, and dead ancestors.



Inca nobles digging with foot ploughs before planting

Sun-worship

The Sun was especially important to the Incas. They believed their emperor was the Sun god's son. Incas celebrated the Sun's journey across the sky with ceremonies in December and June.



An Inca warrior offering drink to the Sun god

Planting ceremony

In spring, Inca nobles dug the first furrows in the ground for sowing seeds. The people then planted crops. At harvest time, everyone gathered for a thanksgiving ceremony. This lasted for eight days.

Sacrifices

The Maya and Aztecs offered their gods human sacrifices. Victims were thrown into sacred wells or killed in temple ceremonies. The Incas and Aztecs made sacrifices on mountain peaks.

! WOW!

The Incas believed objects called **huaca**, such as certain rocks or stone figures, had **sacred powers**.

Aztec stone knife used in sacrifices





Inca ceremonial mask, showing ear discs

Ear-piercing ritual

At about 14, a noble Inca boy had his ears pierced and discs inserted. This showed he was now a man. The boy climbed a sacred peak, and promised to fight for his Sun emperor. His family gave him a cloak. This was a sign that he was now a warrior.

Flower wars

Aztecs often took part in “flower wars”, sometimes after crop failure. Here, warriors fought not to kill, but to take captives. The prisoners were sacrificed to the gods in the hope of a better harvest.



Aztec jaguar warrior (right) about to sacrifice a captured warrior



Incas offering drink to the mummy of a dead leader

Mummy ceremony

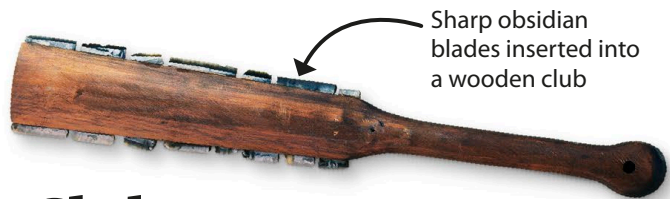
The Incas preserved their dead emperors as mummies. Each November, the ruling Inca offered royal mummies food and drink, so that his ancestors would help him.

War

War was part of life. The Maya and Incas sent armies into battle, but the Aztecs were especially feared warriors. Battles began with armies far apart, shooting arrows and javelins from complex machines. Closer fighting with clubs and knives came next. Prisoners were taken for human sacrifice.

Knives

Razor-sharp knives were made from a volcanic stone called obsidian. Aztecs cut their enemies' legs to make them fall.

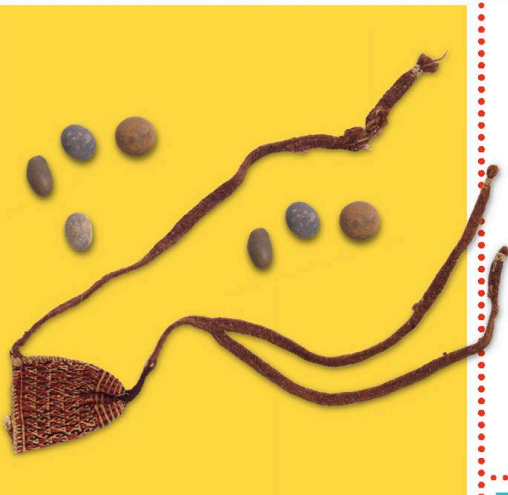


Club

An Aztec warrior would swing a wooden club called a *maquahuitl* like a sword. About 1 m (39 in) long, it was so sharp it could slice off an enemy's head.

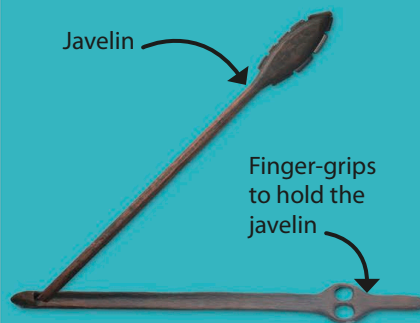
SLING

The sling could fling a stone over 200 m (650 ft). It was made from strong plant-fibre, and was whirled around to release the stone. Slingers chose stones with care before a battle.



Javelin and launcher

A warrior used a throwing aid called an *atlatl* to help him throw a long spear, or javelin, a greater distance.





An Aztec ruler is said to have worn this headdress.

HEADRESS

Feather headdresses made high-ranking Aztec warriors look taller and fiercer. The one above is made from about 500 feathers from the quetzal bird. Top Aztec fighters wore full-body jaguar or eagle costumes.

Feather headdress



Earplug

Shield

Maya warrior

This clay warrior has earplugs, a headdress, and a shield. A Maya warrior had a tuft of hair on his head that he switched from the left to the right after taking his first prisoner.

SHIELD

Shields were made from animal skin or wood. Some were brightly decorated, and were meant to scare the enemy as well as to protect warriors' bodies. Warriors also wore padded cotton body-armor.



Aztecs stuck feathers on their shields.

Axe

A stone axe, similar to tools used by farmers to break up hard soil, made a useful weapon. Most axes had stone heads, but some had sharper heads of copper metal.



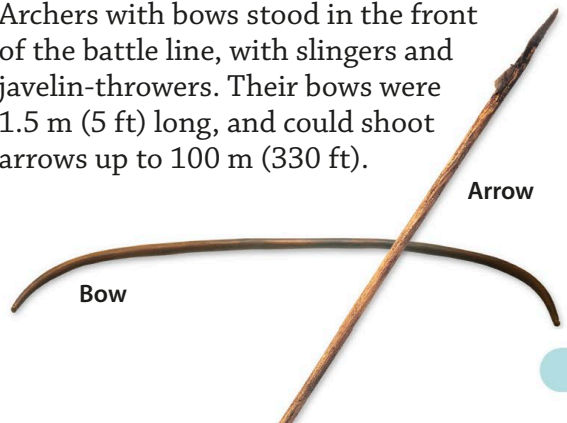
Stone axe



Metal head

Bow and arrow

Archers with bows stood in the front of the battle line, with slingers and javelin-throwers. Their bows were 1.5 m (5 ft) long, and could shoot arrows up to 100 m (330 ft).



Bow

Arrow

Chichen Itza

Chichen Itza, in Yucatán, Mexico, was an important Maya city from around 600 to 1200CE. The city's temple, today known as the Temple of Kukulcan, dominates Chichen Itza. The temple was dedicated to Kukulcan, the feathered-serpent god.

The temple was built so that it lined up with the Sun. At certain times, shadows from the Sun make it look as if snakes are sliding down towards the stone serpent head.



Sacred site

Chichen Itza was a busy trading city, but also a centre for religious rituals. Many of its most important sites were sacred places.



Sacred cenote

Sacred well

A cenote is a natural well full of water. Into it people threw gifts for the rain god. Gifts included gold, jade, pots, rubber, cloth, weapons, and even human victims. Some items were broken before being thrown in.

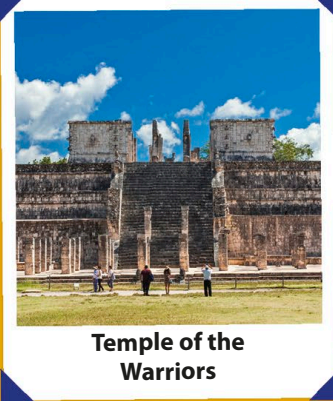


! WOW!
Chichen Itza
is one of the
New Seven
Wonders of
the World.

The temple has 91 steps on three sides and 92 steps on the fourth – 365 in all. This represents the 365 days in a Maya Sun year.

There are nine terraces leading up to the top. These nine terraces are split into two by a stairway on each side, representing the 18 months in a Maya calendar year.

Fifty-two panels are on each side of the pyramid. They represent the number of years in the Maya sacred cycle.



Temple of the Warriors

Stone temple
People probably gathered at the Temple of the Warriors for ceremonies. It had four stone platforms, and 200 stone columns on which were carved images of warriors.

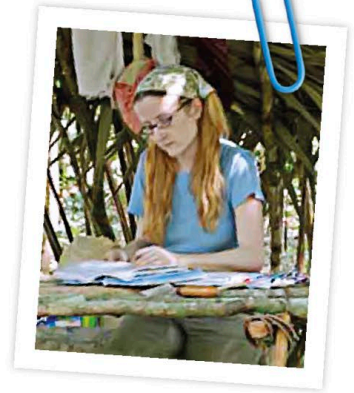
Observatory
El Caracol (“The Snail”) was an observatory used by Maya astronomers. Through carefully positioned slits in its walls, they checked the movements of the Moon, Sun, and stars.



El Caracol

Interview with...

Dr Diane Davies is a Maya history expert who has hunted for ancient objects and explored ruins deep in the jungles of Central America. She now lives in the UK, teaching schoolchildren and university students all about the Maya.



Q: Could you explain what an archeologist does?

A: Being an archeologist, I try to understand how people lived in the past by looking at the things they left behind – including their rubbish! Archeologists are like detectives that excavate (dig) for clues to find out what life might have been like in the ancient world.

Q: Why did you want to be an archeologist?

A: Growing up, I read a lot of adventure books and watched the *Indiana Jones* films, which inspired me to be an archeologist! I loved the idea of digging up the past and learning about how ancient people created amazing buildings without any modern technology.

Q: What's the most exciting thing about your job?

A: I find things that no-one else living today has seen before. Some artefacts are over 2,000 years old! As the first person to dig up and touch them, it feels like I am almost touching the past.

Q: Why did you want to study the Maya?

A: I visited a Maya site in Mexico called Palenque while learning about Central American history. The rainforest, pyramids, writing, and art fascinated me, and I decided to learn more about these amazing people.

Q: What have you learnt about the Maya?

A: The Maya created one of the most advanced civilizations in the ancient world. They brought us extraordinary calendars, complex hieroglyphic (picture) writing,



Diane digging inside a Maya house

and some of the largest pyramids in the world. They also had a ball game like no other and, most importantly, chocolate!

Q: What's your favourite Maya fact?

A: The Maya knew all about the movements of the stars and planets. Venus was special to them, and when they saw it in the sky they took it as a sign to go to war. This was called a "star war".

Q: Where is the most exciting place you have been for your work?

A: I have worked in many places, from Wales to Peru, but the Maya rainforest in Guatemala is the most exciting place for me. Walking to work with monkeys following you from above is quite something!

Q: What's your most amazing find?

A: I helped to uncover the murals of San Bartolo. These are the earliest Maya paintings and show how the Maya believed their world came about. The murals date to around 100BCE, over 2,000 years ago, and we found the earliest Maya writing from 300BCE. A television crew filmed us, and we appeared in newspapers because of the finds!

Q: Apart from the writing at San Bartolo, what's your oldest find?

A: I found a beautiful red bowl in a Maya house. It was made around 100BCE and left behind in 900CE! This meant that it was saved and looked after for a very long time by its Maya owners.

Q: Can you describe a typical day for an archeologist?

A: In the Maya rainforest, I was often woken up by noisy monkeys. I spent the day with a team of people digging in trenches to find



An ancient Maya bowl from one of Diane's digs

pottery, stone tools, and even human bones. After digging, I'd sit down to examine the findings.

Q: What sort of equipment do you use?

A: If I am excavating, I start with a small pick to break up the soil. I then dig with a trowel until I find something, and use a small brush to gently get rid of the mud.

Q: Do you have any advice for future archeologists?

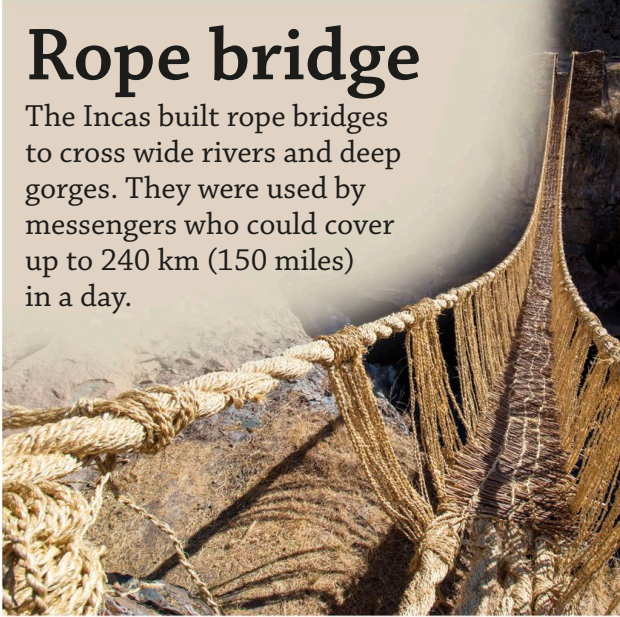
A: You have to work hard to be an archeologist, but if you do well in history and science in school then you're on the right track to becoming a history detective!

Art and technology

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs did not use the wheel. Their tools were made of natural materials, such as stone. Yet they built boats and slung rope bridges across rivers. They made statues, huge temples, and beautiful objects. They studied the stars and maths.

Rope bridge

The Incas built rope bridges to cross wide rivers and deep gorges. They were used by messengers who could cover up to 240 km (150 miles) in a day.



Recording

The Incas kept careful records of everything, including llama herds, grain stores, and army numbers. Instead of writing, they used a system of knotted strings, called a *quipu*.



Stone carving

All three civilizations made detailed stone carvings, using stone tools. They created statues and carvings of gods. This carving shows an Aztec goddess.



Rubber

The Maya collected latex (sap) by “tapping”, or cutting into, rubber trees. From it they made waterproof cloth, glue for books, and rubber balls.



PAINTING

All three civilizations used bright colours in textiles and in paintings. When Spanish soldiers arrived in Mexico, the Aztec emperor sent artists to paint them. This Maya wall painting shows warriors fighting during a battle.



Aztec pipe, in human shape

Maya incense jar

Pottery

People used plain clay pots in the home. Decorated pottery was used in religious ceremonies at temples. Potters shaped clay by hand, then baked the pot to harden it.

Reed boat

The Incas paddled canoes made from reeds on Lake Titicaca, high in the Andes mountains. They went to sea on large rafts built from logs.



Music

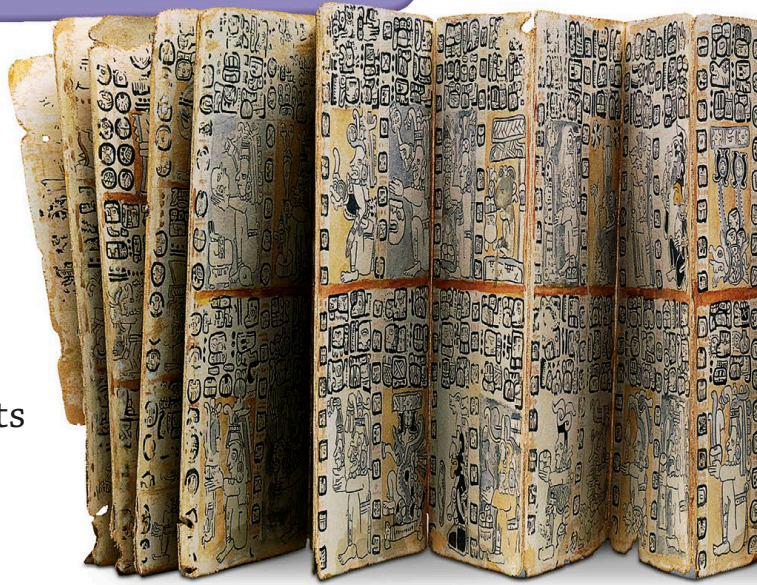
The Aztecs made music for ceremonies, dancing, and in battle. They played a drum made from a hollowed out log, called a *teponaztli*.



Match the Maya symbols with their meanings.

Writing

The Maya created an early form of writing using signs, called glyphs. Some were picture-signs standing for ideas or words, others were sound-signs for parts of words. See if you can match the descriptions below with the symbols, and so decode the glyphs!



Maya book

The Maya wrote on paper made from bark. They folded pages to make a book called a codex.

1

“lady”

This is an easier one to start with!
A woman’s face, shown sideways.

2

“water”

Look for dots for raindrops. And can you see slashed lines for rain?

3

“Sun”

The Sun was important in Maya belief. Try looking for flower petals.

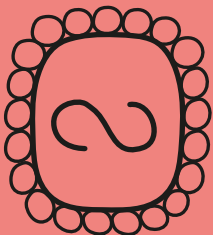
4

“to scatter”

Farmers scattered seed by hand – so look for the hand-sign.

A

MUYAL



B

K'AK'



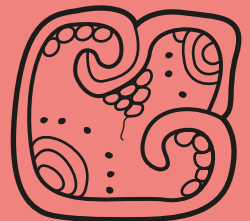
C

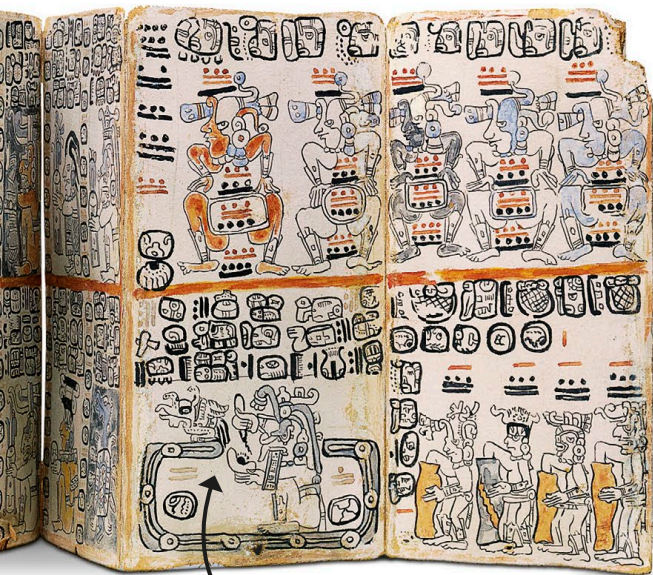
IX



D

WITZ

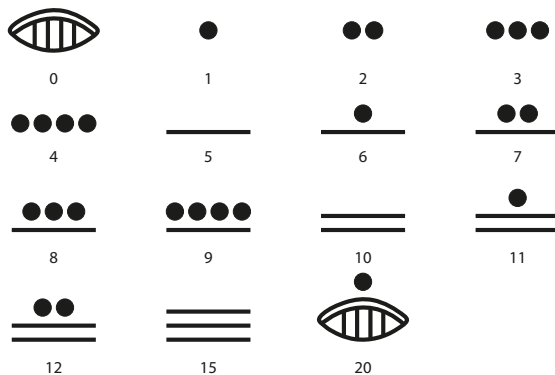




Experts can read about 80 per cent of Maya writing.

Maya numbers

The Maya counted in 20s. They used a dot for "1" and a bar for "5". They had a special sign for zero, or "0". The Maya were one of the first people to use the zero. Below are the Maya numbers 0–12, 15, and 20.



5

“fire”

Can you see the curved lines that look like flickering flames?

6

“cloud”

Can you spot the curved line surrounded by lots of small circles?

7

“mountain”

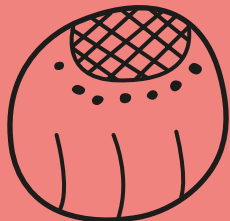
This is tricky! The glyph has three peaks, like a mountain.

8

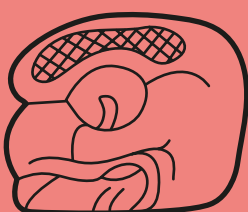
“snake”

The feathered serpent was a Maya god. Can you see a serpent-head glyph?

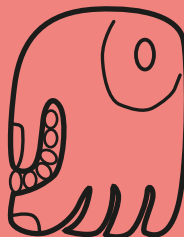
E JA



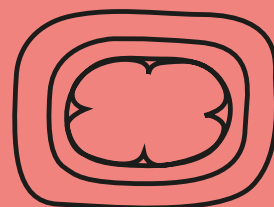
F CHAN



G CHOK



H K'IN



Medicine

If you were a Maya, Inca, or Aztec, you'd ask the gods for help to heal your illness. Plants were also important for healing the sick, and surgeons knew how to patch up battle wounds. These medical skills, however, could not fight off the killer diseases later brought by Spanish invaders.

Rabbit's foot fern

Aztecs used these leaves to make cough mixture and to treat arthritis (stiff joints).



Pudding pipe tree
Pods from this tree were eaten to help Mayas and Aztecs who couldn't poo.

Palm nuts

Oil and seeds from palm trees made skin, chest, and stomach medicines.



Surgical tools
Inca surgeons used sharp stone knives to carry out operations.



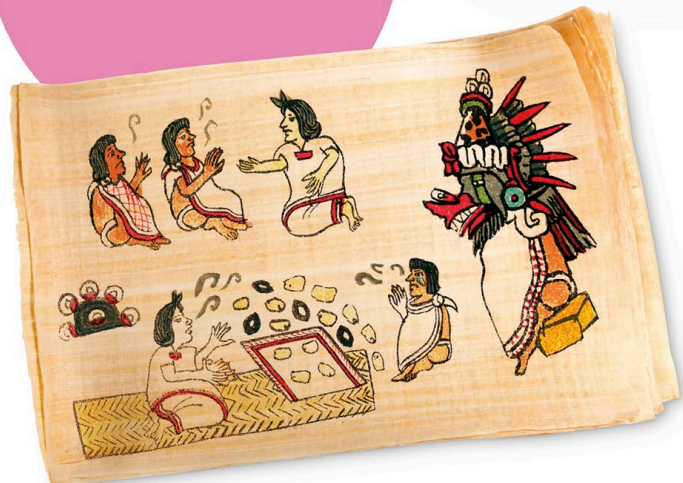
Trepanned hole in an Inca skull



Trepanning
Drilling a hole in the skull (trepanning) was thought to release evil spirits in unwell people.

Aztec doctors

This book, made by the Spanish invaders, shows Aztec doctors treating patients.





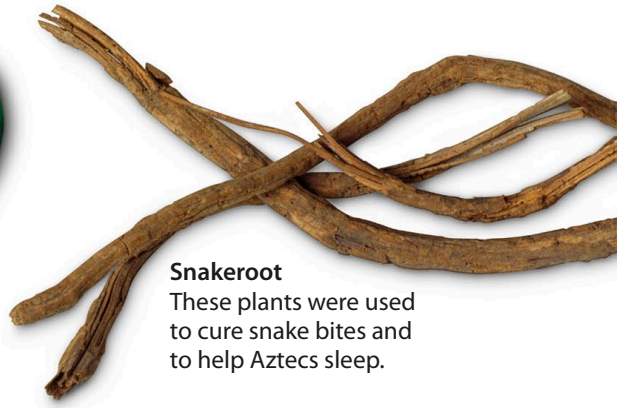
Peppers

Aztecs believed that eating peppers would stop them feeling sad.



Jade

People wore jade stones as charms to keep them healthy.



Snakeroot

These plants were used to cure snake bites and to help Aztecs sleep.



Cocoa beans

Aztecs used these to treat asthma, chest infections, and stomach upsets.



Cinchona bark

Incas made this tree bark into a medicine called quinine to treat a disease called malaria.



Mexican marigolds

These flowers are said to have been used by Aztec priests to make victims sleepy before human sacrifice.



Morning glory

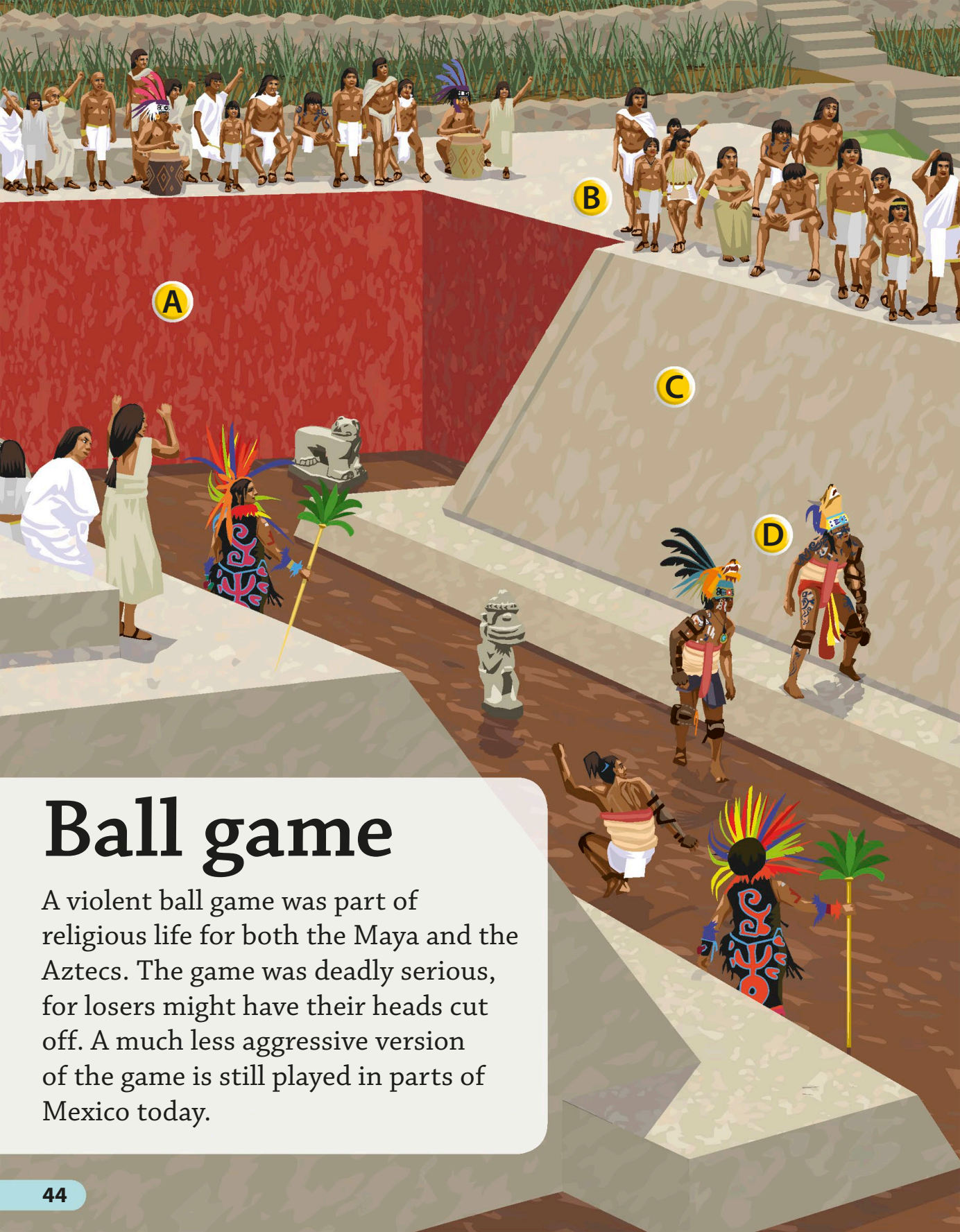
An Aztec mixture made from this flower's seeds sent people into a trance-like state.



God health

Some gods were linked to special types of healing. Cihuacoatl was the Aztec goddess of childbirth. Women prayed to her for healthy children.





A

B


C

D

Ball game

A violent ball game was part of religious life for both the Maya and the Aztecs. The game was deadly serious, for losers might have their heads cut off. A much less aggressive version of the game is still played in parts of Mexico today.

WHAT'S WHAT

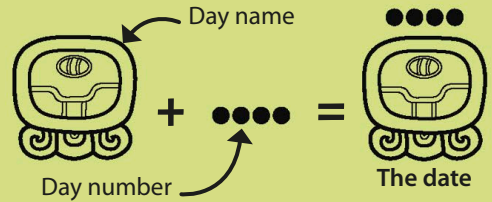
- 
- A Court** The capital L-shaped court had sloped walls. Some were as long as a soccer pitch.
- B Spectators** People watched from platforms on either side. They cheered and shouted for their own team.
- C Sloped walls** Players ran up the steep side walls in their efforts to score.
- D Player's gear** Teams had two or three players. They wore headdresses, belts, and pads on their arms and knees.
- E Rubber ball** The heavy ball of latex (tree rubber) was hit with hips, elbows, or knees.
- F Stone rings** To score, a player hit the ball through one of two stone rings.
- G Scoring** The rings could be 6 m (18 ft) high, so it was difficult to score.
- H Captive players** Captive enemies always lost. Winners were given model heads (or real ones).

Calendars

The Maya and the Aztecs had several calendars. This meant that each day had more than one date! These calendars helped people to keep up with their busy schedules of religious celebrations.

Making a date

To see what the date was, a Maya combined a glyph showing the day name with a number between 1 and 13.



Tzolk'in calendar

This religious Maya calendar had a year of 260 days. Each day had a date made up of one of 20 gods' names and a number between one and 13. Priests foretold events for different days.

A picture called a glyph was used to show the name of each day.

Maya numbers made of bars and dots gave each day a number up to 13.

| | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| 1 Imix | 2 Ik' | 3 Ak'bal | 4 K'an | 5 Chikchan |
| 6 Kimi | 7 Manik' | 8 Lamat | 9 Muluk | 10 Ok |
| 11 Chuwen | 12 Eb | 13 Ben | 1 Hix | 2 Men |
| 3 Kib | 4 Kaban | 5 Etz'nab | 6 Kawak | 7 Ajaw |

! WOW!

The Maya believed that the world started again every 5,130 years.

Haab calendar

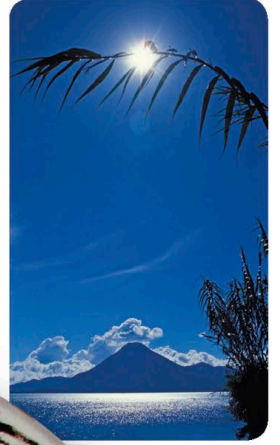
Like our calendar, the Haab had 365 days. However, there were 19 months instead of 12. Most of these months had 20 days, with one month having five left-over days at the end. This was called the Wayeb.

Stone calendar wheel

The glyphs for the Haab month are carved around this wheel.

Solar calendar

The Haab calendar was 365 days long because that is how long it takes the Earth to move around the Sun. This is called a solar calendar, because "solar" means related to the Sun.



The 19 outer glyphs each show a month.

The Wayeb
The five Wayeb days were seen as unlucky.

Crafts

Children learned crafts from their parents. They could make pots and baskets, and weave wool and cloth. Craftwork was a full-time job for many people. Precious stone masks, metal jewellery, and feathered headdresses all took a lot of skill and practice to make.



Inca dish in the shape of a turtle

Pottery

People shaped wet, messy clay into pots and stamps by hand. Pots were coloured and decorated using powdered minerals. To make the clay objects harder, they were fired (baked).



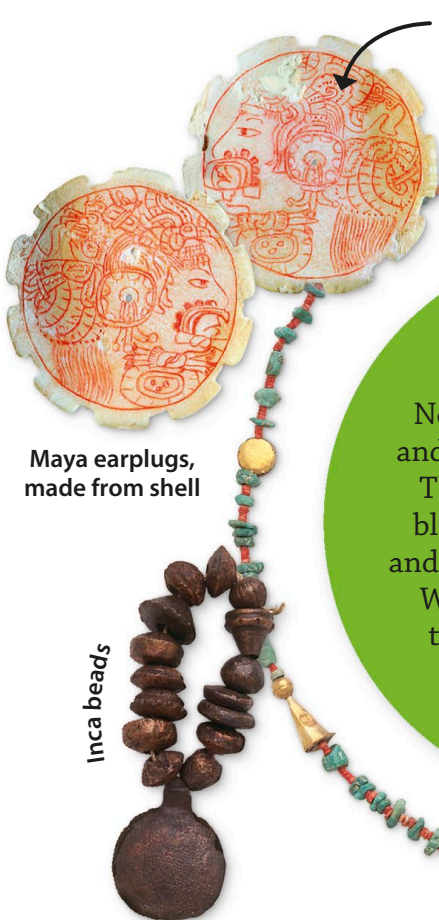
Aztec stamp



Maya vase

Jewellery

Necklaces of precious stones and gold were made for nobles. The Incas liked turquoise (a blue-green stone). The Maya and Aztecs preferred green jade. Warriors wore gold plugs in their pierced ears and lips.



Maya earplugs, made from shell

Inca beads



The gold plug was fixed into a person's lip.

Aztec lip-decoration

Inca necklace



Maya mosaic mask

Masks

Gold or precious stones were used to make masks. Mosaic masks were made from wood covered with pieces of stone. They were worn for ceremonies or to scare enemies in battle.



Inca gold mask

Threads were woven together into material.



Aztec loom



Inca woven textile

Weaving

Plant fibres and animal coats were spun into thread or wool.

Aztec women wove cotton thread into light clothes, while

Inca women made llama and alpaca wool into warm clothes.



Aztec fan

Feathers

Feathers were a sign of importance. They were used to decorate nobles' clothes, as well as shields and fans. Thousands of bird skins used for featherwork were found in one Inca city.



Inca pouch

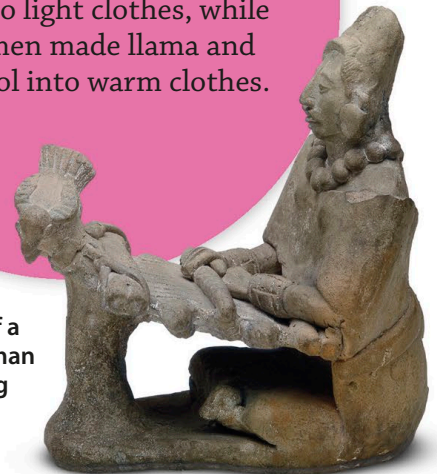


Figure of a Maya woman weaving

Inca gold

Gold was the sacred metal of the Incas. They called gold “the sweat of the Sun god”. But the Incas’ fascination with gold led to their downfall. Spanish soldiers heard of a land of gold and silver, and conquered the Inca Empire so they could take their treasures.

Gifts of gold

The Inca emperor took gold and silver from peoples defeated in war. The emperor showed his power by filling storehouses with gold and by giving gifts. He also rewarded brave soldiers with gold.



Gold cup used to give offerings to the gods



Gold figure of a god



Gold llama given as an offering to the gods



Gold of the gods

This magnificent gold disk shows the face of the Sun god, Inti. He was the Incas’ supreme god.



This is a copy of one of the few precious Inca objects found that Spanish soldiers failed to melt down.

The Incas shaped gold into decorative ornaments, like this gold disc.



Golden nuggets

The Incas dug gold mines in the Andes mountains. Chunks of small gold rocks, or nuggets, were smelted (melted) until soft and then shaped.

The lure of gold

In the 1530s, Spanish conqueror Pizarro heard about the riches to be found in Peru. He and his men fought the Inca people, and stole and melted down most of the Inca gold. Only a few pieces are left in museums today.



Spanish gold coins

Under attack

In the 1500s CE, the Spanish came to the Americas to find treasure. They attacked the Maya, Aztecs, and Incas, whose lands were rich in gold and silver. The native people bravely fought back, but were conquered by the Spanish invaders.

KEY

- Maya
- Inca
- Aztec



World map showing the empires



Pedro de Alvarado
(1485–1541)



FACT FILE

- » **Conquest begins:** 1523
- » **Led by:** Pedro de Alvarado
- » **Arrival site:** Soconusco
- » **Major Spanish victories:**
Zapotitlan
Acajutla
Lake Atitlan
Quetzaltenango

Maya

In 1523, Alvarado invaded the Maya lands. One of the last Maya rulers, Tecun Uman, was killed during battle in 1524. Alvarado claimed to have won the land for Spain. The Maya fought on for many years.

Incas

Atahualpa had just won a war for the Inca leadership, but then Pizarro arrived with a small army and killed him. Another Inca leader, Manco Capac, fought back, but was killed in 1545. The last Inca leader was beheaded in 1572.

FACT FILE

- » **Conquest begins:** 1531
- » **Led by:** Francisco Pizarro
- » **Arrival site:** Tumbes
- » **Major Spanish victories:**
Cajamarca
Cusco
Vilcabamba

Pacific
Ocean

Aztecs

When Cortés invaded Aztec lands, the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II sent gold to show his power. Cortés took the emperor prisoner and captured the capital city of Tenochtitlan.

Hernando Cortés
(1485–1547)



! WOW!

Some Aztec, Inca, and Maya people believed the **Spanish invaders were gods.**

FACT FILE

- » **Conquest begins:** 1519
- » **Led by:** Hernando Cortés
- » **Arrival site:** Near modern-day Veracruz
- » **Major Spanish victories:**
Cholula
Otumba
Tenochtitlan

Francisco Pizarro
(1471–1541)



How were they defeated?

The Spanish caused divisions within the Aztec and Inca Empires. They gained allies from these divisions and from local enemies. The Spanish had steel armour, swords, and guns. They also brought diseases, which killed many people.



Steel armour

Where are they now?

Today, many people in Central and South America have Maya, Aztec, or Inca ancestors. In Mexico, some people speak Nahuatl, which comes from the Aztec language. Other people in Central America speak types of Mayan. In Peru, many people still use versions of the Quechua language of the Incas.



Traditional Quechua dolls

Quechua

About 25 per cent of people in Peru speak the Inca language Quechua. Many Quechua people farm and make clothes from the wool of llamas and alpacas, following the traditions of their ancestors.

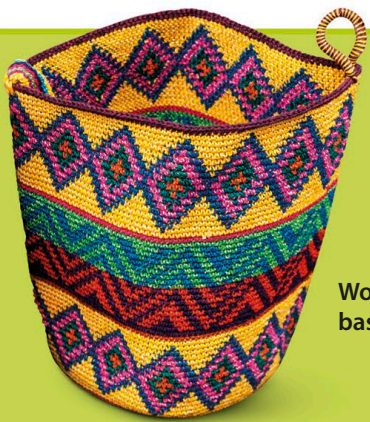
Top, or huipil



Nahua

The Nahua people of Mexico are descended from the Aztecs, and many speak Nahuatl. Some are farmers and craftspeople, like their Aztec ancestors. There are about 2.5 million Nahua people living in Mexico today.





Woven basket

Maya

The descendants of the Maya live mostly in Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Many Maya live in small villages. Here they farm and carry on traditional Maya crafts, such as weaving. Others live in big cities.

Festivals

There are festivals celebrated throughout this region that combine old and new traditions with religious rites.

Dance of the Flyers

This five-man show is based on an Aztec rain ceremony. While one man stands on top of a pole playing music, the other four dangle from ropes, twirling to the ground.



Inca Sun Festival

Inti Raymi, the Sun Festival, takes place in many places in Peru on 24 June. It marks the shortest day of the year, and the start of the Inca new year.



Skull mask



Day of the Dead

This festival (31 October–2 November) mixes Christianity and ancient traditions. In Mexico, many people dress up and wear masks. They visit family graves with flowers and gifts.

Then and now

If you've ever bounced a rubber ball, crossed a suspension bridge, or eaten popcorn, you have the Maya, Incas, and Aztecs to thank! As well as being inventors, they were among the first people to discover many materials and popular foods of today.

Modern herbal medicines use passion flower.



Popcorn

Corn was first popped over fires in the Americas thousands of years ago. Later, Aztecs introduced it to the Spanish invaders, who showed it to the rest of the world.

Tortillas

Many people in the Americas made dried maize into flour. They baked maize flatbreads, or wraps, which the Spanish invaders called tortillas ("little cakes").



Maize tortillas

Chocolate

The Maya and Aztecs used cacao beans to make a hot drink, which they flavoured with chili. This spread to Europe, where it was called "drinking chocolate".

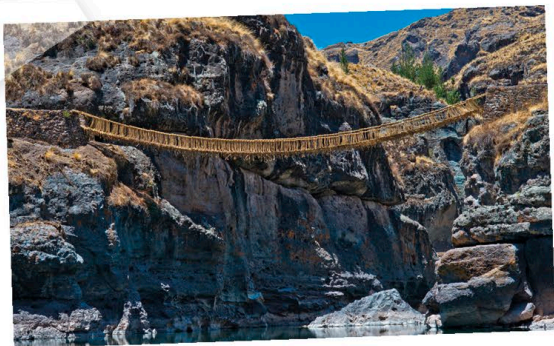
Cacao beans were called cocoa beans by the English.





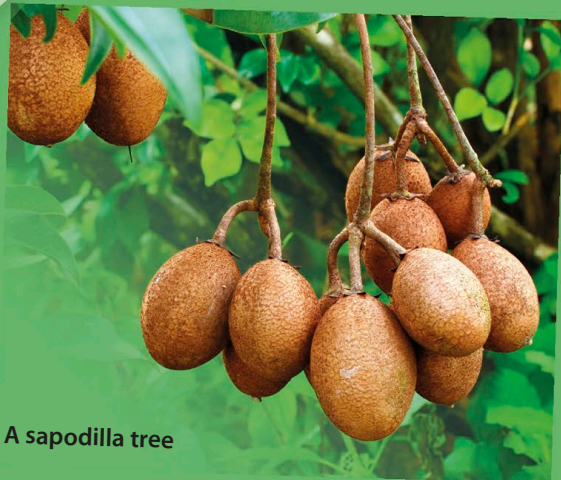
Plant medicines

The Aztecs loved flowers and flower-medicines. They used passion flower to calm people, relax muscles, and help people sleep. This plant is still used in herbal medicine today.



Suspension bridges

The Incas built bridges to cross deep rivers to get to their mountain cities. They hung suspension bridges across the gaps using plant fibres. The bridges swung, but were safe!



A sapodilla tree

Chewing gum

The Maya found that sap, or “chicle”, from the sapodilla tree went rubbery when chewed. Chewing gum was made from natural chicle until the 1940s.



Freeze-dried potatoes

Rubber

The Maya took sap from rubber trees. They turned the sap into squidgy, bouncy rubber by mixing it with juice from morning glory vines.

Rubber tree sap



Freeze-drying

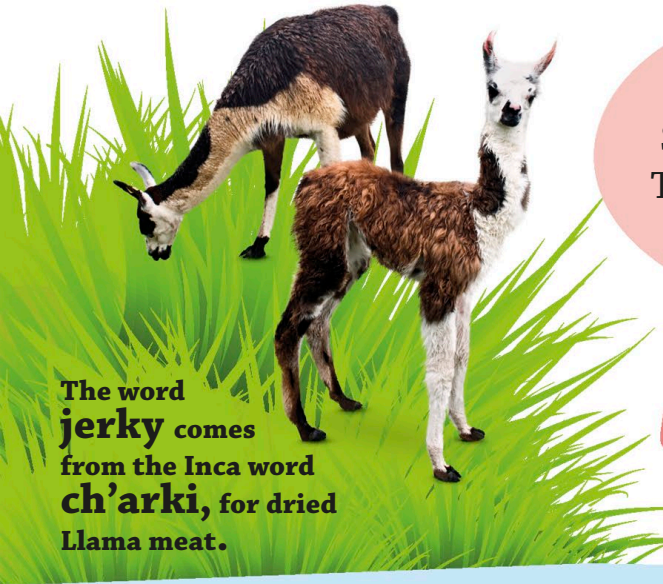
The Incas left potatoes out to freeze during cold nights. They then trod on them to get rid of any moisture, drying them out. These freeze-dried potatoes, called *chuño*, lasted for a long time.

Facts and figures

There is so much to learn about the Maya, Incas, and Aztecs. We've gathered together as many fascinating facts as we could fit onto these pages.

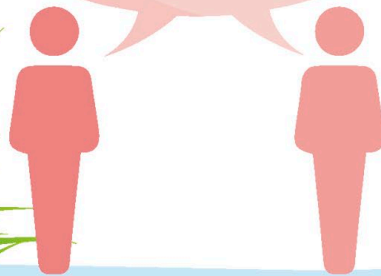


The Maya didn't have sugar. They ate honey as a sweet treat.



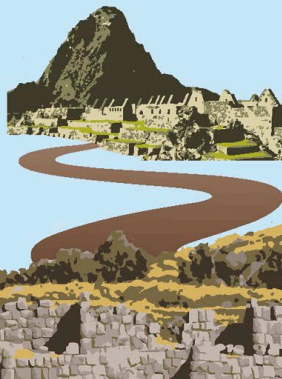
The word **jerky** comes from the Inca word **ch'arki**, for dried Llama meat.

8 MILLION PEOPLE SPEAK A VERSION OF THE INCA LANGUAGE, QUECHUA, TODAY.



24,000

The Incas built roads stretching around 24,000 km (15,000 miles) across their vast empire.

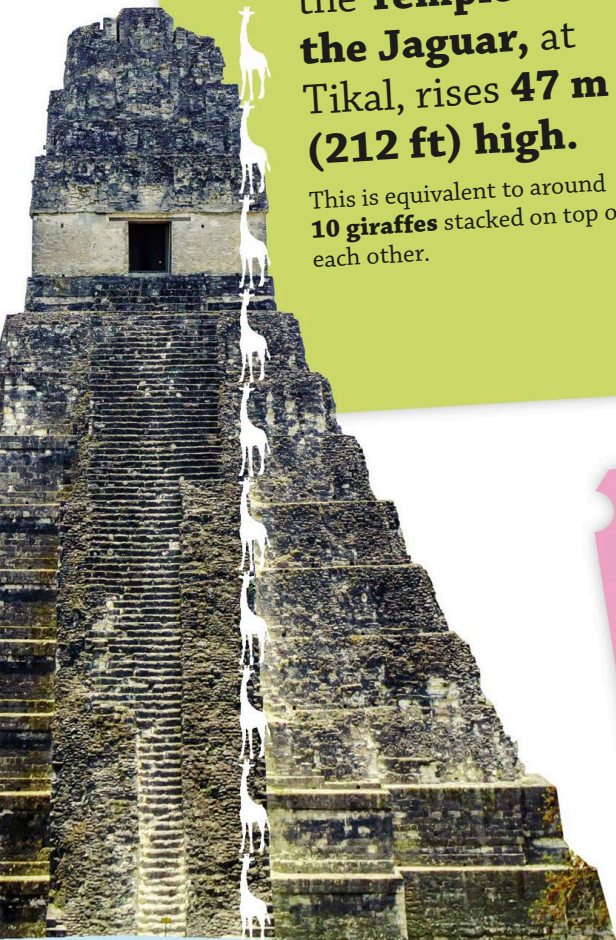


6 MILLION

There are around 6 million Maya people alive today.

Maya children





The Maya pyramid the **Temple of the Jaguar**, at Tikal, rises **47 m (212 ft) high**.

This is equivalent to around **10 giraffes** stacked on top of each other.

Aztec children

may have been pricked with **maguey cactus spines** as a punishment.



THE MAYA KEPT A
LOOK OUT FOR
VENUS
AND MAY EVEN HAVE
STARTED WARS WHEN
THEY SAW IT IN THE
MORNING SKY.



90%



Up to 90 per cent of the Aztecs and the Maya died when the Spanish came, mostly from European diseases.

700



It is said that 700 sheets of gold were used for the walls of the Inca Golden Temple in Cusco, Peru.

650



In 2017, archaeologists digging beneath Mexico City found 650 skulls of human sacrifice victims.



Glossary

Some words in this book may be new to you. This is what they mean. They will help you to learn about the Maya, Incas, and Aztecs.

alpaca Animal of South America and a relative of the llama and camel, valued for its wool and hunted for meat by the Incas

Andes Highest range of mountains in South America, which stretches along the western side of the continent

armour Body protection for soldiers

astronomy Study of the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars

calendar Chart showing a year or years divided into units of time, such as days

canal Waterway made for boats, or to bring water to crops growing in farmers' fields

canoe Small boat made from a tree trunk or animal skins, and pushed through the water with paddles

Central America The strip of land joining North America and South America

ceremony Special event that is often religious

chinampas Small islands in lakes, used by the Aztecs as farmland to grow food

civilization Large group of people, or society, who share the same way of life

codex Book with handwritten pages

conqueror Winning side in a war, when one leader defeats another and takes their land

empire Multiple lands ruled by one leader

glyph Picture signs, used by the Maya and Aztecs in writing instead of alphabet letters

irrigation Bringing water from rivers or lakes to farmland by digging canals

llama The Incas' most useful domestic animal, providing wool, milk, meat, and transport

maize Commonly known as corn, or sweetcorn, an important food in the ancient Americas

Mesoamerica Earlier name for the area of land that includes Central America and Mexico

mummy Dead body preserved by chemicals or drying so that it does not decay

noble Important person in society, often a royal relative, who may control an area of land and people

obsidian Hard, volcanic rock used to make sharp-edged knives and war weapons

priest Person who leads religious ceremonies

pyramid Stone-built mound with four triangular faces and steps, often with a temple on top

quipu Knotted-string device used by the Incas to record events, keep accounts, and send messages

ritual Religious activity in which people perform a series of set actions

sacred Linked to the gods

sacrifice Offering, such as gold, food, or human victims, made to the gods to seek their help

site A piece of ground used for something, such as an old city

slave Person owned by other people, and made to work for them without pay

society Group of people living together in an ordered way, for example in a country

temple Building for religious ceremonies and worship of gods

terraced fields Walled fields, such as steps or terraces one above the other, created by the Incas on mountainsides

warrior Soldier who is trained to fight in battles

How to say it

This guide will show you how to say words and names from the Maya, Inca, and Aztec civilizations. Capital letters mean you should emphasize that part of the word, or say it a tiny bit louder.

Acajutla (A-ka-HOOT-la)

Acatitlan (A-ka-TEET-lan)

atlatl (at-LAT-l)

Cajamarca (Ka-ha-MAR-ka)

cenote (sen-oat-ay)

Chichen Itza (Chi-chen It-za)

Cholula (Cho-LOO-la)

Choquequirao

(Cho-keh-KEY-ra-o)

chuno (choo-no)

Cihuacoatl (Si-WA-ko-at-l)

Cinteotl (Sin-tay-ot-l)

curacas (koo-RA-kas]

Cusco (Kus-ko)

huaca (hwa-ka)

Huayna Picchu

(Hway-na Pee-choo)

huipil (wi-pill)

Huitzilopochtli

(Hwit-zi-low-POK-tli)

Illapu (Il-A-poo)

Intihuatana (In-tee-WA-ta-na)

Ixchel (Eesh-chel)

Machu Picchu

(Ma-choo Pee-choo)

Feather shield



Mama Coya (Ma-ma Koy-a)

mamakuna (ma-ma-KOO-na)

Mama Quilla (Ma-ma Key-a)

maquahuitl (ma-KWA-weet-l)

Maya (MY-a)

Otumba (O-TOOM-ba)

panacas (pan-A-kas)

Quetzalcoatl

(Kwet-zal-ko-ATL)

Quetzaltenango

(Kwet-zal-te-NAN-go)

quipu (key-poo)

Sacsayhuaman

(Sak-say-WA-man)

Sapa Inca (Sa-pa In-ka)

Tenochtitlan (Te-nock-TEET-lan)

Teotihuacan (Tay-oh-ti-WA-kan)

Tlaloc (Tla-lok)

Tonatiuh (Ton-a-TEE-oooh)

tzolk'in (zol-keen)

Vilcabamba (Vil-ka-BAM-ba)

Viracocha (Vir-a-coach-a)

Willac Umu (Wil-ak Oo-moo)

Xipe Totec (Shi-pay toe-tek)

Zapotitlan (Za-po-TEET-lan)



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