

Key Vocabulary

civilisation	An organised society with its own culture and way of life, existing in a particular area over a particular period of time.
drought	A long period with very little rain.
ritual	A ceremony, often religious, with set actions performed in a set order.
jaguar	A big cat, heavier than a leopard, with yellowish fur and black spots.
scribes	People paid to write things down, either as an official record or for someone else unable to write.
codices	Ancient handwritten texts. Maya codices could be unfolded like a concertina. One text is called a codex.
maize	Another word for sweetcorn or corn on the cob. It can be made into a dough and baked into tortillas.
cacao beans	Cacao trees sprout pods directly from their trunks. When they are ripe, the pods can be broken open to reveal the beans, which can then be dried, roasted and ground.

Writing

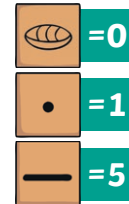
The Maya writing system, used to write several different Maya languages, was made up of over 800 symbols called glyphs. Some glyphs were logograms, representing a whole word, and some were syllabograms, representing units of sound. They were carved onto stone buildings and monuments and painted onto pottery. Maya **scribes** also wrote books, called **codices**, made from the bark of fig trees. Only priests and noblemen would know the whole written language.



The Maya logogram for b'alam – **jaguar**

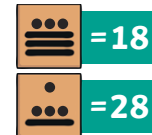
Maya Numbers

The Maya developed a complex number and counting system that was advanced for their time. They were one of only two cultures in the world to develop the concept of zero.



The Maya people used just three symbols in their number system. These are thought to represent items that the Maya people might have first used to count with, such as pebbles, sticks and shells.

The Maya used a base 20 number system, so after number 19, multiples of 20 were written above the bottom number.



Food

Maize was a very important crop that formed up to 80% of the Maya people's diets. They believed that the first humans were made from **maize** dough by the gods.

The Maya made a bitter chocolatey drink from **cacao beans** that was enjoyed by the rich and used for medicines and in ceremonies.

The beans were highly valued and even used as a form of money.

