

The Mayans

The Mayans and Religion

The Maya believed in and worshipped a number of different gods. They believed that the gods had a good side and a bad side and that the gods could help or hurt them. The Maya would dance, sing and sometimes make offerings of blood to the gods. Priests were very important in Maya society as it was believed that they could communicate directly with the gods. They would perform different rituals during festivals or special ceremonies in order to appeal to the gods.

The Mayan Writing System

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.

Key Vocabulary:

Civilization - 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.

Maya Number System

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.

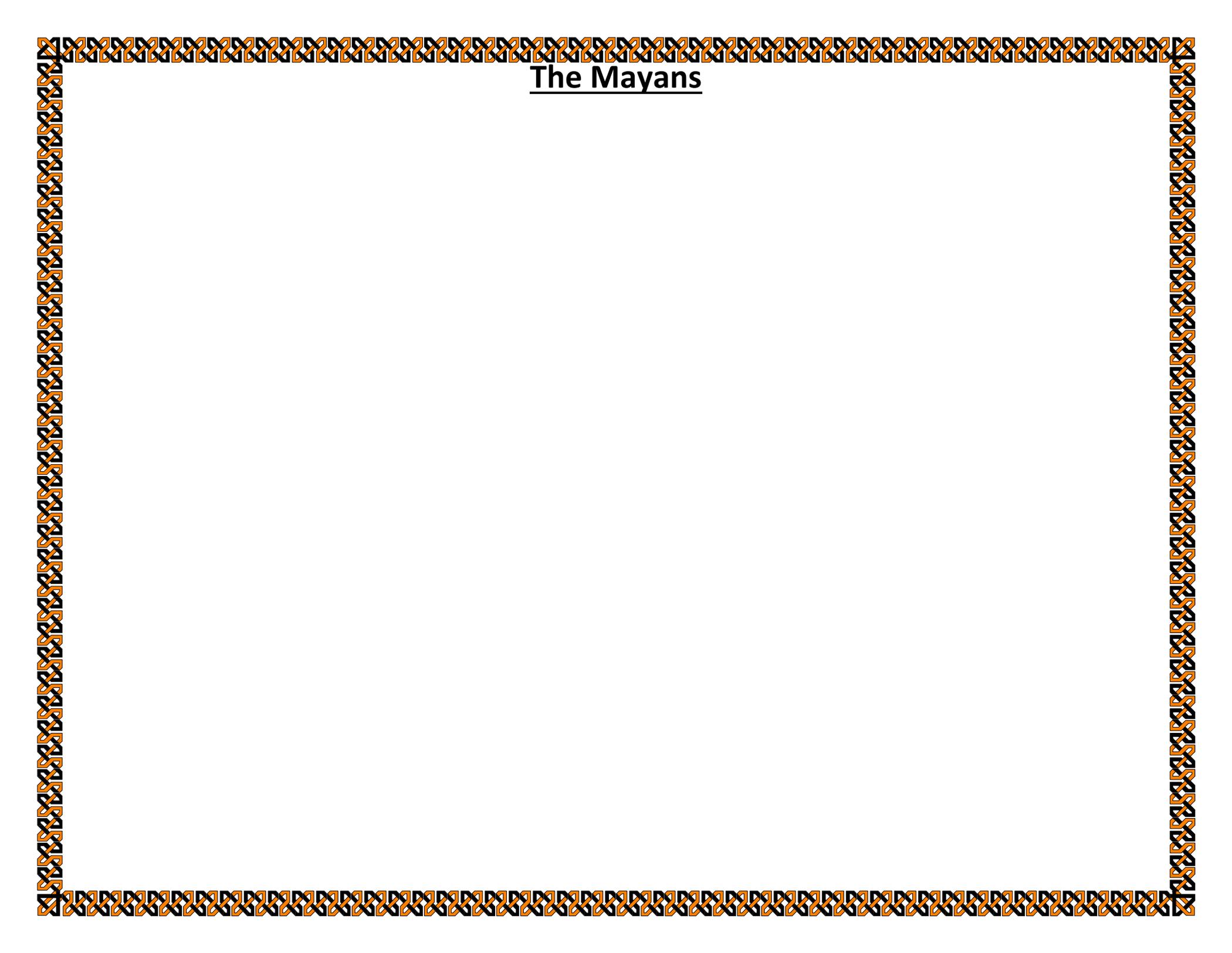
Mayan Food

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.





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