Knowsley Junior School

The Maya

Subject	Word	Definition
H	Maya Civilisation	An ancient Mesoamerican civilisation known for its advanced agriculture, hieroglyphic script, mathematics, and stone cities.
H	City-State	An independent city with its own ruler, laws, and territory, such as Tikal, Palenque, and Copán.
H	Codex	An ancient folding book made from bark paper, containing Maya painted hieroglyphs, calendars, and astronomical records.
H	Pok-a-Tok	A sacred Maya ritual ballgame played on stone courts, which had deep religious, cosmic, and political significance.
H	Vigesimal System	A mathematical number system based on the number 20, using shells, dots, and bars including the concept of zero.
G	Topography	The physical shape, height, and arrangement of natural and artificial surface features of the land.
G	Prime Meridian	The line of longitude at 0° that passes through Greenwich, London, dividing the world into Eastern and Western Hemispheres.
G	Time Zones	Global regions that observe a uniform standard time, calculated in hours ahead or behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).
G	Rainforest Biome	A dense, warm, and humid forest ecosystem near the Equator that receives high rainfall all year round.
G	Cacao	Seeds from the tropical cacao tree, valued by the Maya as sacred currency and brewed into a bitter chocolate drink.

By the end of this topic I should be able to:

- Construct a comparative timeline shwoing the Maya civilisation alongside prior KS2 historical periods.
- Use lines of latitude, longitude, and world time zones to calculate local time differences between the UK and Central America.
- Examine and decipher Maya mathematics and hieroglyphic glyphs to understand how they recorded numbers, dates, and historical records.
- Analyse archaeological evidence, expedition journals, and illustrations from Stephens and Catherwood to understand the features of Maya city-states.
- Critically evaluate different historical theories about the sudden decline and abandonment of classic Maya cities around AD 900.
- Investigate the geographical impact of modern mass tourism at Chichén Itzá, suggesting sustainable solutions to reduce stone erosion.

By the end of this topic I should know:

Geography:

- The ancient Maya inhabited Central America (including modern-day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador), a region shaped by volcanic mountains, lowlands, and coastal plains.
- Lines of longitude determine the 24 global time zones; places located west of the Prime Meridian are hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).
- Tropical rainforest biomes are distributed around the Equator between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, providing the humid climate needed for cacao to grow.
- Modern mass tourism brings economic wealth to historical ruins like Chichén Itzá, but also causes physical stone erosion and environmental wear that require managed conservation.

History:

- The classic period of the Maya civilisation flourished in Central America from around AD 250 to AD 900, organised into competing, independent city-states rather than a unified empire.
- Maya society was strictly hierarchical, led by a holy lord (K'uhul Ajaw), nobles, and priests, supported by skilled craftspeople, farmers, and enslaved labourers.
- The Maya developed an advanced vigesimal (base-20) number system using only three symbols: a shell (zero), a dot (one), and a bar (five).
- The Popol Vuh is the sacred Maya creation myth, detailing the Hero Twins and explaining their beliefs about the universe, gods, and nature.
- Around AD 900, major southern Maya cities like Copán were largely abandoned due to a combination of prolonged drought, warfare, and running out of resources.
- Explorers John Lloyd Stephens and artist Frederick Catherwood rediscovered ruined Maya cities in the 1830s, documenting them with detailed journals and drawings.