

HOW DID THE MAYA LIVE?

Mayan society was divided into royalty, priests, warriors – and then there was everyone else! But only the royalty lived in the incredible stone-built temple complexes like the one shown here. Ordinary people had simple huts for homes, away from the ceremonial centres.

Priests and scribes (people who wrote and copied documents) were involved in storytelling, astronomy and celebrating religious events.

These ceremonial buildings were places of worship



AWESOME MATHEMATICIANS

The Maya was one of the very first civilisations to come up with the concept of the number 'zero'. And this made big calculations much simpler.

Their brilliant maths skills helped them to build incredible temples and pyramids like the Temple Of Kukulcán at Chichén Itzá (below), which is considered one of the new Wonders Of The World.

SLITHERING TEMPLES

The Maya built the Kukulcán pyramid so that it precisely lined up with the sun. At the spring and autumn equinoxes (when there are as many hours in the day as there are in the night), shadows fall in such a way that the sun lights up triangles on the staircase and on the serpent's head at the base. These triangles appear to slither – like a snake winding its way down the pyramid. Wow!



Watch out for the slithering snake!

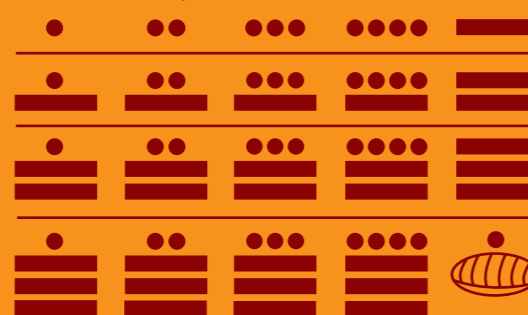
SPECIAL SYMBOLS

The Maya used this code to write numbers. Try writing your age using the symbols below...

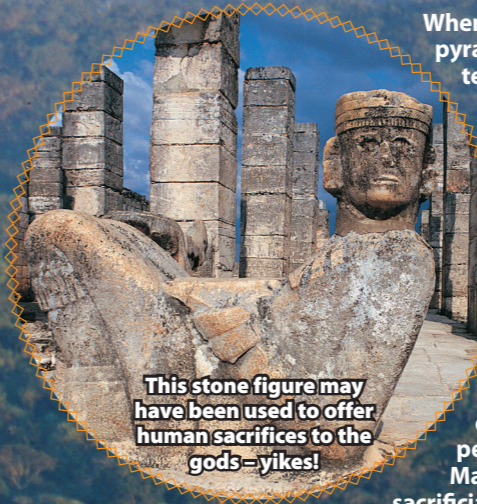
KEY



Here's how they would write numbers 1 to 20:



Did you know...?
The Maya used a calendar to record their historical events. It started on 11 August 3114BC – and mysteriously ended on 22 December 2012AD!



This stone figure may have been used to offer human sacrifices to the gods – yikes!

CRACKING THE CODE

In 1839, an American explorer called John Lloyd Stephens came across the ruined Mayan city of Copán. He marvelled at the hieroglyphic inscriptions that were carved on the temple walls. John felt sure that if we could somehow read the writing, we'd be able to learn about Mayan history.

The trouble was, the Mayan code was really difficult to crack! But, many years later in the 1980s, experts from Russia and the United States made an amazing breakthrough – the code was deciphered, and the Mayan history could finally be revealed!



The temples of Tulum overlook the sea in Mexico

GRUESOME DISCOVERY

When the code etched onto the pyramids, monuments and temples started to tell its story, archaeologists were shocked to find that it wasn't only a tale of kings, politics and wars. It was also a story of *human sacrifice* and *murder*!

The Maya believed that gods controlled nature, and that to get a good harvest, they had to make sacrifices to them. Sometimes a few drops of royal blood was all that was needed – but at other times they had to take a person's life. Eek! Mayan priests would drown their sacrificial victims in 'cenotes' – natural wells or reservoirs (below). Or, even worse, they would slice out victims' hearts on top of the pyramids. Scary or what?!



The Maya would drown victims in cenotes. Creepy!

THE GREAT COLLAPSE

Mayan royalty were very powerful. They ruled the land, and would sometimes make war with other Mayan kingdoms to defend and increase their own lands.

But, strangely, when Spanish invaders arrived in Central America in the late

1500s, after conquering Mexico, the Maya had all but vanished from their kingdoms. Their cities were empty ruins, so there was no one left to answer the important question: what happened?

DISAPPEARING ACT

There are many theories about how or why this incredible civilisation disappeared. Some people believe that a plague wiped out the Maya. But, if that's the case, where are the bodies?

Another idea is that a terrible event scared the people away from their cities. Maybe the Maya people stopped believing in their own gods? Others even believe that the Maya originally came from outer space! Did they somehow return there – maybe in gigantic flying saucers?!

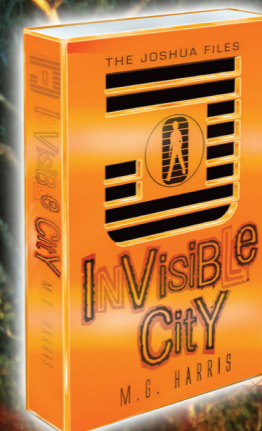
NATURAL CAUSES

Some archaeologists think that the Maya were victims of climate change, and that they were hit by extreme droughts, causing crops to fail. Unable to grow corn or vegetables, wars could have broken out as people fought over food and water.

Or maybe ordinary Mayan people were fed up of working for priests and kings who sacrificed them to gods – gods that no longer seemed to want to protect them? Perhaps they believed they would have a better chance of surviving as families, living free in the forest.

There are many different theories, but we may never know for sure what happened to this amazing civilisation. Will the Maya remain a mystery forever...?

Did you know...?
There are still millions of Mayan people living in Central America today – all descendants of the mysterious and ancient Maya!



MAYAN ADVENTURE

The Joshua Files: *Invisible City* by M.G. Harris – the author who helped us write this story – is an action-packed thriller, full of amazing Mayan mystery...

Josh Garcia's life is turned upside down when his father is killed in a plane crash. His dad was an archaeologist who was searching for a lost book of the Maya, the legendary 'Ix Codex'. Now it's up to 13-year-old Josh to find it. But there are others who also want the book – and the incredible power it holds...

The Joshua Files: *Invisible City* is out now. Go to www.joshuafiles.com