

## A Part of History Grade 5 Learners Book (only for students without learners book)

### 3.1 Who were the Maya?

**The first Mayan tribes were hunter-gatherers. This means that they moved around from place to place gathering food (such as fruit, seeds and nuts) and hunting animals for meat. Gradually, the Maya learned how to grow crops such as corn (which they called maize), squash and beans. This changed how the Maya lived. Why and how did knowledge of growing crops change Mayan civilisation?**

#### Farming techniques

The Maya learned how to clear large areas of jungle to create fields to grow crops. They used tools made from stone, bone and wood. When they had removed most of the trees, they set fire to the remaining plants. They used the ash from these fires as a fertiliser that added nutrients to the earth. The ash helped the Maya to grow crops successfully. The Maya dug canals through the fields so they could water their crops.



Stepped farming using terraces helped the Maya to farm in mountainous regions.

Where the land was very wet, the Maya built raised platforms on which they grew crops. In mountainous areas, they used stepped farming, which means that they built terraces up the hillside. The terraces stopped the soil slipping downhill and provided a firm, flat base for the crops to grow.

#### A wide variety of food

Maize was a very important food for the Maya. They made corn flour from maize and used it to make bread. The most common type of bread was very thick and flat, known as a tortilla. The Maya also made porridge from maize. Mayan farmers grew many other crops, including sweet potatoes, tomatoes, avocados and chilli peppers. The Maya kept bees for honey and grew cotton to make clothes. They caught fish in the rivers and hunted wild turkeys and deer. The Maya used cacao beans to make a bitter chocolate drink, sometimes spiced with chilli.

#### Did you know?

Water was important for growing crops and for drinking. Where water was hard to find, the Maya collected rainwater and stored it in tanks and reservoirs.

#### Glossary words

maize

nutrients

squash

stepped farming

terrace

tortilla



The Maya used a flat, stone table known as a metate to grind corn into flour. They used the flour to make bread.

## Settling down

Once the Maya began to farm, groups of people were able to settle in villages. The Maya were successful farmers so there was plenty of food and the population in these villages began to grow. Over time, cities started to develop.

## Activities

- 1 Show your understanding by defining these words. Then explain why each of these things was important to the Maya:
  - a maize
  - b stepped farming
  - c metate.
- 2 Write a brief report explaining:
  - a how the Maya farmed
  - b what Mayan farmers grew
  - c why the Maya changed from hunter-gatherers to settlers.

## Be a good historian

Remember that historians and archeologists do not always know the answers to questions in history. For example, experts are not completely sure why the Maya eventually abandoned their rainforest cities. The experts carry out research and look for clues, but sometimes they have to make an 'educated guess'.

## Challenge

The Maya are believed to be the first people to discover how to make chocolate. Find out about the history of chocolate. How did the Maya enjoy chocolate? How did it become the type of chocolate we enjoy today?

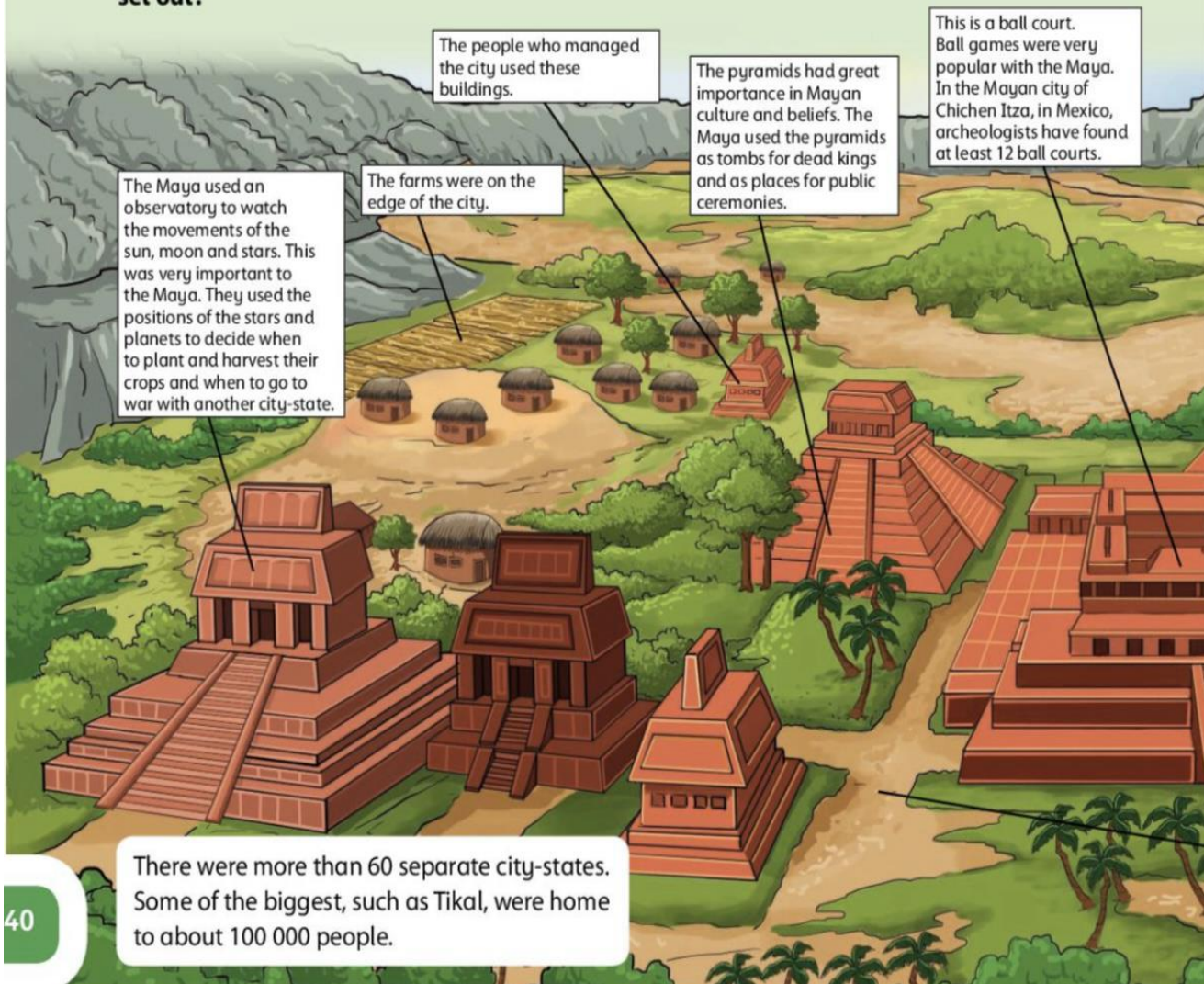


## 3.2 What were Mayan cities like?

**The Maya never had one emperor ruling over them or just one central capital city. Instead, there were many independent areas, each controlled by a different king. These were called city-states. The city-state was the total area ruled by a king. The king and his advisors and all the important buildings were located in the main city, usually close to the centre of the city-state. How many city-states were there? What were Mayan cities like? How were the cities set out?**

### Mayan civilisation

There were many different **city-states**, but all the Maya spoke the same language – Mayan. At least 6 million people still speak Mayan today. People in all the city-states worshipped in the same way and followed similar laws. They planned their cities in the same way, with all the important buildings in the centre and the ordinary homes and farms on the edges. All the Maya dressed in a similar way and shared the same calendar.





## Rival city-states

For many years, historians thought the Maya were peaceful. However, archeologists discovered wall paintings, statues and carvings that recorded wars between rival city-states. Sometimes one city-state became very powerful and gained control of some of the smaller city-states. But no state managed to control the whole Mayan civilisation.

### Did you know?

The Maya built their spectacular buildings without metal tools, the wheel or large animals (such as the donkey, ox or elephant) to help them.



Teotihuacan, a city of over 100 000 people, was a centre for trade. By 500 CE, it was the sixth largest city in the world. The larger pyramid shown here is the third largest in the world.

## Activities

- 1 Research one Mayan city-state and find images. Write a fact file about the city-state you have researched.
- 2 Create a travel guide for someone visiting the city-state. You can write your guide for someone visiting the city-state today, or for someone visiting long ago.

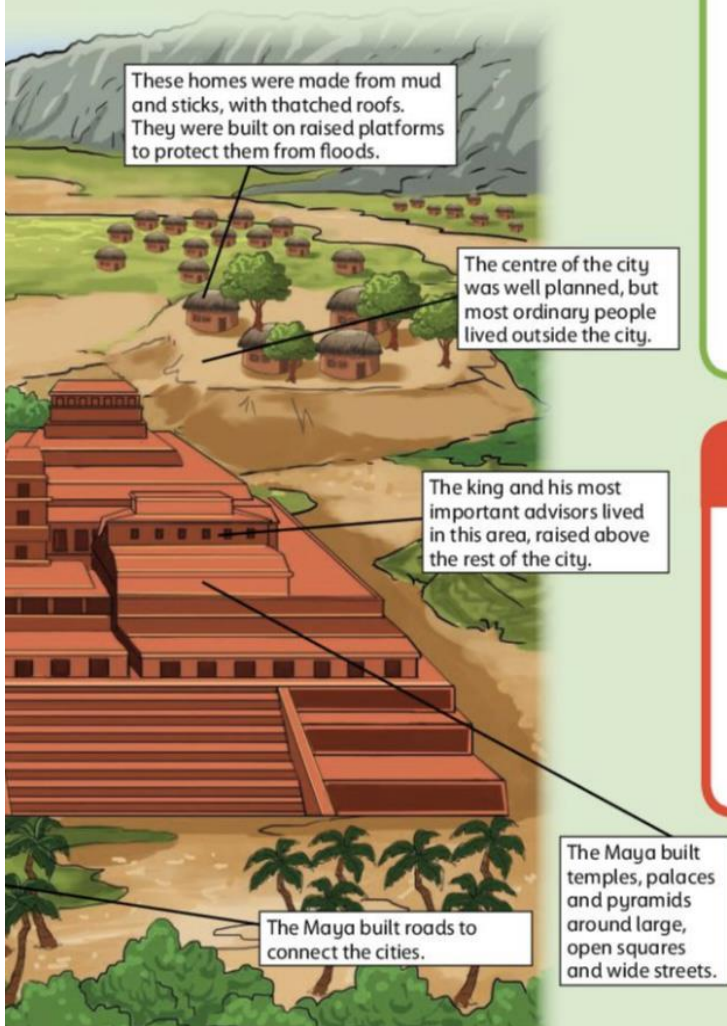
## Challenge

The Maya were one of many civilisations of southern Mexico, Central America and South America. Use books and the Internet to research and prepare fact files about the Olmec, Inca and Aztec civilisations.

### Glossary words

pyramid

tomb



## 3.3 Who ruled the Maya?

**Each Mayan city-state had its own king. When a king died, his son or other closest relative became the next king. Who helped the king rule? What were the different levels in Mayan society? How do we know so much about the Mayan kings?**

### The king and his family

Each city-state had a ruling family. The king, his wives and children were at the top of Mayan **society**. They lived a life of luxury in large palaces in the centre of the city. People believed that members of the royal family were more important than anyone else and thought the royal family could protect them. The king performed special ceremonies to protect his city and bring good fortune.

There was only one way for a new ruling family to take over a city-state. This happened when the ruling family in another city-state challenged and defeated the king's family. Fights and wars between city-states were common. In times of war, the king led his army into battle.

### Helping the king

A group of men known as the nobles helped the king to rule. The nobles were generals and other officials. They were usually members of the king's family.

Mayan nobles spent a lot of time on their appearance. They wore brightly coloured clothes and painted their bodies. They wore lots of necklaces, hair bands, bangles and enormous earrings.



This painted pottery figure shows a Mayan noble.

They also wore huge hats – the taller the better! The hats were usually decorated with long feathers from the quetzal bird, which had tail feathers up to 1 metre long.

Some women played an important role in Mayan society. The wives and mothers of kings sometimes held positions of influence. At a lower level than the nobles were the craftspeople, architects and merchants. This group could become wealthy, but they were not allowed to become nobles, unless the king invited them. They could not even dress like a noble. At the next level were the farmers, who lived outside the city centre on their farms. At the lowest level were the slaves. Most slaves were captured in wars from other city-states. Some people became slaves as a punishment for a crime. Slaves did much of the building work and had no rights or privileges.



## How do we know about Mayan people?

We know a lot about the rulers of the larger city-states because the Maya recorded the kings' reigns. Information about the kings was painted onto pottery or carved in wood or stone.



Stone columns known as stelae were carved out of limestone. The stelae recorded the actions and achievements of the kings.

### Did you know?

The organisation of society was very strict. It was very difficult to move from a position within society. If a person's father was a farmer or a merchant, then that person became a farmer or a merchant. People could not marry outside their social class.

## Glossary words

nobles

record

reign

social class

## Crime and punishment

Laws were similar across all the city-states. If a person broke a law, a judge listened to the evidence and decided whether the person was guilty or not. The punishments varied. A thief might become a slave of the victim for a short while. The punishment for damaging someone else's property was to pay for the damage or become a slave. Murder was rare. The punishment for murder was execution or the family of the victim might decide to take the murderer's land instead.

## Activities

- 1 Create a diagram to show how Mayan society was organised. Remember to show and explain the differences between the various groups.
- 2 Write a description of the system of law and order in Mayan society. Carry out some extra research on crime and punishment.

## Challenge

Research and write a report about one of the Mayan kings. King Pakal of Palenque is one of the most famous kings. He became king when he was 12 years old. The rulers of the city-states were nearly always men, but there were sometimes queens. You could research the Lady of Tikal.

