

The Mayans

The ancient Mayan civilization, in Central America, dates back to 500 B.C.E. In Guatemala and parts of Mexico, there are people that still call themselves Mayans, and they can even speak the Mayan language. These people are actually descendants of the ancient Mayans that ruled and built several civilized cities in Central America.

Tikal was one of the most impressive Mayan cities. The ruins of Tikal can still be seen in a Guatemalan jungle. The city of Tikal had palaces that were decorated with colorful paintings and hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics are ancient written symbols that were used as a form of expression. Tikal was not a highly populated city, because it was mainly used for religious ceremonies and sacrifices.

Ancestry was an important piece of the Mayan culture. A person's life or job was often determined by who their ancestors were. Depending on who a person's ancestors were, they could be a laborer or have a high-ranking position serving the emperor. The Mayan people believed that their rulers descended from the gods. Ancestry was also a common theme for Mayan art, since it played such an important role.

In the Mayan civilization, most people were actually peasants. These people lived outside of the actual cities, and they worked as laborers and farmers. Typically, they only visited the temples and palaces in the city if there was a special occasion or if a religious ceremony taking place.

On a typical day inside a Mayan city, like Tikal, artisans and craft people would be hard at work, attempting to please their princes and lords. In the royal court, poets, storytellers, and musicians would perform for their leaders.

Not much is known regarding Mayan religion. We do know that the Mayan people believed in many gods. They thought that these gods controlled the elements of nature, like rain and wind. They also believed that blood needed to be shed in order to please the gods. The Mayan civilization is credited with first discovering the concept of zero. In addition, they designed a calendar that was more accurate than even the 365-day calendar that we use today.

By 900 C.E., the Mayan civilization was declining. Their cities were nearly abandoned and were later inhabited by new peoples. Archaeologists are still working to determine what happened to the Mayan civilization.

Some think that the lands were over-farmed, and they were eventually unable to grow enough food to feed their people. Others believe that the peasants revolted against the ruling class, which led to war. The answer may lie in the hieroglyphics that have been found. Archaeologists have been able to determine what most of the Mayan hieroglyphics mean, but they have not yet been able to find a definite answer to the question of what happened to the Mayan people.

Name _____

Date _____

The Mayans Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. Ancient written symbols that were used as a form of expression were called:

- a. cursive
- b. tikals
- c. maya
- d. hieroglyphics

2. In the Mayan civilization, most people were actually this:

- a. soldiers
- b. peasants
- c. priests
- d. rich

3. The Mayan civilization dates back to this year:

- a. 500 C.E
- b. 50 C.E
- c. 50 B.C.E
- d. 500 B.C.E

True or False:

___ 4. Tikal was not an impressive Mayan city.

___ 5. Ancestry was an important piece of the Mayan culture.

___ 6. The ruins of Tikal have never been found.

___ 7. Mayan civilization is credited with first discovering the concept of zero.

___ 8. The Mayan people designed a calendar that was more accurate than even the 365-day calendar that we use today.

Fill Ins:

9. In _____ and parts of Mexico, there are people that still call themselves Mayans, and they can even speak the Mayan language.

10. _____ are still working to determine what happened to the Mayan civilization.

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The Mayans Answers

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