

Knowledge Organiser for Year 6 History: Ancient Mesoamerican Civilisations

Key idea: To compare the life of the Ancient Maya and Aztec Civilisations to modern life

Tier 3 vocabulary	Mesoamerican Ancient Civilisations Timeline	
Mesoamerican: relating to or characteristic of the region of Meso-America or its inhabitants	21000 BCE	The first hunter-gathers settle into the region that will be home to the Maya.
Hieroglyphs: a stylised picture of an object representing a word, syllable, or sound, as found in ancient writing systems	3114 BCE	The world is created according to Maya mythology. The first day of the Long Count calendar takes place in midsummer.
Auto de fé: a work of faith	1800 BCE	The Ancient Maya begin to farm and settle in villages.
Jade: a translucent or opaque ornamental mineral gem stone of many colours, of which it is mostly known for its green varieties	600 BCE	The Ancient Maya begin digging irrigation canals to increase crop yields.
New Fire Ceremony: an Aztec ceremony performed once every 52 years – a full cycle of the Aztec ‘calendar round’ – in order to stave off the end of the world. This was part of the ‘Binding of the Years’ tradition among the Aztecs.	400 BCE	The earliest known solar calendars come into use by the Maya.
Tier 2 vocabulary	300 BCE	The Ancient Maya begin to write using hieroglyphs. Kings and chiefs are selected to rule Maya cities and towns.
Civilisation: the society, culture and way of life in a particular area	683 CE	The ruler Pakal the Great (who became king at the age of 12) dies in the city of Palenque. His death mask made out of jade is one of the most famous surviving Maya artefacts.
Culture: the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society	869 CE	Tikal citadel reaches its peak and begins to decline.
Irrigation: the supply of water to land or crops to help growth	300 BCE – 900 CE	The Ancient Maya build large cities and become very skilled in writing, maths, the arts and astronomy.
Canals: human-made channels, or artificial waterways, for water conveyance or to service water transport vehicles. They can be thought of as artificial versions of rivers.	c. 1100 CE	The Valley of Mexico is first settled by migrating tribes.
Migrating: moving from one habitat or region to another	1345 CE	The previously nomadic Aztecs found the capital of Tenochtitlan on Lake Texcoco.
Nomadic: living the life of a nomad; wandering about	1351 CE	New Fire Ceremony celebrated by the Aztecs to mark the start of the 2 nd century.
Found: build	1375 – 1395 CE	Acapahtli reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
Reign: the period of rule of a monarch	1395 – 1417 CE	Huitzilohuitl reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
Key Places	1403 CE	New Fire Ceremony celebrated by the Aztecs to mark the start of the 3 rd century.
Chichén Itzá: the site of the first major power of the Maya in the Yucatan Peninsula. The city was founded sometime between the years 750 and 800 CE by a group of Maya people known as the Itza. Thanks to a powerful military and a strong economy, the city was able to expand rapidly over the next one hundred years. Most scholars believe that, at its height, Chichén Itzá was the largest city-state in Maya history. Today it is a complex site of Mayan ruins where there are many statues and carvings, an observatory, temples and a pyramid that remain on the site. A massive step pyramid, known as El Castillo (or Temple of Kukulcan) dominates the ancient city. Graphic stone carvings survive at structures like the ball court, Temple of the Warriors and the Wall of the Skulls.	1417- 1426 CE	Chimalpopoca reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
Tenochtitlan: the capital city and centre of the Aztec Empire. It was founded in 1325 and served as the capital until the Aztecs were conquered by the Spanish. Tenochtitlan was located on a swampy island in Lake Texcoco and Mexico City stands on the same site today.	c. 1427 CE	The Sun Stone depicting the ages of the five suns of Aztec mythology is carved and set up at Tenochtitlan.
Tikal: now designated as a world heritage site, was one of the longest reigning Maya dynasties and one of the greatest Maya states lasting through 39 kings and more than 800 years. The citadel at its height it had up to 90000 citizens and was located in northern Guatemala. Tikal flourished between 200 and 850 CE but was later abandoned. By 900 CE the kingdom was falling apart and the jungle was already creeping in to take over the decaying remains of the once-great Tikal. Its iconic ruins of temples and palaces include the giant ceremonial Lost World Pyramid (Mundo Perido) and the Temple of the Grand Jaguar. Temple IV is the tallest pre-Columbian structure in the Americas.	1427 – 1440 CE	Itzcoatl reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
	c. 1450 CE	The Aztecs establish a garrison at Mitla in the Oaxaca Valley.
	1440 – 1469 CE	Moteczuhzoma I reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
	1455 CE	New Fire Ceremony celebrated by the Aztecs to mark the start of the 4 th century.
	1469 – 1481 CE	Axayacatl reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
	1481 – 1486 CE	Tizoc reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
	1486 – 1502 CE	Ahuitzotl reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
	1487 CE	The Templo Mayor (The Great Temple) is completed at Tenochtitlan and inaugurated with the sacrifice of 20000 captives. This was the focal point of the Aztec religion and the very centre of the Aztec world. It was also the scene of state occasions such as coronations and the place of countless human sacrifices where the blood of victims were thought to feed and appease the two great Gods to whom the temple was dedicated.
	1502 CE	On his fourth voyage from Spain to the Caribbean, Christopher Columbus spied something that he described as, “A canoe as long as a galleon.” The canoe had more than 40 passengers, including a pilot, paddlers, a merchant and some servants. This was Europe’s first encounter with the Maya.
	1502 – 1520 CE	Moteczuhzoma II reigns as leader of the Aztec Empire.
	1507 CE	New Fire Ceremony celebrated by the Aztecs to mark the start of the 5 th century.
	1511 CE	The next contact between the Maya and the Spanish when a small Spanish ship ran aground on a sandbar. The survivors were captured by local Mayas and became slaves or sacrifices. This brought new diseases to the area such as smallpox which sickened and killed thousands of Maya over the next few years.
	1517 CE	The Spanish, led by Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba, tried to conquer the Maya but the Maya fought back. Many Maya died in battle but many more died through disease that the Spanish brought with them. Cordoba led the expedition, sailing to the Yucatan from Cuba, looking for natives he could take as slaves. He was surprised to find such an advanced culture and he began trading with the natives obtaining small amounts of gold. His expedition did not fare well; in one settlement the Maya ambushed the Spanish attacking them with stones thrown from slings, arrows and darts from blowpipes.
	1519 CE	Hernan Cortes set forth to seek his fortune landing to the north of the Yucatan. He learned of the wealthy Aztecs and set off to Tenochtitlan to steal as much of their gold as possible.
	1520 CE	30 th June, death of the Aztec ruler Moteczuhzoma II.
	1521 CE	The Spanish conquered the Aztecs in a matter of months.
	1521 CE	13 th August, Tenochtitlan falls into the hands of Spanish forces led by Cortes.
	1562 CE	The Spanish appoint a Governor of the region and began working to eliminate Maya culture.
	1562 CE	Spanish Bishop Fray Diego de Landa began an <i>auto de fé</i> in which he destroyed Maya idols and burnt 40 important Maya religious texts, claiming them to be the work of the devil. Such activities left the Maya culture almost completely devastated.
	1600s CE	The Spanish government took away the Aztec and Maya lands to give to the Roman Catholic Church and Spanish noblemen. The Maya were forced to work as slaves, barely having enough food and shelter to survive.
	1600s CE	The Spanish took control of the Maya and the Aztec lands, which is now known as Mexico and Central America.
	1680s CE	The Spanish finally conquered the Ancient Maya. Although many Maya survived, their civilisation was destroyed. The Spanish found the climate and terrain difficult as Maya cities were often deep in jungles and the Spanish could barely endure the heat in their full metal armour.
	2011 CE	An Ancient Maya road was discovered near the Loma Caldera volcano, indicating a way for the Maya to escape during a volcanic eruption.
Knowledge Intentions		
KI1: Know about Ancient Mesoamerican religious beliefs and customs Bloodletting and sacrifice were important parts of religious beliefs, e.g. the Aztecs used to pierce their tongues with a cactus spike every morning to give a blood offering to their sun God Huitzilopochtli (also the deity of war and human sacrifice, and the patron of the city of Tenochtitlan). They believed that the sun would not rise every morning without this daily offering. Aztecs: worshipped 200 different Gods and Goddesses. Maya: worshipped 250 different Gods and Goddesses.		
KI2: Know about the Ancient Mesoamerican way of life Aztecs: men and boys were warriors and hunters. When a baby boy was born, their umbilical cord was given to a warrior to bury on a battlefield as a ritual to help boys grow into strong warriors. Boys from noble families could train to become priests. Life was harsh for boys and fathers, if deemed necessary, would stab or tie up their sons to discipline them. Women and girls kept home, completed religious jobs, traded or became curers and midwives. Female slaves would weave cloth from agave fibres. Maya: men and boys were farmers, hunters and they made tools. Boys would also help construct temples and other buildings for Maya rulers. Sons from wealthier families could study to become priests. Women and girls worked in the home cooking, weaving cloth from cotton or wool to make clothes or shopping at the market. Some women became midwives and historical evidence suggests that some even learnt to read and become scribes.		
KI3: Know about Ancient Mesoamerican calendar systems Both civilisations had multiple calendar systems that they devised from observing the sun. The Aztecs had two calendar systems – religious and a farming – which when they matched up at the same point in their cycles (every 52 years), became a new century and was celebrated in the New Fire Ceremony. The Maya had four different calendar systems.		
KI4: Know about Ancient Mesoamerican cities Aztecs: The city of Tenochtitlan Maya: The citadel of Chichén Itzá		
KI5: Know about Ancient Mesoamerican links with life today Aztecs: the prophecy that ended the Aztec nomadic way of life has links with the Mexican flag of today. The prophecy stated that they would settle when they saw an eagle sit on top of a cactus eating a snake. Maya: although the conquering Spanish brought about the end of the way of life for the Ancient Maya, many Maya are alive today and still continue some ancient traditions.		

Key notes for teaching staff: