

Ancient Maya: DAILY LIFE

Life in the Maya civilization was focused on work, family, and religion. People farmed the land and worshipped their gods at temples. The Maya made crafts and artwork. Some Maya were able to read and write. Maya society was strictly divided between the elite and the ordinary people, or commoners. The daily life of a Maya depended on their level of social class. There were several classes in Maya society including common people, nobles, priests, or people who were enslaved.

COMMON MAYA

Most Maya commoners were farmers. Other commoners were architects, stonecutters, and carpenters. They worked the fields raising maize, beans, and other crops. The men also hunted for meat. Most women worked at home preparing meals and weaving clothing. Women sometimes helped in the fields too. Commoner children did not attend school but learned skills from their families. Common people dressed simply. They were not allowed to wear fancy clothing and jewelry like the elite, even if they could afford them. Men covered themselves with loincloths, while women wore simple woven dresses or skirts. Most Maya families lived in one-room houses and slept on reed mats at night.



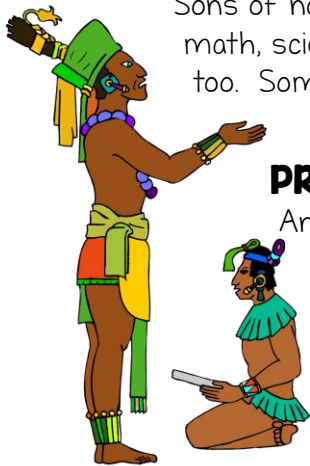
MIDDLE CLASS

There was a small middle class of merchants and government officials. Members of the middle class could earn great wealth, but they could never join the elite, who inherited their status from their parents.

NOBLES

Nobles lived very different lives from the common Maya. Each city-state had both nobles and a king. The king lived a life of privilege but had many responsibilities to organize his people. Nobles wore jewelry made from jade, a stone. Many also had tattoos that showed animals or gods.

Sons of nobles went to school, where they were taught by priests. They studied math, science, writing, and other subjects. Some nobles learned to read and write too. Some noble girls also learned to read and write.



PRIESTS

Another powerful class in Maya society was priests. Nobles ruled, while priests made decisions. They chose when farmers would plant and harvest their crops. Priests selected when people should be sacrificed to their gods. They climbed the stairs of pyramid temples to perform ceremonies and sacrifices. Priests were also astronomers who tracked the movements of the planets and stars.

THE ENSLAVED

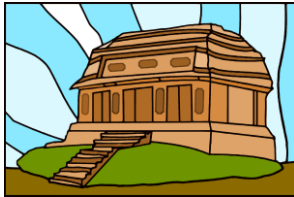
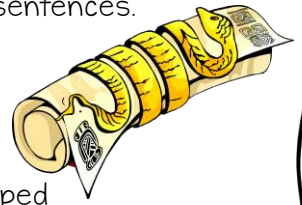
The Maya sometimes captured enemies in battle and enslaved them. People who were caught stealing also were enslaved, meaning they worked for no pay. Many were sacrificed to the Maya gods.

MARRIAGE

Young people went through rituals in which they were recognized as adults before they could marry. Marriages were arranged, but couples could get divorced and remarry. Young couples lived in the wife's family compound at first. They built a home on the husband's family land after a few years. Sons inherited from their fathers, while daughters did not inherit anything.

COMMUNICATION

The Maya spoke different languages in the different areas. They were related, but speakers of different Mayan languages could not understand each other. Maya city-states frequently communicated with one another. A system of roads connected their cities. Over twenty different Mayan languages are still spoken today. The Maya had a form of writing made up of 1,000 glyphs and combined hieroglyphics. The pictures included people, animals, and gods. Each picture stood for a sound. The pictures were combined to make words and sentences. The Maya wrote on stone and an early form of paper. A type of folding book called a codex recorded the history, religion, and culture of the Maya.



RELIGION

Religion was very important to the Maya. They worshipped many different nature gods such as the sun, rain, and corn. The Maya believed these gods controlled natural events like the weather, harvests, and earthquakes. The Maya believed they needed to keep the gods happy. They built huge temples shaped like pyramids to the gods. The Maya gave offerings, such as food, drink, and animals, to the gods. Blood was the most important offering given to the gods. Humans were sacrificed to keep the gods happy. The Maya offered sacrifices to their gods on the altar at the top of temples.

CALENDAR

The Maya created complex calendars used for farming, religion, and other important events. The Maya calendar had two main parts: the *Tzolk'in* and the *Haab'*. The *Tzolk'in* calendar was a 260-day sacred cycle made up of 13 months of 20 days. Each day had its own name. It tracked important ceremonies and astronomical events. The *Haab'* was the 365-day cycle based on the solar year. It had 18 months and 20 days. And was used to track harvest dates and seasons. The Maya knew the solar year was not exact, so they added five extra days called the *Wayeb*. The *Tzolk'in* and *Haab'* cycles overlapped. It took 52 years for them to begin again at the same starting point, known as the Calendar Round. The Long Count is a separate system used to measure lengths of time that are longer than 52 years. It measures time in five cycles from a starting date of August 11, 3114 BCE. That is the day the Maya believed the world was created.

DIET

The people of Mesoamerica learned to grow maize, or corn, between 3000 and 2000 BCE. The Maya depended on corn, the most important food eaten by them. It was made into tortillas, dumplings, and a porridge called *atole*. The elite mixed atole with a chocolate. Commoners added chili peppers, pumpkin seeds, honey, and herbs to their atole. A corn drink called chicha was also made by the Maya. The Maya also ate squash, pumpkins, tomatoes, nuts, fruits, beans, peppers, and avocados. Depending on where the Maya lived, they ate venison (deer), turkey, and shellfish. Maya chocolate did not have sugar or milk added to it. Cacao beans were toasted and then ground to make a hot drink. Cacao beans were a chief crop of the Maya. They were used for trade and were very valuable.

