

## Mayan Calendar

Name \_\_\_\_\_

The Maya were an indigenous people who lived throughout Mexico and Central America from about 800 B.C. to 1100 A.D. The Mayan society was thought to be the most complex and sophisticated in the world at the time. The Maya were responsible for incredible achievements in astronomy, agriculture, math, engineering and technology. Although there are several theories on why they eventually faded into history, historians and archaeologists still have not come to a consensus.

## Pyramids

Ruins of the majestic Mayan pyramids are scattered throughout parts of Mexico and Central America. All Mayan pyramids had flat tops and many were built to align with celestial events such as the path of the sun.

## Types of Pyramid

Pyramids to the Gods – These pyramids were designed to honor the Mayan gods. They were not meant to be touched or climbed by humans. Although there were stairs leading to the top of the pyramid, they were so steep that most humans were incapable of making such a climb. Such pyramids also contained secret passages and traps.

Sacrificial Pyramids – The Maya also built pyramids that were designed for religious and sacrificial purposes. These pyramids had stairs that led to a temple at the top where important religious ceremonies could be held and where sacrifices were made to the gods by priests in front of worshippers.

## A Famous Pyramid

Temple of Kukulcan, sometimes called El Castillo, honors the Mayan feathered-serpent God named Kukulcan. The temple is the centerpiece of Chichén Itzá – an important Mayan city, and world UNESCO site, that lasted about 300 years. The flat-topped pyramid has four staircases, each with 91 steps. Combined with the entrance step, there are 365 total steps. Amazingly, during the spring and fall equinox, a serpent-shaped shadow descends upon the pyramid and grows larger as it falls upon the stairs as the day progresses. By dusk, the shadow joins the stone serpent head at the base of the stairs producing a chilling effect. The entire shadow lasts for about 45 minutes before disappearing in the dwindling light. According to Maya legend, the shadow symbolized the return of Kukulcan, who comes back to Earth to give his blessing for a full harvest and good health. Today, thousands of people gather around the pyramid during this time to celebrate the “descent of Kukulcan.”

**1. What is NOT true about Mayan pyramids?**

- A. They were built for religious ceremonies
- B. They were built to honor gods
- C. They were flat at the tops
- D. Humans could visit pyramids built for gods

**2. In contrast to sacrificial pyramids...**

- A. pyramids to the gods had flat tops.
- B. pyramids to the gods were the sites of sacrifices.
- C. sacrificial pyramids had secret passages and traps.
- D. pyramids to the gods could not be climbed by humans.

**3. Where is the Temple of Kukulcan?**

- A. El Castillo
- B. Chichén Itzá
- C. UNESCO World Heritage Site
- D. The passage doesn't say

**4. Which paragraph describes a sequence of events?**

- A. Second
- B. Third
- C. Fourth
- D. Final

**5. What could replace “incapable of making” in the following sentence?**

Although there were stairs leading to the top of the pyramid, they were so steep that most humans were incapable of making such a climb.

- A. difficult to make
- B. impossible to find
- C. eager to make
- D. unable to male

**6. Which of the following best describes “the descent of Kukulcan”?**

- A. The four stairwells and entrance step that combine to make 365 total steps
- B. A feathered-serpent God
- C. The growing shadows that envelop the stairs of El Castillo during an equinox
- D. Ceremonies that occur atop the sacrificial pyramids

**7. What question is not answered in the passage?**

- A. What kinds of things were sacrificed by the Maya?
- B. How did the Mayan civilization compare to other civilizations that existed at the same time?
- C. What did the shadow symbolize?
- D. How long does the shadow of Kukulcan last during the Spring or Fall Equinox?