

The Maya Ancient and Modern

The text is provided courtesy of Vanderbilt University: Center for Latin American Studies.

The Maya are native peoples who live in parts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Archaeologists divide the period before the Spanish conquest in the 1520s into several periods.

The Pre-Classic period began as early as 1800 BCE (Before Common Era). During this time, the Maya began to live in villages and cities, and around 300 BCE to develop a Maya writing system.

In the Classic period (250 CE to 900 CE) the Maya expanded their settlements into great cities with large temple complexes, which were controlled by kings. These cities such as Tikal, Chichen Itzá, and Palenque, were comparable to or larger in size than European cities of that time. The Maya developed a sophisticated writing system using glyphs, as well as a unique number system that used a combination of bars and dots to create large numbers. Maya mathematics included the concept of zero.

By around 900 CE, many Maya cities such as Tikal and Palenque had fallen into decline. The reason for this decline is not known; theories include disease, warfare, or climate change. The Spanish conquest in the early 16th century brought devastation and upheaval to the Maya people. As the Spanish crown established its own administration Maya people had to leave their homes and were relocated into newly founded Spanish cities. In the [1820s] Central American States like Guatemala gained independences from Spain.

While Maya civilization is often remembered for these Classic Era accomplishments, Maya culture did not end with the so-called collapse in 900 CE. Today there are over six million Maya people living throughout Central America-and many living as immigrants in the U.S. Half the population of Guatemala [is] Maya. The Modern Maya show remarkable cultural resilience despite suffering from land equality and severe poverty. There are twenty-three Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala today, and the Maya maintain traditions of dress and religion that can be traced back to the peak of Classic Maya civilization.



the pyramid in Chichen Itza known as El Castillo



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This picture shows some Maya women today wearing traditional Mayan clothing.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What happened in the Pre-Classic period?

- A. The Maya began living in villages and cities.
- B. The Maya developed a number system that could express large numbers.
- C. The Maya left their homes and relocated into Spanish cities.
- D. The Maya made up half the population of Guatemala.

2. The text describes some Maya accomplishments in the Maya Classic period. What is one of those accomplishments?

- A. The Maya began living in villages and cities.
- B. The Maya developed a number system that could express large numbers.
- C. The Maya left their homes and relocated into Spanish cities.
- D. The Maya made up half the population of Guatemala.

3. Maya culture from the Classic period is still practiced today. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

A. "The Maya are native peoples who live in parts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador."

B. "In the Classic period (250 CE to 900 CE) the Maya expanded their settlements into great cities with large temple complexes, which were controlled by kings."

C. "In the [1820s] Central American States like Guatemala gained independences from Spain."

D. ". . . the Maya maintain traditions of dress and religion that can be traced back to the peak of Classic Maya civilization."

4. Read this sentence from the text.

"While Maya civilization is often remembered for these Classic Era accomplishments, Maya culture did not end with the so-called collapse in 900 CE. . . . the Maya maintain traditions of dress and religion that can be traced back to the peak of Classic Maya civilization."

Based on the text, what can you infer about the Maya Classic period?

- A. The Classic period defined Maya cultural identity.
- B. The Classic period is not important to Maya cultural identity.
- C. The Classic period was the longest period in Maya history.
- D. The Classic Period was the end of Maya cultural identity.

5. What is the main idea of the text?

- A. Maya history is divided into periods before the Spanish conquest, and the Maya people are spread out today.
- B. The Maya Classic period is the most important period of Maya history because of all the important accomplishments made in that time.
- C. The Maya culture formed long ago, and despite the fall of the Maya civilization, the culture continues today.
- D. The Spanish conquest was devastating to the Maya people, but places like Guatemala with a lot of Maya people gained independence from Spain.