

MAYA TIMELINE

Overview:

Ancient Maya civilization is divided into three periods. Dates differ among sources, but generally these periods and dates are:

Pre-classic	1800 BC–300 AD
Classic	300 AD–900 AD
Post-classic	900 AD–1530 AD

This activity helps learners visualize and comprehend the chronology and scale of the Maya civilization during these three periods. Further, they can anchor this new knowledge against the backdrop of other civilizations, discoveries, and events.

What You Need:

- Timeline from “World Timeline” activity
- Markers
- Reference books
- Internet access

Teaching Strategy:

- This activity should be introduced early in the unit in order to help learners anchor Maya accomplishments within the specific eras and compare Maya events to world events. The timeline should be seen as an on-going activity, with newly learned events being added to the timeline at any time during the unit.
- For events, see master 13, *Voyage of the Mimi II*—Social Studies Resource Guide.

What to Do:

- Divide your learners in small working groups. Give each group 3–5 historical events from Maya history.
- Have learners look up each event and decide when that event happened. Have them post the event on the timeline near the appropriate date or range of dates.
- Make sure that learners realize that different sources may give different dates

about events in ancient history. Have them discuss why that may be.

- Learners can also make illustrations (with labels) of the events and connect them to the timeline with yarn.
- Discuss the finished timeline. Make sure that your learners make connections between the three eras. The Maya culture was developing during the Pre-classic era, flourishing during the Classic era, and declining during the Post-classic.
- During your discussion, have your learners note the similarities and differences between and among cultures, such as when other civilizations began using metals (the ancient Maya did not use metals), when different ancient structures were built, and when different cultures used astronomy.

Extensions:

- It is a good idea to have extra events available for those groups that finish early.
- Allow learners to put up events that interest them. This may mean extending the timeline to include modern eras.
- You can extend the timeline to include civilizations before the Maya (such as the Olmec) and those that followed (such as the Aztec).
- Have each learner select a Maya event of interest and research the particulars of this event. Ask each learner to write a newspaper article depicting the details. Have a learner compile these articles into a Maya newspaper—complete with newspaper formatting and name, such as “The Jaguar Journal” or the “Maya Times.” Encourage learners to include headlines and graphics in their articles.

Events in Maya History

B.C.

- 11,000 The first hunter-gatherers settle in the Maya highlands and lowlands.
- 3113 The creation of the world takes place, according to the Maya Long Count calendar.
- 2600 Maya civilization begins.
- 2000 The rise of the Olmec civilization, from which many aspects of Maya culture are derived. Village farming becomes established throughout Maya regions.
- 700 Writing is developed in Mesoamerica.
- 400 The earliest known solar calendars carved in stone are in use among the Maya, although the solar calendar may have been known and used by the Maya before this date.
- 300 The Maya adopt the idea of a hierarchical society ruled by nobles and kings.
- 100 The city of Teotihuacan is founded and for centuries is the cultural, religious and trading center of Mesoamerica.
- 50 The Maya city of Cerros is built, with a complex of temples and ball courts. It is abandoned (for reasons unknown) a hundred years later and its people return to fishing and farming.

A.D.

- 100 The decline of the Olmecs.
- 400 The Maya highlands fall under the domination of Teotihuacan, and the disintegration of Maya culture and language begins in some parts of the highlands.
- 500 The Maya city of Tikal becomes the first great Maya city, as citizens from Teotihuacan make their way to Tikal, introducing new ideas involving weaponry, captives, ritual practices and human sacrifice.
- 600 An unknown event destroys the civilization at Teotihuacan, along with the empire it supported. Tikal becomes the largest city-state in Mesoamerica, with as many as 500,000 inhabitants within the city and its hinterland.
- 683 The Emperor Pacal dies at the age of 80 and is buried in the Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque.
- 751 Long-standing Maya alliances begin to break down. Trade between Maya city-states declines, and inter-state conflict increases.
- 869 Construction ceases in Tikal, marking the beginning of the city's decline.
- 899 Tikal is abandoned.
- 900 The Classic Period of Maya history ends, with the collapse of the southern lowland cities. Maya cities in the northern Yucatán continue to thrive.

Taken from: <http://www.digitalmeesh.com/maya/history.htm>



MESOAMERICAN POPULATION HISTORY

Beginning around 15,000 years ago (some insist that the proper date is more like 20 to 30 thousand years ago) the earth was in the grips of the last Ice Age. Much of the ocean's water was locked up in the expanded polar ice caps, dropping the level of sea water to 100 to 300 feet below the present level. In the Bering Sea, between modern Alaska and Siberia, the sea was shallow enough that the reduced level of sea water would have resulted in a dry land bridge between the Asian and American continents. The so-called Bering Straits Land Bridge was at times over 1,000 miles wide, permitting movement of humans and animals freely from the Old World to the New, and vice-versa. At the time there were no human inhabitants in the New World, but there were vast numbers of large game animals such as mammoths, mastodons, giant sloths, horses and several varieties of camels (some of which are still around in the form of llamas, alpacas and vicunas).

This remote period, known as the Late Pleistocene, was when the first hunters and gatherers from Siberia colonized the New World. Eventually these nomadic hunters followed the game herds as far south as the tip of South America, where radiocarbon dates have recently established their presence there by 12,500 years ago. Called the Paleo-Indian Period by archeologists, these bands of hunters roamed the continent until around 8,000 B.C.

In Middle America, small bands of nomads began to cultivate certain plants rather than merely collect them. The most important of these seed plants was corn (maize) which permitted the storage of surplus and allowed for the establishment of the first permanent villages by the close of this, the Archaic Period, by 2000 B.C. The Pre-Classic Period lasted, more or less, allowing for regional variability, from 2000 B.C to 250 A.D. With the spread everywhere of peasant hamlets, the first Mesoamerican civilization established itself within this time frame.

The Period that followed is called the Classic Period, 250 to 900 A.D. In the minds of some, the "Golden Age" of Mesoamerican civilization dominated in Central Mexico by the great city of Teotihuacan and by the Maya of the Yucatan Peninsular, southern Mexico and Guatemala. It was during this period the Maya reached their zenith, with construction of the great ceremonial centers and the erection of carved stone monuments with the dates of the monuments expressed in the Maya "Long Count." The Classic Period began, as far as archeologists are concerned, with the establishment of a monument at Tikal, dated 292 A.D. and ends with the last such monument found at Uaxactun, dated 889 A.D.

The Post-Classic Period, A.D. 900 to 1521 saw the rapid decline of the Maya civilization followed by intrusions into the Maya world by elements from southern and central Mexico. While it is true the Maya made several attempts to reorganize and re-affirm their leadership, most notably at the large settlement of Mayapan in the Yucatan, they never achieved their former influence. The arrival of the Spanish, of course, extinguished the Post-Classic cultures.

The Maya's ancestors made the long journey from Siberia to Mesoamerica over many centuries, enduring the uncertainties and hardships of nomadic life until they opted for a more secure lifestyle as farmers. The outgrowth of this sedentary existence was the production of surplus food which freed up some of the more skilled craftsmen to produce things associated with permanent village life, such as pottery, textiles, and canoes that helped exploit food and other resources that enriched their daily lives. The ruins of the great cities and ceremonial centers of the Maya, only now being wrenched from the grip of the jungle, are testimony to their success and failure.

References

Mesoamerican Population History, <http://www.ambergriscaye.com/museum/digit17.html>.

