

## A comparison study of Ancient Maya and Anglo-Saxons

### Builds on Knowledge and Skills

In Year 5, you learnt about the Anglo-Saxons. They settled in Britain around 400AD – 1066AD. They were a mix of tribes from Germany (The Saxons were German-Dutch), Denmark (The Angles were southern Danish) and the Jutes (Northern Danish). The Land they settled in was 'Angle-Land' or England. Meanwhile, the Ancient Maya civilisation was at its peak in Mesoamerica from 250AD – 900AD. This huge area is made up of Mexico and part of Central America. While they lived in different cities, ruled by different kings and queens, the Mayas shared many common beliefs and traditions. Interestingly, although these two civilisations occurred during similar time periods, their lives were very different. During this topic, we will compare and contrast the non-European society with British history.

### Books, texts, primary and secondary sources you may use:

- The Chocolate Tree: A Mayan Folktale by Linda Lowery
- Avoid being a Mayan Soothsayer (Danger Zone) by Rupert Matthews
- The History Detective Investigates: Mayan Civilization by Clare Hibbert
- Anglo-Saxon Boy by Tony Bradman
- The History Detectives Investigates Anglo-Saxons

### Suggested family experiences:

- Visit Cadbury World, where you can walk through the tropical rainforest of the Mayan, visit [here](#) for more information.
- You can take a virtual tour of Room 41 to see the artefacts on screen by clicking [here](#).

### National Curriculum Links:

- A non-European society that provides contrasts with British history – one study chosen from: early Islamic civilization, including a study of Baghdad c. AD 900; Mayan civilization c. AD 900; Benin (West Africa) c. AD 900-1300.

### Local History Links:

St John's Church in Halesowen Town Centre is built on an Anglo-Saxon site and is Grade I listed.



### Vocabulary you will use:

Word	Definition
abandoned	Left for a long time
Angles	A tribe from Southern Denmark
Bretwalda	King of all Britain
ceremony	A formal event at which special things are done
codices	plural of codex (an ancient type of book written by hand)
conquistadors	Spanish conquerors
kingdom	A territory ruled by a king or a queen
pagan	Religious beliefs other than those of the other world religions
sacrifice	To kill an animal or person in a religious ceremony
Saxons	A German-Dutch tribe
traditions	Customs that have existed for a long time
tribe	A group of people who come from a particular region and stay together as a group
uninhabitable	Cannot be lived in

### Quick Summary

The first Mesoamerican civilisation to develop writing, the **Maya** lived in central America around 4000 years ago (2000 BC) and developed a sophisticated culture of city states with fine monumental buildings and characteristic stepped pyramids.

The **Anglo-Saxons** were made up of different tribes who invaded Britain after the Roman army left. The land they conquered was split into small kingdoms and the new invaders brought their own building methods, religious beliefs and language.



### Main Events

250 BCE: First systems of Maya writing developed.

600 CE: Caracol became the most important Maya city.

750 CE: Maya civilisation a major power in the region.

900 CE: Several Maya cities were suddenly abandoned.

1520 CE: Spanish conquistadors contacted Maya settlements.

410AD: Roman army left Britain.

597AD: St Augustine brought Christianity to Britain from Rome.

878AD: Alfred the Great was victorious at the battle of Edington.

927AD: Kingdom of England created.

1939: Important discovery made at Sutton Hoo.

Questions we'll ask you throughout the unit to check your knowledge and understanding.

In what ways were the Maya an advanced civilisation at their time?

Discuss the similarities and differences between the Maya culture and the Anglo-Saxons.

Compare and contrast the legacy of the Maya with that of the Anglo-Saxons.

Investigate the impact of invasions on Maya and Anglo-Saxon society.



## Ancient Maya

Who were they?



The Maya are native Americans of Central America. At its peak, the civilisation was made up of 40 great cities and almost 2 million people. The Maya became expert mathematicians, skilful astronomers and architects.

They were experts at reading the stars and even built their cities as a map of the sky. They were also inspired by the creatures of the forest.

The population in Maya's largest settlements was about 60,000, making them some of the most populated places in the world at the time. While the average Maya lived in small stone or thatched homes, the palaces and temples in the cities were decorated with beautiful murals and sculptures. The Maya built amazing cities like Tikal and Palenque.

By 200 CE, the Maya had moved from their smaller villages into larger cities. Each city was designed with characteristic features including large temples, stone pyramids, palaces and ball courts. A large population of farmers growing corn, maize and squash surrounded Maya cities. The Maya created farmland by cutting away the trees and vines of the surrounding rain forest.

The beliefs and culture of the Maya continue to fascinate people today. The Maya worshipped different nature gods, including gods of the Sun, the Moon, rain and corn. The rulers of Maya society were the kings, or holy lords, who claimed to be related to gods. They performed many rituals, including human sacrifice, to pay respect to their

The Maya's mathematical and astronomy skills also influenced their architecture – temples and other public buildings were built so that sunlight would hit certain places at particular times of the year, often in time for a religious ceremony.



Historians used to believe that the Maya were a peaceful people, preferring to dedicate themselves to astronomy and architecture rather than war. However, advances in the interpretation of stonework at Maya sites have changed that. Wars were important to the Maya for capture of prisoners for sacrifice.

Invasion affected both the Maya and the Anglo-Saxons. The Spanish conquest resulted in centuries of cruelty towards the Maya people, causing their population to decline.

The most important conflict was the struggle between Calakmul and Tikal in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. These two powerful cities were close to one another.

The Spanish arrived and destroyed Maya cities and built their own churches, sometimes on top of Maya pyramids. The Spanish made the Maya work on huge farms and burned their codices.

The Maya developed a writing system that was able to represent their spoken language in symbolic form. Only the most educated would have been able to use this writing system, so scribes became important and respected people.

The symbols have been found in stone carvings, temples and palaces but there is also evidence that the Maya used a form of paper made from tree bark to create folded codices.

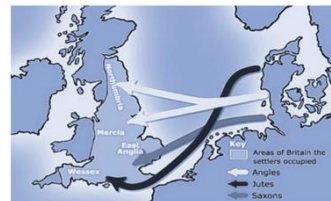
The Maya were skilful mathematicians and astronomers and used their knowledge to build a calendar system. It told the Maya when to plant crops, when to harvest and even when to make a sacrifice to the gods.

People often think that the Mayas only existed in the past. However, today, there are over seven million Maya people, most of whom live in Central America and southern Mexico.



The Maya were an advanced civilisation for their time and are remembered for amazing creations: spectacular buildings and beautiful objects made from jade. They also invented ground-breaking ideas, which have helped shape the way we live our lives today. It is thought they invented the concept of 'zero' and calendars.

## Anglo-Saxons



After years of stability and peace under Roman rule, the collapse of the Roman empire brought chaos and conflict to Britain.

The Celtic tribes who had lived in harmony with the Romans found themselves under attack from northern tribes (the Picts and the Scots). They asked the Anglo-Saxons to protect them from these fierce warriors.

Gradually, the Anglo-Saxons took control and, by the ninth century, ruled over four main kingdoms: Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia and Wessex. In 927AD, these four kingdoms were united under the rule of King Athelstan and the kingdom of England was created.

Early Anglo-Saxon Britain was made up of many different tribes with their own leaders, chiefs and kings.

The separate kingdoms were frequently in conflict with each other, and by the beginning of the seventh century, there were seven major Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. They included Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Wessex

Sometimes, a king would try and claim the title of Bretwalda (King of all Britain), and overall control of the Anglo-Saxons kingdoms often changed.



In Roman Britain many people had been Christians. But the early Anglo-Saxons were not Christians, they were pagans. Similarly, to the Ancient Maya, this means that they worshipped more than one god.



After the Romans left, Christianity continued in places where Anglo-Saxons did not settle, like Wales and the west. However, when the Anglo Saxons came to Britain, they brought their own gods and beliefs with them.

Over time their beliefs changed, and many Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity.

There were centuries of conflict in Britain after the Roman army left Britain. The Jutes, Angles all invaded Britain.



The Norman Conquest in 1066 had an even more significant impact on the Anglo-Saxons than the Spanish Conquest had on the Maya.

A large number of tribes fought for control of the land they had colonised. They all had to face the consequences of a Viking invasion. What started as small raiding parties by the Vikings became an almost total conquest of the Anglo-Saxons by the Vikings. However, the Vikings were defeated in 954, when their King Eric Bloodaxe was killed.

The Battle of Hastings is one of the most important and well-known battles in English history. It took place on 14 October 1066 and was the start of the Norman Conquest of England. The Normans were the next group of people to rule England after the Anglo-Saxons. The Bayeux Tapestry tells the story of the Norman invasion.

The Anglo-Saxons were great craft workers. They made intricate jewellery, musical instruments and homemade toys and games.

Like the Maya, the Saxons liked to play with words too. They amused themselves by telling clever riddles.

Children played with homemade toys such as rag dolls and carved, wooden toys, as well as games that used counters and dice.

They were keen storytellers. They would gather together in feasting halls and tell thrilling stories. Often their stories were accompanied by music played on an instrument called a lyre.



These four Anglo-Saxon gods gave their names to the days of the week that we still use today:

- **Tiw the God of War** became **Tuesday**.
- **Woden the King of the Gods** became **Wednesday**.
- **Thunor the God of Thunder** became **Thursday**.
- **Friga the Goddess of Love** became **Friday**.

### The Story of Beowulf

It was written down around 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> Century but, long before, it was told around a fire.

Anglo-Saxon rule came to end with the Norman Conquest of 1066, but the Saxons left their legacy on England: the language, culture and politics of the land. Many of the shires established then are still used

Settlements and Kingdoms



Beliefs

Invasions

Art and Culture

Legacy

