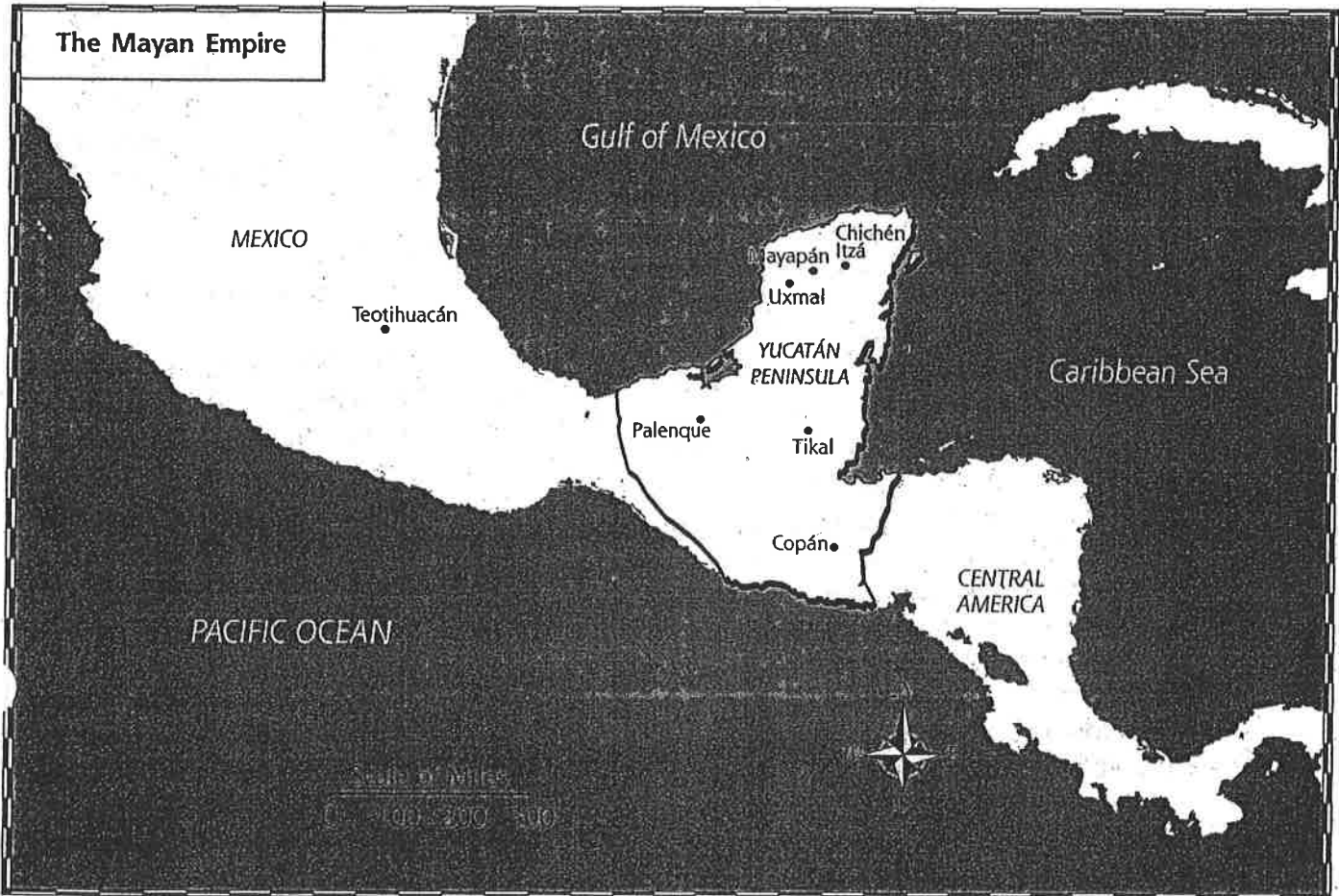




THE MAYAS

Map and Time Line



3114 BC
This date marks the beginning of the Mayan calendar and is the Mayas' creation date.

600 BC
The Mayas begin to build large pyramids.

800
The Mayas begin to abandon their cities.

1200
Mayapán replaces Chichén Itzá as the chief Mayan city.

1527
The Spanish begin their conquest of the Mayas.

1000 BC
Preclassic Period begins. Mayan farmers settle in what is now northern Guatemala.

250
Classic Period begins. The Mayas build great cities and excel in architecture, art, science, and writing.

900
Postclassic Period begins. Chichén Itzá becomes the most important Mayan city.

1440
Wars rage between Mayan leaders.

Today
Many Mayas continue to practice their customs.

THE MAYAS

The Mayan culture was one of the most important in the history of Mexico. The early Mayas borrowed from the Olmec culture. The Maya civilization lasted from about 2500 B.C. until the Spanish conquest in the A.D. 1500s. The era of greatest importance for the Mayas lasted from about A.D. 250 to 900.

The Mayas settled in what is now southern Mexico, including the Yucatan Peninsula.

They also settled in Honduras, Belize, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

The Mayas built many cities. Most of the cities included large open plazas and ceremonial centers with pyramid-shaped temples.

Tikal, their largest city, may have had a population of 100,000 or more. Tikal is in modern Guatemala. Other major cities located in Mexico include Copán and Chichén Itzá. The Pyramid of Kukulcan with its great staircase is one of the most famous Mayan structures. The ruins of these cities are major tourist attractions today.

The Mayas developed advanced systems of agriculture, including irrigation systems in the dryer areas. In the swamp areas they developed methods of building mounds for growing plants. Maize (corn) became their major crop. They also grew beans, peppers, squashes, tomatoes, avocados, pumpkins, and cacao. The Mayas discovered how to make chocolate out of cacao beans.

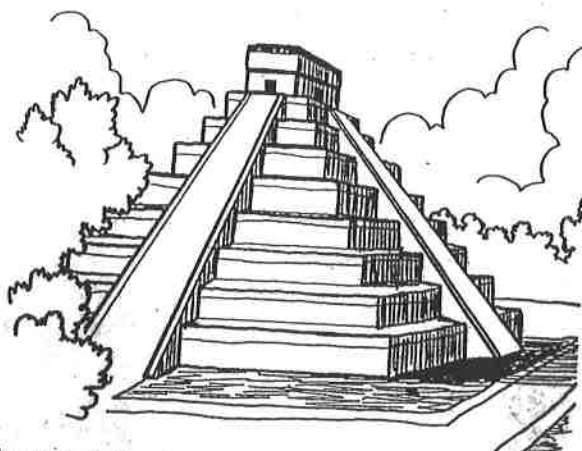
They also developed the most advanced system of writing of the ancient Americans. They did not have an alphabet. Instead they used a combination of pictures to represent ideas and symbols to represent sounds. Today, we know of about 800 different Mayan glyphs (picture symbols). The Mayas also developed a method of making paper, and they wrote books. Most of the books are lost, but a few samples remain in museums in Europe.

The Mayas developed systems of mathematics and astronomy. These were more advanced than the systems of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. The Mayas were the first culture to use the idea of a zero. Mayan priests studied the movements of the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars. They could predict eclipses and the orbit of the planet Venus. The great observatory at Chichén Itzá still remains. The Mayas developed a calendar that had 365 days, divided into 18 months of 20 days each.

The Mayan religion had many gods and goddesses. Each year a variety of religious festivals were held. Many of their religious ceremonies included human sacrifice. Each city-state of the empire had its own religious leader. He was called the *halach uinic*. The *halach uinic* was a living god. He ruled until his death. He dressed in colorful clothes and wore a large headdress.

The end of the great Mayan civilization remains one of the world's greatest mysteries. It was the most important culture in the new world in A.D. 900, but suddenly the Mayas left their cities and scattered throughout the country. We do not know the reason or reasons why the great Mayan civilization ended.

The Mayas continued to farm in the region, however, and Christopher Columbus met some Mayas in 1502. Many Mexicans today are descendents of the Mayas.



Name _____ Date _____

Making Comparisons

The column at the left gives statements about our modern culture. In the spaces at the right, give information from the article that tells of Mayan similarities or differences.

OUR CULTURE

THE MAYAN CULTURE

1. Our culture borrowed from the English culture.

1. _____

2. The Statue of Liberty is one of our most famous structures.

2. _____

3. We have advanced methods of agriculture.

3. _____

4. We use an alphabet.

4. _____

5. We manufacture paper and make books.

5. _____

6. We use a zero.

6. _____

7. Most of us believe in one supreme God or being.

7. _____

8. We have a calendar with 365 days.

8. _____

9. We have a calendar with 12 months.

9. _____

10. We have a calendar with months (except February) of 30 or 31 days.

10. _____

