DERRY HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL • YEAR 5 KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

THE ANCIENT MAYA

"A remarkable history — and a living culture today"



CORE FACTS	**WHERE & WHEN**
Region - Mesoamerica: southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador Main crops - Maize (sacred!), beans, squash, cacao, sweet potatoes Farming-Cleared Forest; raised beds & terraces; canals for water	Timeline: c. 2000 BCE – 900 CE (Classic period); some cities until 1500s CE Climate: Tropical rainforest, mountains, dry plains Key cities: Tikal, Chichén Itzá, Palenque, Uxmal Today: Millions of Maya people still live in the region
SOCIETY & DAILY LIFE Structure: Ruler → Priests/Nobles → Warriors → Craftspeople → Farmers → Enslaved Homes: Ordinary: wood/mud/palm huts • Nobles: painted stone Clothing: Woven cotton, bright colours, jade jewellery — showed status Food: Maize was central — believed humans made from maize dough!	**GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS** Writing: Full system of glyphs; carved stone & bark-paper codices Maths: Invented concept of zero; base-20 number system Astronomy: 2 calendars (260-day sacred + 365-day solar); predicted eclipses Buildings: Pyramids, palaces, plazas, ballcourts — no metal tools! Medicine: Herbal remedies, setting bones, stitching wounds
BELIEFS & RELIGION • Polytheistic — worshipped many gods: sun, moon, rain, maize, war • Ceremonies: offerings, dance, music; offerings to keep gods happy • Pok-ta-pok: Sacred rubber-ball game linked to the cosmos • Buried dead under home floors with food & tools for the journey	**WHY ABANDONED?** No single cause — mix of: • Drought & food shortages • Over-farming damaging land • Warfare between cities • Spanish arrival in 1500s
KEY VOCABULARY 1) Glyph - Symbol in Maya writing 2) Maize -Corn — most sacred crop 3) Mesoamerica - Central American region 4) Codex - Ancient bark-paper book 5) Polytheism - Belief in many gods	