

## English Language Reading Comprehension Exam

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The Mayan Indians lived in Mexico for thousands of years before the Spanish arrived in the 1500s. The Maya were an intelligent, culturally rich people whose achievements were many. They had farms, beautiful palaces, and cities with many buildings. The Mayan people knew a lot about nature and the world around them. This knowledge helped them to live a better life than most people of that time, because they could use it to make their lives more comfortable and rewarding. Knowledge about tools and farming, for instance, made their work easier and more productive.

In ancient Mexico there were many small clearings in the forest. In each clearing was a village with fields of corn, beans, and other crops around it. To clear the land for farms, the Maya cut down trees with stone axes. They planted seeds by digging holes in the ground with pointed sticks. A farmer was able to grow crops that produced food for several people. But not every Maya had to be a farmer.

Some were cloth makers, builders, or priests.

The Maya believed in many gods, including rain gods, sun gods, and corn gods. The people built large temples to honour the Mayan gods. Skilful workers built cities around these temples. It was difficult for them to construct these cities, because they had no horses to carry the heavy stone they used to build with. Workers had to carry all of the building materials themselves. Today, many of these ancient Mayan cities and temples are still standing.

Although the cities that the Maya built were beautiful, and the people worked hard to build them, very few of the people lived in them. Usually, only the priests lived in the cities.

The other people lived in small villages in the forests. Their houses were much simpler than the elaborate structures in the cities. They lived in small huts with no windows. The walls were made of poles covered with dried mud, and the roof was made of grass or leaves. Most Maya lived a simple life close to nature.

Measuring time was important to the Maya, so they developed a system for measuring it accurately.

Farmers needed to know when to plant and harvest their crops. Mayan priests made a system to keep track of time. They wrote numbers as dots (...) and bars (-). A dot was one and a bar was five.

The Mayan priests studied the Sun, Moon, stars, and planets. They made a calendar from what they learned. The year was divided into 18 months of 20 days each with five days left over. The Mayan calendar was far more accurate than the European calendars of the time.

Around the year 800, the Maya left their villages and beautiful cities, never to return. No one knows why this happened. They may have died from an infectious disease. They may have left because the soil could no longer grow crops. Archaeologists are still trying to find the lost secrets of the Maya. They are still one of our greatest mysteries.

1. What is a synonym for the word *knowledge*?

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2. Choose one of the following answers to complete the sentence by putting an 'X' beside the correct answer.

The Maya lived in Mexico for ...

A Decades

B. Centuries

C. Millennia

.... before the Spanish arrived.

3. Describe the system the Mayas used to keep time.

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4. Finish the sentence by giving your opinion

Many Mayan cities and temples are still standing today because

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5. How is the Mayan calendar the same as or different from our current calendar? Use details from the

article to support your answer.

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6. What is the main idea of this article?

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7. Most Maya lived in the cities. Put an 'X' beside the correct answer.

True \_\_\_\_\_

False \_\_\_\_\_

8. How do we know that the Mayan civilization was an intelligent and cultured one? Use details from the article to support your answer.

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9. Other than farming, what trades did the people also have?

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10. What are the possible explanations provided for the disappearance of the Maya?

Use your own words.

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11. Who usually lived in the more elaborate structures?

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12. What made their work easier and more efficient?

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13. What did the Maya do to make space for crops?

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14. How did the Maya transport the material to make the cities?

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15. What advantage came from studying astronomy?

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