

Maya Archaeology Artefacts Pack

Guidance Notes for Teachers

Use this pack to transport your class back to the classic period of the Maya Empire with this authentic collection of replica resources. Use the artefacts to create a hands-on enquiry or recreate an archaeological dig! The items can support the teaching of topics across the curriculum in History, Geography, RE and Art.



Contents:

1. Mayan Pot x 1
2. Clay Incense Burner x 1
3. Set of Cacao Beans x 1
4. Mayan Glyph Hand Painted onto Handmade Paper x 1
5. Mini Metate x 1
6. Mayan Copal Incense x 1
7. Mayan Plaque x 1
8. Mayan Ceramic Stamp x 1
9. Archaeology CD x 1 (*not shown in picture*)

Please note contents and designs may vary.



The resources in the Maya Archaeological Artefacts Pack shown in the pictures on the left can be used in KS1 and KS2 classrooms.

- Explore Mayan culture and life with high-quality replicas.
- Introduce the resources during whole class teaching and provide time for hands-on exploration in small groups.
- Enhance classroom displays and promote discussion by displaying the items.
- Add the resources to tabletop areas and promote independent investigation.



Activity 1 – History Mystery Activity

- Introduce the resources without naming or identifying.
- Give the pupils time to work together to guess what the items are.
- Encourage the pupils to identify what materials the resources are made of.

Activity 2 – Hands-on Historical Enquiry

- Identify and name each of the resources.
- Explain the material and use of each item.
- Give time for small groups to handle each resource.

Activity 3 – Archaeological Dig

- Use a tuff tray and cover the resources with sand.
- Provide small spades, brushes and sieves for the pupils to uncover the buried resources.
- Encourage note taking and provide clipboards for the pupils to record their finds.

Activity 4 – Clay Design

- Provide paper and pencils for children to design clay pots and plaques.
- Use air dry modelling clay and a range of modelling tools to create unique designs.

Activity 5 – Glyph Design

- Look at examples of Mayan hieroglyphic writing.
- Discuss the differences and similarities between logograms (representing whole words) and syllabograms (representing syllables).
- Invite the children to design their own glyph – this could be an animal, action or event.

Discussion Points – Topics

➤ Mayan Calendar Stone

The ancient Mayan had a very accurate method of counting days and years, which is known as the Mayan Calendar. However, in reality there were several interlocking calendars which gave it great accuracy. This piece is known as the Ha'ab calendar and it is a solar calendar measuring 365 days. The figure in the middle is a timewheel bearer and he is carrying glyphs which are depicted around the outer rim. These are a set of 18 months, each of which lasts 20 days. This means that every year there would be 5 extra days, a period known as the Wayeb. During this time the Mayans feared that evil spirits could enter the world, so they performed many rituals and ceremonies to keep danger away.

Explore further – Design and make a calendar wheel with moveable circles.

➤ Mini Metate (*pronunciation – muh-tah-tee*)

A metate is a grinding stone used for processing grain and seeds. They are usually made of heavy volcanic rock and vary in size. Traditionally used by women, they exist in many different designs and sizes, and are still used in many parts of Mexico and Guatemala today. This is a miniature replica to show the shape, actual sizes are too heavy to move and too big for an artefact pack!

Explore further – Use online resources to explore the tradition of tortilla making using a metate.



➤ Mayan Plaque

Mayan art often depicts religious beliefs, their way of life, wars they had fought and portraits of themselves.

Explore further – Use clay to design and make a self-portrait plaque.

➤ Mayan Copal Incense

A bundle of sacred fragrant black copal resin chips wrapped in corn husk, traditionally used by the ancient Mayans in fire rituals. This sweet, earthy and uplifting resin bundle should be carefully opened, and the individual chips added directly to hot coals in a fire or suitable burner to produce an aroma. Ritual and therapeutic use of these bundles continues into the modern day, including during meditation.

Explore further – Provide a safe space for those pupils who would like to participate in meditation.

➤ Mayan Pot

This pot is a reproduction of ancient Mayan pottery urns. It features intricate small mask detailing.

Explore further – Design and make a small clay pot.

➤ Cacao Beans

The Guatemalan Maya were the first people to document their use of cacao, and it was considered very important. The Mayans would dry, grind and mix these beans with water to make a bitter and frothy drink, often mixed with chilli. The Mayans believed that chocolate was a gift from the gods, and they also believed it had healing powers. Research shows that the May used chocolate as a form of currency, exchanging the beans for goods and services, paying taxes and in religious ceremonies.

Explore further - Use the beans as a starting point to explore the journey from cacao to chocolate! Investigate Fairtrade chocolate.

➤ Mayan Ceramic Stamp

This clay stamp has been inspired by the traditional stamps used by pre-Hispanic people. Original designs usually featured animals, as well as abstract shapes, gods and mythical figures. The stamps were primarily used to decorate the skin or clothing with prepared dyes although they were also sometimes used to print patterns into pottery before it was set.

Explore further – Explore other options for stamping onto paper and fabric.

➤ Geography

The Maya civilisation began in the historic region Mesoamerica, which now spans Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador. They built many large cities out of stone which included pyramids and statues. The geographic area was vast and contained three sub areas, including lowlands and highlands.

Explore further – Locate significant Mayan civilisation landmarks on a map.



➤ Mayan Glyph

This Mayan Glyph has been hand painted on to handmade paper. The Mayans used signs for individual letters, as well as signs for whole words. Traditionally, amate paper would have been used; a type of paper made from the bark of fig trees in Mexico. The bark of the tree is stripped off and simmered in a large cauldron and then boiled in large kettles. The fibres which then remain are taken to the nearby stream for washing before being beaten with a stone on a flat surface, binding the fibres together. Once flat and smooth the paper is left to dry in the sun. The Mayans did not use an alphabet but used signs to represent full words and syllables. For example, there was one glyph used for the word 'sun'. It has taken centuries for the Mayan glyphs to be deciphered but a significant proportion can now be understood.

Explore further – Investigate paper making and explore ways of making recycled paper.

➤ Fair Trade

Fair Trade is a worldwide movement that aims to help farmers and producers in less economically developed countries. The term Fair Trade means that producers receive a fair price for the goods they produce.

The items included in this pack can be a way to teach and learn about the principles of Fair Trade. Teaching the principles of Fair Trade provides learning opportunities in many areas of learning, including PSED, Understanding the World and Geography. The items have been sourced by supplier who is a member of BAFTS (the British Association for Fair Trade Shops and Suppliers) for over 25 years and are also a BAFTS recognised Fair Trade importer.

Nearly everything in this pack is handmade and the Mexican ceramics are made by small family businesses who are continuing a long tradition of producing pre-Hispanic ceramic replicas.

Explore further - Fairtrade Foundation are a global organisation working with businesses, consumers and campaigners to secure a better deal for farmers and producers.