

Mayan Religion

What did the Mayans believe?

The Mayans believed in many different gods who each had control over a different aspect of life, such as the gods of rain, maize, childbirth, bees, wine, games and fire. These gods could control human events and change fates. As such, people consulted the gods on everything they did and prayed for help in their lives.



How did the Mayans worship?

Mayans worshipped the gods in lots of different ways. They had special festivals run by the temple priests every twenty days where people would meet outside the temple to sing, dance and pray. The priests would wear large headdresses and scary masks to frighten any demons away. People also gave offerings and sacrifices of food, drink, flowers, precious objects and blood to the gods to keep them happy. They threw these offerings into a holy well called a cenote.

Why did the Mayans offer blood to the gods?

The Mayans believed that unless they offered blood to the gods, the sun would stop rising every day and the world would end. Sometimes this meant offering a human sacrifice. Humans sacrifices could be men, women or children. Slaves and captives often had their hearts cut out or their fingernails pulled off. However, it was the richer Mayans who had more of a responsibility to give the gods blood. They would do this by pricking themselves with cactus thorns or by pulling a barbed rope through their tongues.



What were Mayan temples like?

Mayan temples were pyramids. They were tall so that the tops were closer to heaven. Temples were the domains of the priests who would perform ceremonies in small, dark rooms. However, temples were also tombs. Mayan leaders would often have temples built as their burial ground. They would be buried with precious objects and human or animal sacrifices. They also wore special masks and jewellery that was thought to help them become gods in the afterlife.

What did Mayans believe happened when you died?

The Mayans believed that there was an underworld and a heaven. There were different levels of the underworld and different levels of heaven. Mayans believed that most people, including kings, nobles and priests, had to journey through the underworld to reach heaven and live with the gods. The underworld was a dark and terrifying place with frightening gods, scary demons and rivers of blood. The only people who went straight to heaven were those who had been sacrificed, those who died in childbirth or battle, and those who died playing a religious ball game called Pok-a-Tok.