

A Stone Age Civilization



These are new words to practice.

Say each word 10 times.

* flourished

* extensive

* hieroglyph

* amino acids

* archeologists

* niacin

* cisterns

* counterfeit

Before or after reading the story, write one sentence that contains at least one new word.

A Stone Age Civilization



The Mayans were an ancient civilization. They lived in what is present-day southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. This Central American civilization flourished, or prospered, between A.D. 250 and A.D. 925. The Mayans were a Stone Age people. They had no metal. They did not have wheels, plows, or pack animals.

Despite their lack of metal, the Mayans built large cities, some with up to 100,000 people. They built temples that soared into the sky. They developed a system of hieroglyphic writing. A hieroglyph is a sign that stands for a word, syllable, or sound. They were advanced astronomers. They developed an advanced calendar. They made use of the zero in their arithmetic system.

Why were the Mayas able to flourish? How could cities prosper and grow so big? One reason was the Mayan's ability to produce food. To grow sufficient food, the Mayans needed a water supply. Archeologists, scientists who study ancient cultures, have found thousands of cisterns, or tanks, lined with plaster. The cisterns were built to catch and store rain. Archeologists have also looked at pictures taken from space. The pictures show an amazing and extensive, or far-reaching, network of hand-dug canals. The canals form an extensive drainage system that weaves through the land.

Another reason the Mayans were able to flourish is that somehow they learned to boil their corn with white lime or ground-up snail shells. Corn was the staple food of the Mayans. Boiling the corn with white lime and snail shells improved its balance of amino acids. Amino acids are the chief components of proteins. The treated corn also allowed the body to absorb niacin. Niacin is a necessary nutrient in the human diet. Malnutrition was prevented.

The Mayans learned to brew cacao beans. Chocolate is made from cacao beans. Cacao beans were used to make the Mayans favorite drink, but they were also important in trade. Cacao beans were used as money. Archeologists have found counterfeit, or fake, cacao beans! Some of these counterfeit coins are clay. Others are bean husks that have been filled with sand and mixed with genuine beans!



cacao tree

A Stone Age Civilization



After reading the story, answer the questions.
Fill in the circle next to the correct answer.

1. What is not listed in the story as something the Mayans developed?
 - (a) the plow
 - (b) a calendar
 - (c) use of the zero
 - (d) hieroglyphic writing
2. The Mayans most likely carried food to the city
 - (a) by cart.
 - (b) by boat.
 - (c) by horse.
 - (d) by llama.
3. This story is mainly about
 - (a) the Mayan water supply.
 - (b) an ancient civilization.
 - (c) counterfeit beans or money.
 - (d) how the Mayans prevented malnutrition.
4. From the story, one can tell that for a civilization to flourish, there must be
 - (a) metal.
 - (b) an extensive drainage system.
 - (c) sufficient food to eat and trade.
 - (d) corn boiled with white lime or snail shells.
5. Think about how the word *ancient* relates to *young*. Which words relate in the same way?

ancient : young

 - (a) counterfeit : real
 - (b) sufficient : enough
 - (c) flourishing : growing
 - (d) extensive : far-reaching