The Mayan Civilization
Before the Mayans

- Before the Mayans, a group of people called the Olmecs lived in Mesoamerica
  - Mesoamerica – “Middle” America
  - Stretches from central Mexico to Central America

- The Olmecs are best known for the large heads they carved from stone

- The Altiplano Indians are another group of people in Mesoamerica
  - The Altiplano are best known for the city of Teotihuacan
Olmec – Carved Stone Heads

http://www.crystalinks.com/olmec.html
Teotihuacan – Avenue of the Dead

Pyramid of the Sun and Moon
Geography of the Mayans

- **2000 BCE** – Mayans begin settling in Mesoamerica
  - Most of the area is forest, so they clear the land
- The Mayans plant a lot of maize
  - Maize - Corn
- The Mayans used resources from the forest to survive
The Three Ages

Mayan history is divided into three parts:

- Pre-Classic Age (2000 BCE – 200 CE)
- Classic Age (200 CE – 900 CE)
- Post-Classic Age (900 CE – 1500 CE)

Pre-Classic Age:
- Mayan Civilization gets started
- Not many advances

Post-Classic Age:
- Mayans abandon their cities and the civilization declines
Mayan Villages

- Villages begin during the Pre-Classic Period
  - 2000 BCE – 200 CE

- Houses were made from wood and vines from forest

- Mayans lived in small villages that were isolated from each other

- Eventually, Mayans started to trade with each other

- 200 CE – Large Mayan cities begin to appear
The Classic Age

- Mayan civilization flourishes during the Classic Age
  - 200 CE – 900 CE

- Over 40 large cities included in this civilization
  - Large city = 60,000 people or more

- Cities are actually city-states
  - Each has its own government and king
  - All cities are separate from each other
  - No one united all the Mayan cities into one Empire
Court of Thousand Columns
(Chichen Itza)

http://www.mysteriousplaces.com/mayan/TourEntrance.html
The Classic Age

- **Trade linked everyone together**
  - Cotton, Cacao beans, feathers, obsidian, and jade

- **Mayan cities are known for their buildings**
  - Grand palaces, pyramids, and temples
  - Elaborate paintings and carvings

- **Palenque – Palace of Pacal**
  - Very popular ruler – ruled when he was 12 years old
  - Ruled for 50 years
  - His temple was built to record events of his life
Palenque
The Classic Age

- Mayans often built canals and plazas for gathering
- Farmers terraced hillsides to grow more food
- They played a ball game similar to soccer and basketball
Mayan Ball Game
Temple of Jaguars (Chichen Itza)
Mayan Society

- Kings were in charge – highest class
  - He was believed to be related to the gods
- Priests, nobles, warriors – Upper class
  - All the power in Mayan society was in top two classes
- Farmers – lower class
  - Women cared for children, cooked, and did weaving
  - Men farmed, hunted, and made tools
- Lower class had to pay the upper class with crops
  - Also had to help build buildings
- If you were captured in war, you became a slave
A Maya King and His Court

The king and his court were the center of Maya government and religious life. This vase painting shows a Maya king relaxing with some of his servants. Kings enjoyed all the luxuries of Maya life, such as music, fine clothing and food, and even chocolate.

- The king is gazing at this mirror, which the Maya believed held magical powers.
- A bodyguard stands behind the king.
- These vases held a chocolate drink, a favorite of Maya nobles.
- The fly whisk in the king's hand is a symbol of authority.

What about the king indicates he is an important person?
Mayan Religion

- Mayans were polytheistic
- Mayans believed they always had to please the gods
  - Keep the gods happy to prevent terrible things
- Gods needed blood for nourishment
  - And to prevent the end of the world
  - Blood offerings were made through body piercings
  - Blood offerings were made through human sacrifices
  - Prisoners were popular sacrificial victims

http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/CIVAMRCA/MAYAS.HTM
Well of Sacrifice  (Chichen Itza)

http://historylink102.com/meso-pic/rf-ci-well-itza.jpg
Mayan Achievements

- Mayans built many observatories
  - Observatory – a building where people can study the sky
  - Believed that the stars would show the best time for religious festivals
- Developed two calendars
  - 260 days and 365 days
- Very skilled mathematicians
  - First people in Western Hemisphere to invent ‘0’
Chichen Itza – Observatory Tower
Mayan Achievements

- Developed a writing system
  - Similar to Egyptian hieroglyphics
  - Carved writings on stone
  - Wrote stories on bark paper books

- Amazing art and architecture
  - Temple-pyramids made out of stone
    - Decorated with jade and gold
  - No metal tools for construction
    - Used obsidian

http://www.mayainfo.org/overview/temples/
Paris Codex
Maya Temples as seen in *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*
Decline of Mayan Civilization

- **900 CE** – Mayan civilization begins to decline
  - No more temples or grand buildings
  - People abandon the cities

- **Why?**
  - Common people rebel?
  - War?
  - Disease?
  - Natural Disaster?
  - Too many people, but not enough food?

- **We don’t know for sure now, but someday we might**