

# Ancient Maya

DIFFICULTY:  

My name is Pakal and I was a very famous ruler of a city called Palenque. Palenque was an ancient Maya city in Mexico, which is now called Chiapas.

We called it *Lakam Ha* which means 'big water' because there were many streams around the area. It was Spanish explorers, many years later, who named it Palenque.

Palenque was at its busiest between 500 and 700 CE, when a thousand people lived there. It was known as the 'red city' as many of the buildings were painted red at that time.



I became king when I was just 12 years old and ruled from 615 -683 CE. My sons and I ordered our workers to build many temples, pyramids and palaces in the area. These palaces were home to many ancient Maya rulers, such as myself. Some of the temples had observatories on the top in which astrologers would study the sun, moon and stars. This information was used to help us decide when to sow seeds and harvest crops for farming. It was our type of calendar.

Pyramids often had religious structures on top of them as we believed it brought us closer to heaven and the gods. Gods were very important to us and we worshipped many nature gods.

The maize god was very well respected as maize was so important within our culture. This god had the power to help or hinder farming.



When I died, I was buried in Palenque's 'Temple of the Inscriptions'. The city was abandoned about 100 years after my death and it is unknown the reason why. Historians believe it was a result of losing a battle against a neighbouring city state or possibly a drought which wiped out the crops. Luckily, much can still be learned about our wonderful city as we carved hieroglyphics (picture writing) in the stone monuments.

As well as hieroglyphics, we created many statues, murals and pottery. Sculptors would often use a tool made from flint or obsidian, a hard stone. Maya artists painted murals on the walls of palaces which told stories of the Maya gods and their rulers.



# Questions

1. Who was Pakal?

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2. What is modern palenque called? Where is it?

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3. What does *Lakam Ha* mean?

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4. Which years did Pakal rule between? How many years is this?

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5. Why were observatories built on the top of temples?

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6. What information did astronomers collect and why?

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7. Why did pyramids have religious structures on top of them?

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8. In paragraph 2, it says 'This god had the power to help or hinder farming.' What does 'hinder' mean?

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9. Why was Palenque abandoned?

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10. Find and copy a word that means the same as flint.

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# Answers

1. Who was Pakal?

**He was a very famous ruler of Palenque**

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2. What is modern palenque called? Where is it?

**It is called Chiapas, in Mexico**

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3. What does *Lakam Ha* mean?

**Big water**

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4. Which years did Pakal rule between? How many years is this?

**615–683 CE, which is 68 years**

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5. Why were observatories built on the top of temples?

**So that astrologers could study the sun, moon and stars**

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6. What information did astronomers collect and why?

**times to sow and harvest, in order to help make farming calendars.**

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7. Why did pyramids have religious structures on top of them?

**So that Maya people felt closer to heaven and the gods.**

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8. In paragraph 2, it says 'This god had the power to help or hinder farming.' What does 'hinder' mean?

**Hinder means the opposite of help / make it difficult for**

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9. Why was Palenque abandoned?

**We do not know for sure but historians believe either because of a drought or battle.**

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10. Find and copy a word that means the same as flint.

**Obsidian**

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