



Mayan Writing

The Maya created one of the most advanced writing systems of all ancient civilizations. Their system for writing was called hieroglyphics. You have probably seen ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, but although Mayan writing looks similar, there are some distinct differences. Mayan hieroglyphics used symbols (glyphs) to represent words, sounds, or objects. They then put glyphs together to create sentences and tell stories.

Most Maya could not read or write. Only very wealthy individuals who became priests learned these skills. They used bark or leather to make paper. They made black ink from coal, and wrote with quills made from turkey feathers. When they had finished writing, they folded these long papers up into an accordion shape to create books. A Mayan book is called a codex (plural: codices). When the Spanish arrived in the early 1500s, they burned almost all of the Maya codices. Only a few survived.

1. What is a glyph?
2. Describe Mayan hieroglyphics.
3. What is a codex?
4. What happened to the Mayan codices when the Spanish arrived in the early 1500s?