Notes for teachers

National curriculum links
- History: ancient Maya

About this session
Students will learn about the ancient Maya civilisation and life in Yaxchilan, an important Maya city. Images of objects from the Museum collection and key ancient sites will support the students as they find out about Maya rulers, buildings, beliefs, writing, food, entertainment and the environment.

Location  lecture theatre
Format  students view images projected on a screen and participate through a Q&A
Capacity  up to 120 students, usually from different schools
Duration  45 minutes
Price  £1.50 per student

In detail
- After a short introduction to the geography and environment of ancient Mesoamerica, students are introduced to the ancient Maya civilisation.
- The students explore how ancient objects and information from surviving archaeological sites help us to understand different aspects of Maya culture.
- The students will look specifically at rulers, buildings, beliefs, writing, food and entertainment.

Before your visit
- Locate middle America on a globe or in an atlas, and look for the different geographical features and the modern countries in this region of the world.

After your visit
- Search the British Museum collection online database and print out images of Maya lintels. Ask the students to annotate the images by pointing out details and suggest what this tells us about the ancient Maya.

Find out more
- More ancient Maya resources and sessions
- Related galleries: 1, 27
- Take a look at the galleries with Google Street View
- Search the collection online
Visit notes for students and adult helpers

You can print this summary sheet and take it with you during your visit.

Learning objectives
- To locate the ancient Maya civilisation within ancient Mesoamerica
- To understand how ancient objects help us to learn about people in the past

Key words
Mesoamerica – the middle section of the American continents
Maya – a group of people who lived in ancient Mesoamerica
Yaxchilan – an important Maya city
Environment – the natural features and conditions of an area
Map – a plan of somewhere, usually as seen from above
Lintel – a large flat piece of stone used to build a doorway or window opening
Archaeological site – somewhere with things left behind from the past including ruined buildings
Temple – a special building for religious worship
Glyph – a picture symbol used as part of a written language; a sound, a word or an idea
Codex – a folded book
Jade, gold and obsidian – types of natural precious stone/mineral
Maize – a type of corn grown by farmers for food

Where was the ancient Maya civilisation?
- The Maya people lived in ancient Mesoamerica.
- This area is now the modern countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.
- Yaxchilan was an important Maya city built near a river.

What do we know about Yaxchilan?
- You will find out about the ancient city of Yaxchilan by looking at the ancient ruins of the city, considering the local environment and looking at objects found in the city.

Looking at buildings and carvings
- You will find out about ancient Maya temples.
- You will find out where ancient carvings are found on buildings.
- You will learn how to start understanding ancient carvings and inscriptions.

Everyday life
- You will learn about the ancient Maya ruling elite.
- You will learn about key natural resources used by the Maya people.
- You will learn about entertainment and ancient Maya ball games.