

Excerpt from “Golden Age of the Maya”

Read the excerpt and answer the question that follows.

Feeding City-States: Wetlands, Mountains, and Rainforests

Maya farmers worked hard to supply food to the city-states. Rainfall and soil quality varied throughout Mesoamerica. The Maya found clever ways to meet the challenges of their diverse landscapes.



Maya canals and wetlands

Some lowland areas received heavy rains from May through December, followed by drought from January through April. Because of this inconsistent rainfall, the Maya developed ways of redirecting and reusing rainwater. They created canals in the lowlands. They built raised-earth platforms above the canals and created wetlands. Aquatic plants helped keep the water clean and provided shade for the fish in the canals. The fish, in turn, provided both food and fertilizer for the fields.

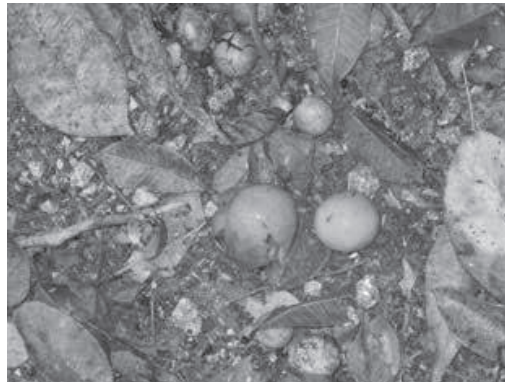
In highland areas, the Maya cut terraces into the slopes of mountains. They practiced multicropping on this flat land, planting and harvesting the land multiple times throughout the year. Their crops included beans, tomatoes, squash, chili peppers, and pumpkins. Maize, or corn, was the main food throughout Mesoamerica.



Crops grown by Maya

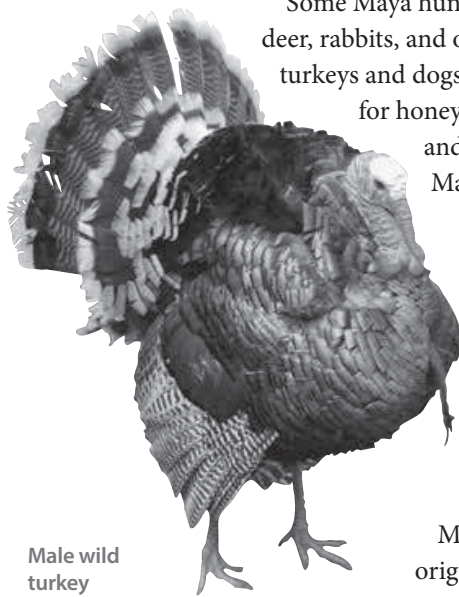
In forested areas, the Maya used a technique known as slash and burn. They slashed, or cut down, trees and then burned the area. Then they planted new crops. Ashes left from the fire added nutrients to the soil. After several years, the crops used up the nutrients in the soil. The Maya then repeated the process in another area.

The Maya also gathered tree crops. Fruit trees thrived in the rainforest. The Maya enjoyed the bountiful fruit of the breadnut tree. Similar to apricots in appearance, breadnut fruit has highly nutritious seeds. The Maya ate these seeds or ground them into flour. The Maya also used many rainforest plants for medicine.



Breadnut fruits

Some Maya hunted **game** in the forests, including deer, rabbits, and other small mammals. They raised turkeys and dogs for food. They raised stingless bees for honey, which they used to sweeten foods and drinks. In coastal communities, the Maya ate fish and turtles as well.



Male wild turkey

It is important to remember that the Maya were not the first civilization to live in Mesoamerica. The way they lived was often very similar to the way others in the area lived. The Maya did not invent the pyramid, nor were they the first to practice writing. Instead, the Maya often improved upon practices originally borrowed from other cultures.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

The paragraphs in this excerpt describe a number of clever ways the Maya people met the challenges of their diverse landscapes to provide food for themselves.

Which method or solution do you think was the most clever? Use specific details from the text to explain your answer.
