

Ancient Americans: The Mayas and Aztecs

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ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Grades 5-8

Viewing Time: 30:00

INTRODUCTION

This 30-minute, two-part video, to be used in grades 5-8, was filmed on location in Mexico and Guatemala. It gives students an in-depth look at two of the greatest ancient civilizations of the Americas: the Mayas and the Aztecs.

PART ONE traces the roots of human culture in the New World and explains the emergence of civilization in Mesoamerica. In this section, students learn of the very ancient Olmec culture, followed by an in-depth study of the brilliant civilization of the Mayas.

PART TWO explores the civilizations of the highlands of central Mexico—fabulous Teotihuacan, and the Toltecs. The program explains the impact of waves of barbarians that overran the highlands—people called the “Chichimecs.” Students will then examine the end-product of this long history—the bizarre and war-like Aztec Empire.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing this video and participating in the lesson activities, students will be able to:

- Describe the important change (shift to farming) which led to the development of civilizations.
- List several characteristics of a civilized society.
- Describe some features of everyday life in the Maya city of Tikal and in the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan.

- Define and identify key terms, phrases, and figures fundamental to the rise of Mesoamerican culture.
- Compare and contrast Maya or Aztec civilization with European civilization of the same time period.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

We suggest that you view this video, and review this guide and its accompanying blackline masters before presenting the program to your class. Duplicate any blackline masters you intend to use. You may wish to distribute copies to your students so they can reference them before they view the video.

As you review these instructional materials, you may choose to make some changes to fit the specific needs of your class. We encourage you to do so, for only by tailoring this program to your students will they obtain the maximum benefits offered by these materials.

It is also suggested that the video presentation take place before the entire group under your supervision. The lesson activities grow out of the context of the video; therefore, the presentation should be a common experience for all students.

INTRODUCING THE VIDEO

One good way to introduce this subject would be to describe briefly the great cities of the Aztecs and Mayas, comparing and contrasting them to European cities during the same time periods; also briefly describe some of the results of the meeting of the European and New World civilizations.

You may choose to use **Blackline Masters 10 and 11, Quiz** as a pre- and post-test, If so, distribute copies and have students complete the quiz before viewing the video.

VIEW THE VIDEO

This program is divided into two parts with a total running time of about 30 minutes for the entire program. You may choose to watch the entire program on one day, or stop for discussion at the mid-point break, and watch Part Two on the following day.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following questions following the viewing of "Ancient Americans: The Mayas and Aztecs." These questions appear on **Blackline Master 1, Discussion Questions** and may be distributed to the class prior to the discussion.

1. What did the city of Teotihuacan look like? Was it an Aztec city? Would the construction of pyramids containing millions of bricks have required a high degree of social organization? Why?

Answer: Teotihuacan was a large city containing enormous pyramids and rows of temples and palaces laid out along broad avenues. There were also many apartment buildings separated by narrow streets and alleys, where the population of some 200,000 people lived. Many of the buildings were painted red. It was not an Aztec city, for it grew to prominence and was then abandoned long before the rise of the Aztecs.

The construction of the huge pyramids is proof that the society of Teotihuacan was highly organized because the building of such structures requires a unified purpose, which is usually related to religious beliefs and political goals shared by many people. It also requires a class of leaders with authority, as well as designers, engineers, craftsmen, and many laborers.

2. Why has the development of agriculture always been essential to the development of civilization?

Answer: Agriculture has allowed people to settle down in one place and live in permanent houses. It has provided a surplus of food, which allowed people to devote time to pursuits other than food getting, such as art, science, organized religion, and the development of writing.

3. What was religion like for the Mayas and the Aztecs? How did they show respect toward their gods?

Answer: The Mayas were fascinated by the concept of time and the idea that there were both good days and bad days. For the Mayas, each day was a separate god with its own name. Both the Mayas and the Aztecs believed that the continuation of the universe depended on the performance of religious ceremonies. They believed that they had to please their gods by performing blood offerings. Human sacrifice was practiced in both civilizations, but the Aztecs took it to extreme levels. The Aztecs believed that human hearts and blood were a form of nourishment required by the gods.

4. What are some characteristics of civilization that were found in the societies of the Mayas and the Aztecs?

Answer: Both the Mayas and the Aztecs lived in permanent towns and cities. They developed great art and architecture. They worked in clay, wood, metal, and stone, and they produced woven fabric. Both peoples observed and measured the movements of the celestial bodies, such as the sun and the moon, and they possessed calendars that were very accurate. Both civilizations had written languages. They were highly organized socially; they knew of other cultures and traded over long distances.

5. One of the indications of social organization in a civilized society is the presence of different social classes and occupations. Describe the different social classes and occupations that existed in the Maya and Aztec civilizations.

Answer: In both civilizations, there existed a ruling class, with a

king-like figure who had absolute authority. However, while the Aztecs created a unified empire, the Mayas lived in many different city-states, each with its own "king," called a "True Man." Mayan rulers were also the high priests. Aztec priests were also very influential but had to share authority with political and military leaders. Both civilizations were marked by classes of builders, craftsmen, merchants, and common people.

6. In the calendar of Mesoamerica, how many days occupied each month? How many of these months were in a solar year? How did the mathematicians round out the solar calendar to 365 days?

Answer: Each month contained 20 days. There were 18 of these months in a solar year. To this were added 5 extra days each year to make a total of 365 days, just as in our calendar.

7. Did the civilizations of Mesoamerica have some form of written language? Describe what it looked like. What kinds of surfaces did they write on?

Answer: Yes, the Mesoamerican civilizations had written languages. The characters were little pictures of common things from the lives of the Indian peoples. Writing was carved into wood and stone. They also wrote in folding books, called "codices," which were often made from the bark of the fig tree. The bark was flattened and coated with a thin layer of white lime.

8. Who were the Chichimecs? Where did they come from and what effect did they have on Mesoamerica?

Answer: The Chichimecs were tribes of Nahuatl-speaking peoples who originally lived in central and northern Mexico. Over the centuries, they migrated southward, many settling in and around the Valley of Mexico. They brought a fierce, war-like tradition into Mesoamerica, which was expressed by the violent and powerful Toltecs, which culminated in the Aztec Empire.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Distribute **Blackline Masters 2-5, Vocabulary List**. This list will help students with unfamiliar words found in the program; it also contains terms that might be encountered in outside reading. Review the words and discuss their relevance to the study of ancient cultures.
- Distribute **Blackline Master 6, Timeline**. This sheet illustrates how events occurring in the Americas were related temporally to events occurring in the rest of the world.
- Distribute **Blackline Master 7, Crossword Puzzle**, which challenges students to use new ideas and vocabulary presented in this program. An answer key can be found on page 8 of this guide.
- Distribute **Blackline Master 8, Interesting Facts About the Mayas and Aztecs**. Discuss each of these facts. How does a culture develop its unique characteristics? What are some rituals, beliefs, and practices of the students' cultures? Are there any modern cultural traits that seem related to those of the Mayas and Aztecs? What happens when cultures are invaded by other cultures?
- Distribute **Blackline Master 9, Internet Resources**. For students and/or classrooms with Internet access, these websites provide additional information and images relating to ancient American civilizations.
- Distribute **Blackline Masters 10-11, Quiz**. This assessment tool will help you gauge student comprehension of the objectives for the program. If you used this as a pre-test, contrast students' scores before and after participating in the program. Clarify and review those points which may not have been fully grasped.

EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

These activities may be used to examine ideas outside the scope of the program.

1. Written or oral reports could be composed on the following subjects:

- A comparison of the Aztec and the Maya civilizations.
- The role of human sacrifice in the Aztec religion.
- Agricultural products and practices of the Mayas and Aztecs.
- Daily life in an Aztec or Maya city.

2. Project:

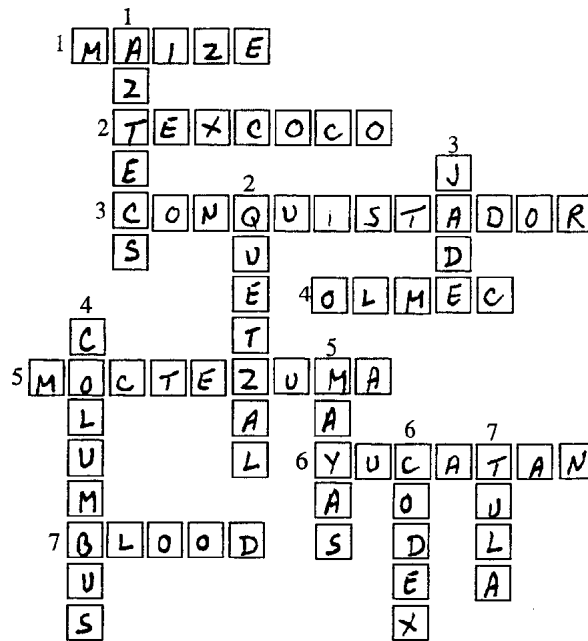
The class is divided into two groups. One group researches and then creates a large painting depicting the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, while the other group creates a similar picture of the Maya city of Tikal. After the paintings are finished, they can be discussed and compared.

3. Challenge Game:

Using the vocabulary list as a guide, students study the proper pronunciation of the names that the Aztecs gave to their kings, gods, and cities. Then students form two teams, and each team selects a list of five Aztec names, printing them clearly on a piece of paper. After trading lists, each team challenges members of the other team to pronounce the names correctly by reading from the list.

ANSWER KEY

Blackline Master #7: Crossword Puzzle



Blackline Masters 10-11: Quiz

Section 1: Chart

1. Mayas
2. Mayas & Aztecs
3. Aztecs
4. Mayas
5. Mayas and Aztecs
6. Mayas
7. Mayas
8. Aztecs
9. Aztecs
10. Mayas

Section 2: True or False

1. True
2. True
3. False. The Spanish had come to teach Christianity.
4. False. Tikal was an abandoned Maya city at the time of Cortés.
5. True
6. True
7. False. Waves of Chichimecs moved into the Valley of Mexico.

Section 3: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. civilization
2. maize
3. heart
4. Asia
5. Hernán Cortés
6. agriculture
7. codex

**ADDITIONAL UNITED LEARNING
VIDEO PROGRAMS**

Ancient Egypt: The Gift of the Nile (3000 B.C. - 30 B.C.)
Catalog #2290

Discovering Ancient Greece (1500 - 100 B.C.)
Catalog #2547

The World of Ancient Rome (753 B.C. - 476 A.D.)
Catalog #2082

INTERNET RESOURCES

The following websites contain interesting information and images relating to Mesoamerican culture.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization's Mystery of the
Maya

<http://www/civilization.ca/membs/civiliz/maya/mminteng.html>

This great site includes links to Maya civilization, exhibits on the Plaza, People of the Jaguar, and an Imax film, *Mystery of the Maya*. The Maya Civilization link provides information on people, geography, languages, cities, society, cosmology and religion, writing and hieroglyphics, mathematics, the Maya calendar, astronomy, and the Maya today.

Ancient Cultures of the World

<http://www2.polarnet.com/~whitton/ancient.html>

Links to Aztec and Maya images: the Aztec calendar, pre-Columbian culture, and images of Mexico.

SCRIPT OF VIDEO NARRATION

Thousands of years ago, out of the darkness of prehistory, the first human civilizations began to appear on Earth. These early civilizations appeared in widely scattered parts of the world.

A great civilization was born, for example, in Egypt, while others appeared in Asia, and still others in the south of Europe, around the Mediterranean Sea. And at about the time that the mighty Roman Empire was near its height, people in a beautiful, far-away land were about to step out of the mist, and into the light of history; then out of the primitive vastness of the American continents came the great civilizations of *The Ancient Americans*.

THE ANCIENT AMERICANS

The first people to live in the Americas came from Asia, through Alaska, about 30,000 years ago. During the last ice age, when much of the world's ocean water was frozen into huge glaciers and ice sheets, there existed a strip of dry land between Asia and Alaska in an area that today is covered by ocean.

It is believed that wandering tribes of hunters crossed this land bridge into America. They were following herds of animals, which they hunted for food, for the first Americans lived by hunting and gathering, which means they obtained food through hunting or fishing, and by gathering wild plants they could eat.

These hunters and gatherers were not yet civilized. Civilization began after a very important shift in the way they got their food—the shift to farming. By about 6,000 B.C., some people began to raise certain wild plants as crops.

Farming, or agriculture, allowed people to settle down and live in one place. They no longer wandered over the earth in search of food. They settled in villages and raised crops. Of these crops, one was destined to become the most

important of all—corn, or maize as the Indians called it. The development of civilization in the New World would be based on this plant.

As people settled down to farm, they began to build permanent houses like this one, and as more people took up farming, villages grew into large towns. Agriculture and living in towns are the first steps toward becoming civilized.

Living in settlements with plenty to eat, people began to have more time. They began to have enough time to make beautiful things.

Artisans became adept at working with clay, wood, and metals. Art is another sign of civilization.

Other marks of civilization are social organization, trade, and a knowledge of math and science, and finally, civilized people usually have a written language.

THE MAYAS

The first American farmers may have lived here, in southern Mexico and Central America—an area we call Mesoamerica. By 1,000 B.C., civilization was emerging in Mesoamerica. Now we will look at one expression of that civilization, the ancient Mayas.

These are Maya Indians today. Living in Guatemala and southern Mexico, they number in the millions.

Most work the land in the way of their ancestors, planting corn, beans and squash, for over the centuries, little has changed for the Maya.

Some women even use the traditional grinding stones—the mano and metate—to grind their corn into flour. All of these habits are part of the modern culture of the Maya. They are justly proud of their culture and their past, for it was the ancestors of these humble peasants who created one of the world's greatest civilizations.

Buried deep in the jungles of Mesoamerica, the ancient civilization of the Mayas was lost from memory for hundreds of years.

In fact, almost nothing was known of this lost civilization until 1839, when two jungle explorers discovered what seemed to be the remains of ancient walls hidden in the forest.

As they cleared away the trees and vines, strange buildings began to take shape. One of the explorers, John Stephens, described the ruins as “lost, buried and unknown, never before visited by a stranger.” He said, “All was dark impenetrable mystery.”

Fortunately, Stephens’ companion, Frederick Catherwood, was an artist and made detailed drawings like this one of everything they saw.

But it would take scientists another century to begin to understand the history of the Mayas.

The beginning of Maya civilization is still shrouded in mystery, but scientists believe that it grew in part from a still older civilization, called the Olmec.

Hidden in jungle on the Gulf of Mexico, explorers have found huge carved heads—curious remains of the lost Olmec civilization.

Some of these heads are nine feet tall and weigh over 20 tons. Explorers have also found Olmec masks carved from pure jade, one of the hardest stones known to man. Olmec craftsman must have worked thousands of hours to carve and polish jade figures such as these.

The Olmecs were highly civilized, produced fine carvings, and even had a written language, but mysteriously, in about 300 B.C., the Olmec civilization disappeared.

As the Olmecs passed from the scene, the Mayas, who had lived for centuries in these tropical forests, began to build a new civilization; by about A.D. 100, stone temples were beginning to rise above the trees.

The Mayas lived here in eastern Mesoamerica. They established a network of cities, such as Uaxactun, Bonampak, Palenque, and in the south, Copan. And in the center of this network lay the fabled city of Tikal.

Tikal was a stunning city crowded with exotic temples, palaces and plazas. By A.D. 700, the city sprawled across ten square miles.

Rising from the primitive rain forest, Tikal must have seemed like a vision from a dream. Most of the buildings were plastered and painted red, and their tops were decorated with wildly painted carvings.

Today Tikal is a mysterious ruin almost completely swallowed by jungle. Trees and vines cover most of the buildings, but if one looks closely at the ruined walls, bits of the original plaster and red paint can still be seen.

Hundreds of scientists, called archaeologists, have spent many years studying these ruins, searching for clues about the ancient Mayas.

Some of the main buildings have been cleared of trees and vegetation. The tallest buildings were the religious temples.

Near the temples, large palaces were set gracefully around lovely open courtyards. Archaeologists are not sure what the palaces were used for. They could have been residential houses where the priests and rich people lived, or they could have been government office buildings, used by the rulers.

Pictures of the rulers were carved onto large stone monuments, called stelae, which were erected near the temples and palaces.

The narrow court between these sloping walls was used to play a kind of sacred ball game.

Every Maya city had at least one, and often several, of these ball courts. Ball games were played throughout Mesoamerica in ancient times. As in soccer, the game was played without the use of the hands; a rubber ball was struck with the knees, hips and elbows.

Rubber came from the sap of the rubber tree; the Maya sliced the bark and collected the sap that ran out.

MAYAN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

Archaeologists believe that Tikal, like other Mayan cities, was a ceremonial center, which means that most of the large buildings we see today were used for religious ceremonies. The most important ceremonies were performed by the highest ranking members of society, the noble-priests. They ruled over Maya society.

The highest priest of all was known as the true man. He was like a king and ruled over everyone in the city.

The existence of these social classes—rulers, priests and common people—is an good example of social organization. We can see what the noble-priests looked like when they were dressed up for a ceremony.

Such fantastic costumes must have set the nobles apart from the average Maya, for most people were ordinary farmers. Like the Maya of today, they spent long days tending their fields and they lived in simple houses, like this one, made of sticks, covered with mud. And like the Maya of today, they traded in large public markets.

All of the cities like Tikal had such markets, where ordinary people could trade the surplus from their gardens for things they might need.

On some days the men would walk out into the jungle, in search of meat for the evening meal.

Above them, monkeys looked down from the safety of the treetops, keeping a watchful eye on the hunters. But the hunters had their minds on easier game: perhaps a wild turkey, venturing out to feed in a clearing.

On a good day, they would capture several of these beautiful birds, taking them back alive to their houses. But on a bad day, they might return home empty-handed. Good days and bad days—these were not mere figures of speech to the ancient Maya, for all of Maya life was built around the idea that some days were naturally good and some were bad, and only a priest could foretell which was which.

To do this, a priest consulted a special ritual calendar, which listed all of the days in a ritual year. Inside the circles are symbols for different days—some good and some bad.

For example, this day, called Imix, was a good day. Good days were set aside for important work, such as planting. But this day, called Cimi, represented by a face with the closed eyes of a dead person, forecast bad luck or even death, so this was not a good day to do anything important.

The Maya actually had two calendars. One calendar, a solar calendar, contained eighteen months of twenty days each, making 360 days. To this were added five unlucky or bad days, making a total of 365 days, just as in our calendar.

The other calendar was the ritual calendar, which contained only 260 days. These two calendars turned together like two wheels, so that each day a different pair of names was brought together. Each new day was named according to its position on both calendars. For example, this day is 4 UAYEB Imix. In this system, the exact same day only repeats every 52 years, marking one “century” of Mayan time.

Many days on the Mayan calendar were set aside for religious ceremonies, which often involved blood offerings to the gods. In piercing his skin with the point of a spear, a priest would offer the vital stuff of life—his own blood. Here the ruler, or true man, is piercing his tongue with a large thorn.

The Mayas believed that blood offerings and even human sacrifice were necessary to keep the universe in balance, and to keep the wheels of time turning.

The Maya were fascinated by the passage of time; they observed the sun as it passed through the sky, and they recorded the cycles of the moon and the planets. Their observations were so precise that they were able to accurately predict eclipses of the moon.

For over a thousand years the Maya civilization flourished, marked by beautiful art, scientific advancement, and brilliant architecture. But in about 900 A.D., the civilization went into a steep decline. No one knows why the civilization fell apart. Perhaps the common people revolted against the noble-priests, who had become rich and corrupt.

Whatever the cause, the great centers like Tikal, Palenque and Copan were abandoned, and grass began to grow over the temples and palaces. The people moved north to the sunny Yucatan and built new cities, which looked very different from the classic Mayan cities because they were influenced by a foreign people who invaded from Mexico, a people called the Toltec.

From the Toltec, the Maya learned a violent, deadly form of religion, while the brilliant civilization of the classic Maya grew dim, faded from memory, and sank beneath the jungle.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

CIVILIZATIONS IN THE VALLEY OF MEXICO

The sound of Indian drums echoes today in the heart of Mexico City, as dancers re-enact the ceremonies of their ancestors. The sacred steps recall a time when feathered warriors invaded the Valley of Mexico, bringing their fierce customs and violent religion.

But only one of these tribes would become famous—burned indelibly into history—a people we now call the “Aztecs.”

The valley of Mexico lies here, in the highlands of southern Mexico. It is a broad basin surrounded by high mountains, and in ancient times it contained a large lake called Lake Texcoco.

This was a center of great civilizations, long before the time of the Aztecs, and to understand the Aztecs, we must take a look at these earlier civilizations.

TEOTIHUACAN

Set on a broad plain in the Valley of Mexico, ancient Teotihuacan is one of the most striking sights in the world.

When the Aztecs found these ruins, they were stunned by the enormous pyramids, the rows of temples, and the broad avenues. They thought the place must have been built by gods, so they named it Teotihuacan, which means, the home of the gods.

As this model shows, the palaces and plazas were laid out in perfect order on each side of a grand avenue. The city must have struck awe in the minds of the Indians who saw it for the first time.

On festival days they could climb the great Pyramid of the Sun, which loomed like a mountain over the city. It was made of millions of mud bricks covered with a layer of volcanic rock.

Looking down from the top of the pyramid, one could see the city laid out. At its height, in 650 A.D., some 200,000 people lived here, sprawled over eight square miles.

They lived in apartment houses connected by narrow streets and alleys. It has been estimated that there were about 3,000 apartment houses, with 60 to 100 people living in each house.

Nearly all of the houses were plastered and painted in a bright color, usually red. Even after fourteen centuries, plaster and paint still cling to the old walls.

Inside the palaces, the wall decorations were lavish. Here the rain god scatters drops of water while his priests pour streams of corn onto the earth. This goggle-eyed god, covered with corn, was called Tlaloc; he was the god of rain and harvest, while this is Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent—a god that is half bird and half snake.

These were two of the most important gods, not only in Teotihuacan, but throughout Mesoamerica.

For unknown reasons, in about the year 700 A.D., the sun began to set on the civilization of Teotihuacan. People moved away, and parts of the city were burned. By the year 750, after more than a thousand years of splendor, the last people left and the city fell silent.

THE CHICHIMEC INDIANS AND THE TOLTECS

To the north and west of the Valley of Mexico lay an area of dry hills and canyons that extended for hundreds of miles to the north.

This desolate area was called the Gran Chichimeca and it was the home of a wild and fierce people called Chichimec, which means, “the Sons of the Dog.” For hundreds of years, Chichimecs had been migrating down from the northern plains and mixing with the civilized tribes already living in the Valley of Mexico, and from this mixture of people arose a society of warriors—the powerful Toltec.

Their capital, called Tula, was set atop a broad ridge about 50 miles north of the Valley of Mexico.

These ruins are all that remain of the great capital of the Toltecs, but in 1000 A.D., the city looked much like this.

From this beautiful capital, the Toltecs extended their influence throughout Mesoamerica. They ruled their subjects through military might. Subject peoples were forced to give food and valuables to the rulers, a kind of payment called tribute.

On a large raised platform in the center of the main plaza, enemies captured in battle were sacrificed to Toltec gods. A victim's heart was cut out and placed on a specially carved altar called a *chac mool*. As we will see, the Aztecs adopted this practice of human sacrifice, and made it the center of their religion.

For unknown reasons, Tula, the city of warriors, declined in power and eventually collapsed. Some believe that it was simply overwhelmed by later waves of Chichimec barbarians.

THE AZTECS

After the fall of the Tula, many of the Toltecs moved south and settled in the Valley of Mexico, founding several towns near Lake Texcoco. Over the years, they were joined by even more waves of Chichimecs migrating into the valley from the north. The last wave of Chichimecs to come into this mixing pot was the tribe we know today as the Aztecs.

Today we know a lot about the Aztecs because they wrote about themselves in books, called codices. A codex was filled with illustrations, as well as these picture symbols, that are a form of writing. Newer codices, written after the Spanish colonists came to Mexico, contain descriptions of typical Aztec life as well as traditional stories about their ancestors and their gods. These stories are called myths or legends.

One such story recounts the mythical origin of the Aztec people. According to the legend, the Aztecs came from a land to the north where they lived in caves. They left this land to search for a new home in the south. They wandered for hundreds of years, accompanied on their journey by their god, Huitzilopochtli, whose name means

"Hummingbird on the Left." Despite his innocent name, Huitzilopochtli was a ferocious god of war.

Huitzilopochtli told them to make their new home at the place where they saw this sign: an eagle eating the fruit of a cactus. In the Spanish version of the legend, the eagle is eating a snake, but to the Aztecs, the fruit of the cactus had symbolic meaning, for it represented the human heart.

Finally, after centuries of wandering, they found the sign and here they began to build a great city.

THE AZTEC CAPITAL

The sign from Huitzilopochtli appeared in an unexpected place—on an island in Lake Texcoco.

Much of the island was swampy and uninhabitable, but the Aztecs, obeying their fearsome god, began to live on the island.

They founded not one, but two towns: Tlatelolco, and the city that was destined to become their capital, Tenochtitlan. To get to the mainland, they built elevated roads or causeways, with bridges that could be drawn up if enemies approached. They also created more usable land by building chinampas, which were rectangular, artificial islands.

Chinampas were built next to the causeways and were separated by canals. The people could plant their gardens on the chinampas or they could live on them. Today, some of these chinampas still exist, surrounded, as then, by canals.

The Aztecs heaped up mud and reeds from the lake and planted trees, or pounded sticks into the mud to hold the soil in place.

But even though the Aztecs were able to create chinampas and sustain themselves on their little island, they were surrounded by enemies; for Tenochtitlan was encircled by older cities around the lake, such as Culhuacan, Chalco

and Xochimilco. But the Aztecs were able to ally themselves with the very powerful city of Azcapotzalco and then with Texcoco, and their power began to grow, for the Aztecs were skilled warriors. In brutal campaigns they began to sweep across the Valley of Mexico. In the name of their terrible god of war they struck terror throughout the land.

Enemies captured in war were taken back to Tenochtitlan to be sacrificed on the altars of Huitzilopochtli, while the survivors were forced to pay tribute to their new masters. Aztec codices record the amounts of tribute paid in a single year—warrior costumes, shields, and headdresses; quantities of cocoa and gold; thousands of cotton garments and tons of food.

Tribute streamed into the capital from the farthest domains as the Aztecs pushed across Mesoamerica. They created an empire that reached from the central highlands to the Gulf of Mexico.

Gorged with tribute, the capital grew into a dazzling city of canals, gardens, and temples—the fabulous Tenochtitlan.

When the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés arrived here in 1519, he was stunned by the beauty of the city.

He described a clean and radiant metropolis of palaces and shining temples, perfectly laid out along broad, paved boulevards. Heads of mythical beasts guarded the temple stairways, while carved serpents and other images decorated the streets.

Cortés also spoke of the beautiful markets of Tlatelolco, where people might go to barter for weavings or pottery, or where the lady of the house might go to buy tortillas, tamales or salt.

You could buy corn, nuts or peppers, or ducks or fish caught fresh from the lake, while merchants from far-away places, like Oaxaca or Yucatan, traded in gold and quetzal feathers.

The people of noble blood and those warriors who had distinguished themselves most in battle were allowed by law to wear fine clothing in public, while the highest noble of all, the great king Moctezuma, was carried through the streets on a litter.

But while the Spaniards were impressed by the magnificence of Tenochtitlan, they were not prepared for what they would find when they entered the temple district.

When they climbed the stairways of the great temples, they discovered, to their horror, that the steps were covered with blood and inside the sanctuaries the odor of rotting blood overcame them, for the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice almost continuously.

The method was not complicated: The chest of the victim was quickly opened with a stone knife and the still-beating heart was removed. Blood was smeared across carved images of the gods and then the heart was placed in a bowl and burned.

By one estimate, the Aztecs sacrificed about 30,000 people every year. When a new temple to Huitzilopochtli was dedicated, some 20,000 people were killed in a span of four days. Near the center of the city, 135,000 skulls were displayed on a rack.

The purpose of all this carnage was to feed the gods, for the gods were thought to be living beings that needed nourishment—blood and human hearts—to survive.

For example, sacrifice caused Tlaloc, the rain god, to send life-giving rain and sacrifice caused the sun god Tonatiuh to rise each day and move through the heavens.

Tonatiuh lies at the center of the famous Aztec calendar stone. On each side are claws holding human hearts. This circular band contains the names of the twenty days of the Aztec month, such as Lizard, Stone Knife, Eagle, and

Reed. At the top we see the date, 13 Reed, when the present sun was born, and inside the four rectangles are the dates when the four previous suns were destroyed.

The Aztecs believed that they were living under the Fifth Sun, which began during the time of Teotihuacan. They were constantly struggling, through sacrifice, to keep the Fifth Sun and the universe alive.

The fall of the Aztec Empire was strangely foretold by one of their own legends. According to the legend, the god Quetzalcóatl, who had gone to live across the ocean, would return in the year One Reed to rule over the Aztecs. In one of the most extraordinary coincidences in all of human history, One Reed fell on the year 1519—precisely when Hernán Cortés landed in Mexico.

Cortés, with his beard and white skin, looked like a god to the Aztecs. The king Moctezuma, thinking Cortés might be a god, welcomed him into Tenochtitlan.

But the Spaniards soon revealed why they had come—to convert the Indians to Christianity and to take their gold.

Conflict was inevitable, and the outcome was never in doubt. The Aztec warriors fought bravely, but they were no match for Spanish armor and horses. And, of course, the Spanish had guns.

Taking stones from the Aztec temples, Cortés built a church. With this act, the New World was united with the old, and the final curtain came down on the two-thousand-year history of the Ancient Americans.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Discussion Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions as directed by your teacher. Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

1. What did the city of Teotihuacan look like? Was it an Aztec city? Would the construction of pyramids containing millions of bricks have required a high degree of social organization? Why?
2. Why has the development of agriculture always been essential to the development of civilization?
3. What was religion like for the Mayas and the Aztecs? How did they show respect toward their gods?
4. What are some characteristics of civilization that were found in the societies of the Mayas and the Aztecs?
5. One of the indications of social organization in a civilized society is the presence of different social classes and occupations. Describe the different social classes and occupations that existed in the Mayan and Aztec civilizations.
6. In the calendar of Mesoamerica, how many days occupied each month? How many of these months were in a solar year? How did the mathematicians round out the solar calendar to 365 days?
7. Did the civilizations of Mesoamerica have some form of written language? Describe what it looked like. What kinds of surfaces did they write on?
8. Who were the Chichimecs? Where did they come from, and what effect did they have on Mesoamerica?

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Vocabulary List

ALLY Someone who is cooperating with another; to enter into cooperation. Before the Aztecs became very powerful, they increased their power by cooperating with other tribes.

ARCHAEOLOGIST A scientist specializing in archaeology; the study of past cultures. Archaeologists often dig up the physical remains of ancient peoples, such as their houses, tools, pottery, and art work.

AZTEC A semi-nomadic, Nahuatl-speaking people who migrated into the Valley of Mexico from the north in about 1200 A.D. and later built an empire with its capital at Tenochtitlan.

AZTLAN (AHST-lahn) According to legend, the island home of the Aztecs, before they began 200 years of wandering. It was situated somewhere to the north of the Valley of Mexico.

BAD DAYS Unlucky days, evil days; the five days at the end of the year that were added to the 360 calendar days (20 days per month times 18 months) to round out the year at 365 days. Both the Mayas and the Aztecs held the belief that these five days were particularly unlucky, and nothing of importance should be attempted on these five days at year's end.

BALL COURT A stone enclosure used for the playing of a ball game. Different versions of the game were played throughout Mesoamerica. Some ball courts were small, such as the one at Tikal, while others were enormous, such as one located at Chichen Itza in Mexico, which measures 76 yards wide by 189 yards long. Ball courts have been found in Indian ruins as far north as Arizona in the United States.

BARBARIAN Something which is from a foreign place; something uncivilized. The Chichimecs were sometimes called "barbarians" because they were an alien, less-civilized people than the residents of the Valley of Mexico.

BARTER Trading one kind of goods for another without the use of money.

BLOOD OFFERING A religious ritual in which an injury is inflicted, so that blood may be obtained and offered to a god.

BONAMPAK (bohn-ahm-PAHK) A Mayan ceremonial center of the classic period, located in Mexico southwest of Tikal. In 1946, archaeologists found beautifully preserved mural paintings at Bonampak.

CACAO (kah-KAH-oh) **TREE** The source of cocoa. The seeds or "beans" from this tree were used to make chocolate. Both the Mayas and the Aztecs made chocolate drinks.

CALENDAR STONE Also called the Sun Stone. A large stone disk with a carved decoration representing Aztec beliefs about the sun and the passage of time. The Calendar Stone is 3 feet thick, 12 feet in diameter, and weighs about 20 tons. The Calendar Stone may well be Mexico's greatest archaeological treasure.

CAMPAIGN A series of actions designed to bring about a desired result. The Aztecs fought a series of battles to bring power and tribute to themselves.

CARNAGE Bloody destruction of life, slaughter.

CAUSEWAY A road raised above surrounding land or water. The Mayas built causeways through the dense jungle, and the Aztecs built causeways over the water to connect their island home to the mainland.

CEREMONIAL CENTER Also called ritual center. Any of the ancient cities of Mesoamerica that were mainly built and maintained as locations for religious ceremonies. This use is particularly attributed to the Mayas.

CHAC (chawk) The Mayan god of rain.

CHAC MOOL (chack-MOOL) An altar carved in the form of a reclining person, on which was placed human hearts, at the time of human sacrifice to the rain god.

CHICHIMEC (chee-chee-MECK) Called the "Sons of the Dog." The semi-nomadic, Nahuatl-speaking tribes that migrated southward through the Mexican highlands from the 5th to the 13th centuries A.D. It is believed the Aztecs were the last Chichimec tribe to migrate into the Valley of Mexico.

CHINAMPAS (Chee-NAM-pahs) Artificial islands, usually narrow and rectangular, which were usually built up of layers of mud and debris. Chinampas were used to increase the amount of usable land that was suitable for farming. Although they have sometimes been called "floating islands," they were built up from the lake bottom, and did not float.

CHICHÉN ITZÁ (chee-CHEHN eets-AH) A large Mayan and Toltec city of the postclassic period, located in the Yucatan. Originally Mayan, the city was overrun by Toltecs in about 990 A. D.

CITY-STATE A city which functions like an independent nation; a city and country combined into one. The Maya did not have a single, unified government; rather, the various Mayan ceremonial centers were independent city-states that sometimes traded with each other and sometimes were at war.

CIVILIZATION A nation or group of people who are civilized; a stage in the evolution of human culture, generally marked by agriculture, towns, social organization, trade, writing, and a high development of art and science.

CLASSIC PERIOD Together with the preclassic and the postclassic, one of the three time periods describing the development of Mesoamerican civilizations. The classic period of Maya civilization lasted from about 200 B.C. until 900 A. D.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Vocabulary List (continued)

COATLICUE (koh-aht-lee-KOO-ay) “Lady of the Serpent Skirt.” An Aztec goddess, the mother of Huitzilopochtli. Coatlicue wore a skirt made of rattlesnakes and a necklace made of human hearts and hands.

CODEX (KOH-dex) The books produced in Mesoamerica beginning in early times and continuing into the colonial period. They were usually made from the inner bark of the fig tree, beaten flat, and covered with a fine layer of white plaster. The pages folded “accordion-style.” Nearly all of the codices found by the Spanish conquerors were destroyed by them.

CODICES (KOH-duh-sees) The plural form of codex.

COLONIAL Referring to colonies—foreign territories under the control of a ruling power. The colonial period in the New World began with the conquests of the Spanish. In this setting, the Spanish were the colonists.

CONQUISTADORS (kohn-kees-tah-DOHRS) Spanish conquerors.

CORTÉS (kohr-TAYS), **HERNÁN** The man who led the Spanish conquerors in Mexico from 1519 to 1521. Also spelled CORTEZ (kor-TEZ).

COSMOS The entire world, the universe.

CULTURE The way of life of a people, including all of their habits, traditions, possessions, art, knowledge and beliefs.

DOMAIN A territory under the control of someone. The Aztecs established domains in far-flung parts of Mesoamerica, that is, they established an empire.

ECLIPSE OF THE MOON Lunar eclipse; the passage of the earth between the sun and the moon, so that the shadow of the earth falls on the moon.

EMPIRE A vast territory all under the control of one ruler or central government.

FIFTH SUN According Aztec belief, the time period in which they were living. The Aztecs believed that the sun and the universe had been created and destroyed four times before.

FLAYING Removing the skin from the body of an animal or human. An Aztec ritual in honor of the god of fertility, Xipe Totec, involved the flaying of a sacrificial victim and the wearing of the victim’s skin.

FORETELL To predict.

FORETOLD Something that is told or known in advance of its occurrence.

HALACH UINIC (ah-LAWCH wee-NEEK) “True Man.” The high priest or ruler of a Mayan ceremonial center.

HIEROGLYPHIC WRITING Also called picture writing. Writing using pictures to represent ideas or objects.

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HUITZILOPOCHTLI (weet-seel-oh-POACH-tlee) “Hummingbird on the Left.” The god of war of the Aztecs. While the Aztecs shared many gods with other Mesoamerican peoples, Huitzilopochtli was their special god, and the one they honored most with war and human sacrifice.

HUNTING AND GATHERING A name given to the practice of hunting wild animals and gathering wild plants as sources of food; the original means of survival of all mankind, before the invention of agriculture.

ICE AGE A period in geological history during which world climate is cooler than normal, and glaciers and ice sheets form in northern latitudes and in mountainous areas. During an ice age, much of the earth’s water is deposited on land as ice. This results in a worldwide lowering of the sea level, creating dry land where formerly there existed shallow seas. Scientists believe that during the last ice age, a land bridge was created in this manner between Asia and Alaska, and that migrating tribes used this bridge to enter North America for the first time.

INCAS (INK-uhs) Together with the Mayas and the Aztecs, one of the most famous of the ancient American civilizations. The Incas established a powerful empire in the Andes Mountains of South America.

INDELIBLE Marked permanently, cannot be erased. For example, something “burned indelibly into history” would be something that is difficult to forget or erase from memory.

INDIAN A name for Native-American people that has been in common usage since the time of Columbus.

INEVITABLE Something which must happen.

JADE A very hard, green gemstone that was highly valued and traded throughout Mesoamerica.

LAKE TEXCOCO (taysh-KOH-koh) The Aztecs built their capital, Tenochtitlan, on an island in this lake in the Valley of Mexico. Originally, Lake Texcoco was quite large, but it was dried out and filled in over the years by the development of Mexico City, which lies over the ancient lake bed.

LAND BRIDGE Scientists believe that wandering tribes entered North America from Asia by walking across dry land, a “land bridge,” that was created during the last ice age.

LAVISH Very costly, something for which much time or money has been expended. For example, lavish decorations would be those that required much time and effort to create.

LEGEND Something that is well known for a long period of time; a traditional story, a myth. In Mesoamerica, legends contained the beliefs of the people regarding their origins, history, and gods.

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ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Vocabulary List (continued)

LITTER A chair or platform on which someone is carried by other people. The Aztec king Moctezuma was sometimes carried through the streets on a litter.

MAIZE (mayz) Corn; the most important grain crop in Mesoamerica. The Aztecs used maize to make tortillas, tamales, and a porridge called "atole."

MAYA (MAH-yah) The people and ancient civilization situated in Guatemala, Belize and parts of Mexico and Honduras, beginning in about 900 B.C.

MESOAMERICA "Middle America." The area from central Mexico to western Honduras and El Salvador, including the Yucatan Peninsula. Ancient civilizations were spread across Mesoamerica, and they shared important characteristics: agricultural economies based primarily on corn, certain gods, solar and ritual calendars, and a mathematical system based on the number 20.

MEXICA (may-HEE-kah) Another word for Aztec. The name "Mexico" comes from this word.

MEXICAN HIGHLANDS The region of mountains and high valleys running in a north-south direction through the center of Mexico.

MIXTEC (MEESH-teck) An ancient civilization and people centered in the Mexican state of Oaxaca. The Mixtecs worked beautiful objects in gold.

MOCTEZUMA II (mohk-tay-SOO-mah) II The Aztec emperor from 1502 until 1520. Also Montezuma.

MYTH A traditional story; a legend. Although myths were sometimes based on certain facts, much contained in them was not true.

MYTHICAL Relating to a myth; a story with a mythical origin is one which has come to us through myth.

NAHUATL (NAH-wahl) The family of related languages to which the Aztec language belongs.

NOBLE A person of high social rank, an aristocrat. A noble class existed in both Aztec and Maya societies; in fact, the existence of noble and common classes is typical of all civilizations. In Maya society, the noble class was largely made up of priests.

NOBLE-PRIEST A priest who is a member of the noble class. The upper-most class in Maya society is sometimes called the noble-priests.

OAXACA (wah-HAH-kah) An area of southern Mexico; the name of the modern city and state of Oaxaca. The ancient Mixtec and Zapotec peoples were located in the vicinity of Oaxaca.

OCELLATED TURKEY A species of wild turkey that lives in Central America.

OLMEC (OHL-meck) The oldest civilization in Mesoamerica; the Olmecs influenced all of the civilizations that followed them. They developed a calendar and hieroglyphic writing. The first ritual ball game was invented by the Olmecs.

PALENQUE (pah-LEHN-kay) A Mayan ceremonial center of the classical period, located in Mexico northwest of Tikal.

POSTCLASSIC PERIOD Together with the preclassic and the classic, one of the three time periods describing the development of Mesoamerican civilizations. In the Maya civilization, the postclassic lasted from about 900 A. D. until 1700 A. D.

PRECLASSIC PERIOD Together with the classic and the postclassic, one of the three time periods describing the development of Mesoamerican civilizations. In the Maya civilization, the preclassic lasted from about 1500 B.C. until 200 B.C.

PRE-COLUMBIAN Refers to the time before Columbus discovered the New World.

PRIEST A person with the training and authority to conduct religious ceremonies. In Mesoamerican civilizations, as in all ancient civilizations, priests were among the most powerful people in society.

QUETZAL (kayt-SAHL) A rare and beautiful bird whose feathers were treasured by the Mayans and Aztecs.

QUETZALCÓATL (kayt-sahl-KOH-wahl) The "feathered serpent." A god of earth and sky, known throughout Mesoamerica for centuries.

RUNNER In ancient civilizations, a person who runs from one place to another to carry news or to deliver something important. As part of the New Fire Ceremony, Aztec runners carried lit torches to all parts of the empire to relight the fires in the temples.

RITUAL A religious ceremony.

RITUAL CALENDAR Along with the solar calendar, one of two calendars used in Mesoamerica. The 260-day ritual calendar was used to mark days of particular religious significance.

RITUAL CENTER Another name for ceremonial center.

SACRIFICE The ritualized killing of an animal or person to honor a god. Human sacrifice was performed throughout Mesoamerica. It was believed that the gods were alive, and required blood as a form of nourishment.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Vocabulary List (continued)

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION The separation of people within a culture into social classes and different occupations. Civilization is marked by the existence of different classes and groups, such as nobles, commoners, priests, traders, artisans, builders, and farmers.

SOLAR CALENDAR A calendar which records the annual cycle of the sun. The solar calendar in use in Mesoamerica had 18 months of 20 days each, totaling 360 days. To this were added 5 extra “bad days,” which made a total of 365 days in the solar year. The 365-day solar calendar was used together with the 260-day ritual calendar to completely identify each day. When using the two calendars together, the exact same day would only repeat every 52 years, which was a “century” in Mesoamerica.

STELA (STEH-luh) A stone monument, usually in the form of a flattened slab, placed vertically on the ground. The Maya carved dates and the images of kings on their stelae.

STELAE Plural form of *stela*.

SUN STONE Another name for the Aztec Calendar Stone.

SYMBOL A word, picture, or thing that represents something else.

SYMBOLIC Something which is a symbol. To the Aztecs, the red fruit of the prickly pear cactus was a symbol for the human heart.

TAMALE A thin pancake of steamed maize porridge folded over different fillings.

TENOCHTITLAN (tay-noch-teet-LAHN) The capital city of the Aztec Empire, founded in 1325.

TEOTIHUACAN (tay-oh-tee-wah-KAHN) A great, pre-Aztec city of ancient Mexico known for its huge pyramids. The name Teotihuacan comes from the Aztec language, and means “The Home of the Gods.” The people who built this city, the Teotihuacanos, controlled the Valley of Mexico from about 200 to 700 A.D.

TEPANEC (tay-PAH-neck) A powerful tribe in the Valley of Mexico during the 14th century; defeated by rival tribes, including the Aztecs, in the early 15th century.

TEZCATLIPOCA (tays-kaht-lee-POH-kah) “Smoking Mirror.” An Aztec god of darkness and evil. According to legend, Tezcatlipoca was the god that drove Quetzalcóatl out of Tula.

TIKAL An important Mayan ceremonial center of the preclassic and classic periods, located in the Peten region of present-day Guatemala.

TALALOC (TLAH-lohk) The Aztec rain god.

TOLTEC (TOHL-teck) A war-like people who controlled the central highlands of southern Mexico from 900-1187 A.D. They greatly increased the use of human sacrifice in religious ritual. Although the Aztecs considered the Toltecs to be their direct ancestors, they were not.

TONATIUH (tow-nah-tee-YOO) The Aztec sun god, whose face decorates the center of the Calendar Stone.

TRADE Between people, the willing exchange of one possession for another; a mark of civilization.

TRIBUTE Taxes which must be paid by one people to another. Usually the payment is forced, under penalty of death. Although tribute may be paid in the money of the land, in Mesoamerica tribute was paid in food, valuables, and slaves.

TRUE MAN “Halach Uinic.” The ruler of a Maya city-state.

TULA (TOO-lah) The capital city of the Toltecs, located about 50 miles north of present-day Mexico City.

UAXACTUN (wah-shawk-TOON) A Mayan ceremonial center of the classic period, near Tikal.

UNINHABITABLE A place where it is not possible to live. The island where the Aztecs settled and built their capital was “almost uninhabitable,” meaning they almost could not live there, because it was so marshy and there was no stone or wood with which to build their city.

UNIVERSE The entire world, the cosmos. In ancient Mesoamerica, the movement of the celestial bodies, particularly the sun, was strongly associated with the continued existence of the universe itself.

VALLEY OF MEXICO A broad basin surrounded by mountains in the central highlands of southern Mexico where Mexico City is now situated. The Valley of Mexico was one of the principal centers of ancient civilization in Mexico, some others being the Gulf Coast, the Yucatan, and Oaxaca.

WRITTEN LANGUAGE A language which can be written, as opposed to a language which can only be spoken. A mark of civilization is the ability to use written symbols to represent ideas or things.

XIPE TOTE (SHEE-pay tow-TECK) The Aztec god of planting and fertility.

YUCATAN (yoo-kaw-TAWN) The large Mexican peninsula that protrudes into the Gulf of Mexico. After the collapse of the classic Maya city-states, such as Tikal, many of the lowland Maya migrated to the north into the Yucatan, where, with the Toltecs, they built new ceremonial centers.

ZERO The numerical equivalent of the idea of nothing. The concept of zero is necessary for number systems using “bases,” such as our base-10 system. The Mayas used a number system with a base of 20.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Timeline

30,000 B.C. - The first people travel over a land bridge from Asia to North America.

5,000 B.C. - Farming based on corn, beans, squash, and peppers is taking place in central Mexico.

3000 B.C. - Great civilizations are found in Mesopotamia, Egypt, China and India. People in Mesoamerica are living in simple farming settlements.

1800 B.C. - Multiplication tables appear in Mesopotamia.

1700 B.C. - Phoenicians are writing with a 22-letter alphabet.

1000 B.C. - The Olmecs build pyramids in Mexico. The Olmecs develop hieroglyphic writing, invent a sacred ball game.

776 B.C. - The first Olympic games are held in Olympia, Greece.

753 B.C. - The city of Rome is founded.

600 B.C. - Mayans settle at Tikal.

481 B.C. - The Buddha, founder of Buddhism, dies in India.

450 B.C. - The civilization of ancient Greece is at its highest point.

260 B.C. - The Maya develop their unique system of numbers that includes a zero. This will be the most advanced numbering system in the world for the next 1000 years.

146 B.C. - Greece is captured by the Romans.

100 B.C. - Settlement begins at Teotihuacan.

33 A.D. - Christ dies.

100 A.D. - First temples built at Tikal.

120 A.D. - High point of the Roman Empire.

200 A.D. - Pyramid of the Sun is completed at Teotihuacan.

300 A.D. - Pyramid of the Moon is completed at Teotihuacan.

476 A.D. - Collapse of the Roman Empire.

500 A.D. - Height of power at Teotihuacan.

570 A.D. - Mohammed, founder of Islam, is born.

700 A.D. - High point of classic Maya civilization; major temples constructed at Tikal.

750 A.D. - Teotihuacan is burned and abandoned.

800 A.D. - Europe is in a period of cultural decay, called the Dark Ages.

900 A.D. - Many Mayan cities are abandoned. The great Anasazi city of Pueblo Bonito is under construction in northern New Mexico. The Anasazi trade with the Toltecs of central Mexico.

1110 A.D. - Aztec people leave Aztlan and begin 200 years of wandering.

1215 A.D. - The Magna Carta is signed by King John of England. At this time, Europe is in the medieval era; this is the time when Europe is a land of castles, knights in armor, and great cathedrals.

1250 A.D. - Anasazi build cities on Mesa Verde in southern Colorado.

1325 A.D. - The Aztecs found their great capital city, Tenochtitlan.

1346 A.D. - In Europe, a plague called the Black Death kills 25 million people—one third of the population.

1347 A.D. - First evidence of guns in Europe.

1400 A.D. - The Aztecs discover the ruins of Teotihuacan.

1440 A.D. - Moctezuma I becomes Aztec emperor. This same year in Germany, the Gutenberg bible is printed on a printing press that uses movable type. This invention makes it possible for books to be made cheaply, and as a result, knowledge begins to spread more rapidly than ever before in history.

1453 A.D. - Moslem Turks capture Constantinople. Around this time Europe enters a great period of cultural rebirth called the Renaissance.

1479 A.D. - The Aztec Calendar Stone is made.

1492 A.D. - Columbus discovers the West Indies (Cuba and other islands) in the New World.

1502 A.D. - Columbus encounters Mayan trading party in ocean-going canoe. This same year, Moctezuma II becomes emperor of the Aztecs.

1517 A.D. - Martin Luther starts the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

1519 A.D. - Hernán Cortés lands on the Gulf Coast of Mexico and fights his way to the Aztec capital, where at first he is welcomed as a god by the Aztec emperor.

1521 A.D. - Fall of the Aztec Empire to Spanish forces. The capital of New Spain is begun on the ruins of the Tenochtitlan.

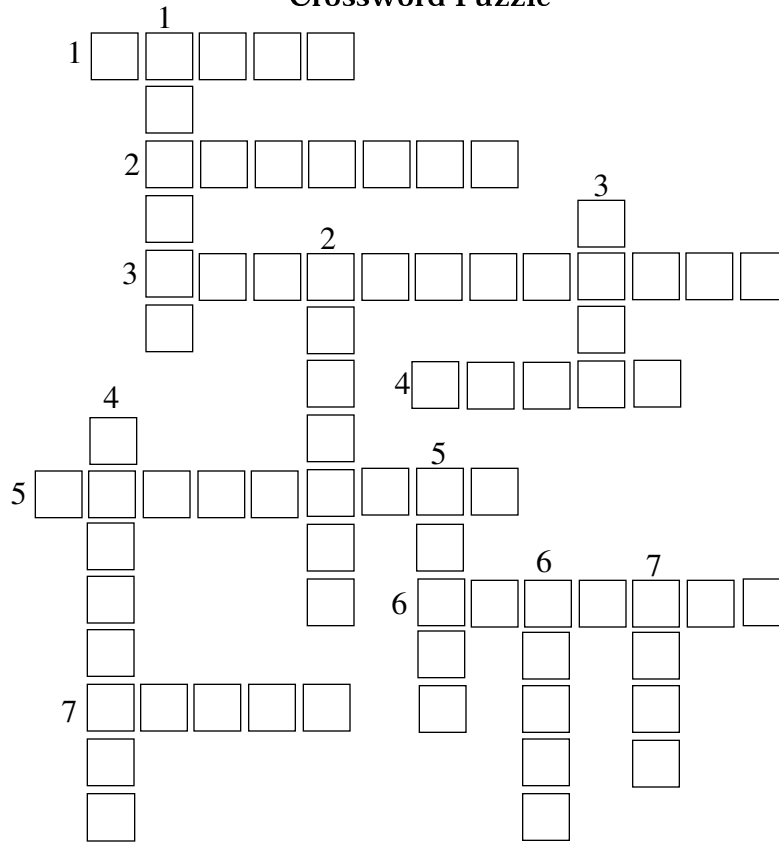
1540 A.D. - The Spanish explorer Coronado explores the American Southwest.

1565 A.D. - Spanish found the city of Saint Augustine in Florida.

1610 A.D. - The city of Santa Fe, New Mexico is founded by the Spanish colonists.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. The most important grain to the Mayas and Aztecs was corn, also known as _____.
2. The Aztecs settled on an island in a large lake; the lake was called Lake _____.
3. Hernán Cortés, who conquered the Aztecs, was a Spanish _____.
4. Explorers have found huge stone heads, the remains of the _____ civilization, which was the first to develop in Mesoamerica.
5. _____ was the king of the Aztecs when Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico.
6. After the classic Maya cities were abandoned in about 900 A. D., many of the Mayas moved north to new centers in the _____ Peninsula.
7. Sometimes the Maya noble-priests inflicted wounds on themselves to make _____ offerings to the gods.

DOWN

1. The _____ built their capital city, Tenochtitlan, on an island in a lake.
2. People in Mesoamerica treasured the _____, because of the beauty of its feathers.
3. The Olmec carved masks of _____, one of the hardest stones known to man.
4. In 1492, _____ discovered some islands in the Bahamas, and thought he had reached the Indies.
5. The beautiful city of Tikal was built by the _____.
6. An Aztec _____ was a book filled with illustrations, as well as picture writing.
7. From their capital of _____, the Toltecs extended their influence throughout Mesoamerica.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS**Interesting Facts About The Aztecs and Mayas**

1. The Aztecs loved to eat tamales, and although they usually filled them with beans, fruit, peppers, or fish, they sometimes filled them with great delicacies like insect eggs, boiled grasshoppers, snails, or the red worms that lived in the mud of Lake Texcoco.
2. Gold was the most valuable thing in the minds of the Spanish conquerors, but the ancient Americans prized many other things just as much - things such as jade and rare feathers. The Mayas sometimes used cocoa beans as a form of money, and some people even counterfeited cocoa beans by making them out of clay.
3. There were no horses in either North or South America until the Spanish conquerors came.
4. The following crops were not found in Europe until they were brought there from the Americas:
• corn (maize) • potatoes • tomatoes • avocados • chocolate • tobacco
5. The Mayas maintained hundreds of miles of roads through the jungles of their lowland domain. They also traveled great distances on the rivers, and even took their huge trading canoes across the ocean to trade with the islanders of the Caribbean.
6. Both the Mayas and the Aztecs performed human sacrifice, but the Aztecs did it much more. By some estimates, the Aztecs sacrificed about 20,000 people per year to their gods, and since most of the victims were prisoners of war, the Aztecs believed that war was needed for their empire to survive.
7. The Mayas never created an empire. Instead, they lived in many separate kingdoms, called "city-states," that were often at war with each other. The Maya kings were both warrior chiefs and priests. The kings often drew their own blood and offered it to the gods in the religious ceremonies they performed.
8. The Mayas were the only Native-American people to invent a complete writing system. Even though the Aztecs used "picture writing" to record names and events, only the Mayas were able to write complete sentences.
9. Both the Mayas and the Aztecs played some kind of ball game, using a rubber ball. The ball game was sacred—that is, it had religious significance for them. They were not allowed to touch the ball with either their hands or feet; instead they hit it with their hips, knees and elbows.
10. Even though the civilizations of the New World were advanced in art, science, mathematics, and in many other ways, they never invented or used the wheel. Oddly, the only record of wheels being used in the New World comes from a toy animal on wheels that was discovered near the Gulf of Mexico.
11. Maya nobles thought that flat foreheads and crossed eyes were marks of beauty. These effects were achieved in childhood by tying boards to their babies' heads, and by dangling objects in front of their babies' eyes. Sometimes they also filed their teeth to make them pointed.
12. Aztec children were sometimes punished by dangling them over a fire or by pricking their hands with thorns.

Name _____

Date _____

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS**Internet Resources**

The following websites contain interesting information and images relating to Mesoamerican culture.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization's Mystery of the Maya

<http://www/civilization.ca/membrs/civiliz/maya/mminteng.html>

This great site includes links to Maya civilization, exhibits on the Plaza, People of the Jaguar, and an Imax film, *Mystery of the Maya*. The Maya Civilization link provides information on people, geography, languages, cities, society, cosmology and religion, writing and hieroglyphics, mathematics, the Maya calendar, astronomy, and the Maya today.

Ancient Cultures of the World

<http://www2.polarnet.com/~whitton/ancient.html>

Links to Aztec and Maya images: the Aztec calendar, pre-Columbian culture, and images of Mexico.

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Quiz

CHART

Directions: Identify which civilization(s) were involved in the following practices by placing an "X" in the appropriate column.

	MAYAS	AZTECS	BOTH MAYAS & AZTECS
1. Carved dates and the names of their rulers on stelae.			
2. Played a ball game with a rubber ball.			
3. Created an empire in Mexican highlands.			
4. Had many small kingdoms, or "city-states."			
5. Performed human sacrifice.			
6. Lived in eastern Mexico, Guatemala and western Honduras.			
7. Civilization at a high point in 700 A.D.			
8. Capital was Tenochtitlan.			
9. Created more farm land by making artificial islands called "chinampas."			
10. Their noble-priests gave blood offerings to their gods.			

ANCIENT AMERICANS: THE MAYAS AND AZTECS

Quiz

TRUE OR FALSE

Directions: Place a "T" in the space next to a true statement and an "F" next to a false statement.

1. _____ Maya astronomers were able to predict eclipses of the moon.
2. _____ At first, Hernando Cortés was welcomed by the Aztec ruler.
3. _____ The Christian conquerors of Mexico liked the Aztec religion.
4. _____ Tikal was a large Aztec city at the time when Cortés invaded Mexico.
5. _____ The Mayas used a number system based on the number 20.
6. _____ Most people sacrificed at Tenochtitlan were captured in war.
7. _____ Waves of Olmecs migrated down from the north and moved into the Valley of Mexico.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS

Directions: Fill in the blank with the word from the box below which best completes the statement
Not all words will be used.

1. Agriculture, towns, social organization, and a high development of art and science are marks of _____.
2. Corn, the most important grain grown in Mesoamerica, is also called _____.
3. Aztec sacrifices usually involved cutting out the _____ of a living person.
4. Scientists believe that the first people in the New World came from _____ during the last ice age.
5. _____ was the leader of the Spanish invasion of Mexico in 1519.
6. Civilization developed in the New World after the ancient Americans shifted from hunting and gathering to _____.
7. An Aztec book, called a _____, was filled with illustrations and picture writing.

ally	agriculture	Asia	Aztec
barbarian	civilization	codex	Hernando Cortés
culture	Halach Uinic	heart	hieroglyphic
legend	maize	Mesoamerica	Moctezuma
Olmec	preclassic period	quetzal	sacrifice
Tezcatlipoca	written language	Yucatan	zero