

Lesson 3: The Aztecs

Directions: Read the summary to reveal how the Aztecs built a great empire in Mesoamerica. As you read, underline important details in each section that relate to that section's title. Think about what you already know, what you want to know, and what you have learned after reading the summary.

Vocabulary

mercenary a hired soldier

chinampa a human-made island

causeway a raised bridge made of land

alliance an agreement to work with others

A Mesoamerican Civilization (p. 175)

The Aztec civilization was the last great civilization of Mesoamerica. The Aztec economy was based on farming. The Aztecs built many great structures out of stone. They also were astronomers and developed a form of writing. They worshipped many gods. Unlike other Mesoamerican civilizations, the Aztecs built a great empire.

Early Aztec History (p. 176-177)

The Aztecs once called themselves the Mexica. At first they were just one of many Mesoamerican peoples. The Mexica sometimes served as **mercenaries**, or hired soldiers. Other times they lived under the rule of others. In the mid-1300s, the Mexica started the city of Tenochtitlán in present-day Mexico. It was built on two swampy islands in the middle of Lake Texcoco. To make more room as the city grew, the Mexica built **chinampas**, or islands. They made chinampas by piling up mud and plants in the lake. The chinampas were used as farmland. The chinampas, natural islands, and the mainland were connected by **causeways**. Causeways are raised bridges made of land. Tenochtitlan soon became a powerful city-state. The Mexica formed **alliances**, or agreements, with neighboring city-states. These alliances helped the Mexica conquer other city-states. The Mexica started calling themselves the Aztecs after their legendary homeland, Aztlán. The Aztec Empire had begun.

The Aztec Empire (p. 178)

At its peak, Tenochtitlán had a population of 300,000 people. The Aztecs controlled many city-states. The population of the entire Aztec Empire may have been as many as 5 million people. The empire collected taxes from the people it conquered and became rich. The Aztecs gained such a large empire because warfare was a normal part of life for them. All young men were trained to fight in battles. Those who showed bravery in battle became famous.

Life (p. 179)

Religion was very important to Aztec life. The Aztecs worshipped hundreds of gods and goddesses. The god Quetzalcóatl was the god of creation. The Aztecs had religious ceremonies that were based on agricultural events. These events included planting and harvesting. The Aztecs performed many human sacrifices to honor their gods. The Aztecs mostly sacrificed people captured in war. Yet they sometimes sacrificed their own people.

A Violent End (p. 180)

The Aztecs were a conquering people. But in the end the Aztecs themselves were conquered. In 1502 Moctezuma II became emperor. For the next two decades, the Aztec Empire was at its height, enjoying their greatest period of power and growth. In 1519 Spanish explorers led by Hernándo Cortés marched into Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs did not fight him and his men at first. The Aztecs might have thought he was the god Quetzalcóatl. The Aztecs began to fight when they realized that Cortés wanted to conquer them. But they were not successful. By 1521 the Spanish had conquered the Aztec Empire.

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Directions: Match each word with its description. Write the letter of the description in the blank beside the word on the left. **You will need to use your textbook.** Hint: *Most of these are highlighted in yellow.*

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| p. <u>175</u> 1. Aztec <u> J </u> | A. the Spanish explorer who some Aztecs believed was Quetzalcóatl |
| p. <u>176</u> 2. Mexica _____ | B. a god of creation to the Aztecs |
| p. <u>176</u> 3. mercenaries _____ | C. floating islands |
| p. <u>176</u> 4. Tenochtitlán _____ | D. what the early Aztecs called themselves |
| p. <u>176</u> 5. chinampas _____ | E. what the Aztecs believed they had to offer to honor their gods |
| p. <u>178</u> 6. Moctezuma I _____ | F. the city the Aztecs built on two islands in Lake Texcoco |
| p. <u>179</u> 7. Quetzalcóatl _____ | G. hired soldiers |
| p. <u>179</u> 8. human sacrifices _____ | H. ruled the Aztec Empire from 1440 to 1469 |
| p. <u>180</u> 9. Moctezuma II _____ | I. emperor during the Aztec’s greatest period of power and wealth |
| p. <u>180</u> 10. Hernándo Cortés _____ | J. the last great civilization of ancient Mesoamerica |

Directions: On the lines below, describe the Aztec game of ulama. Describe the **rules**, the **equipment**, and the **final results / outcome** of the game. (“You Are There” p. 174)
