

**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** (chok-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-wahtl) 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-wahtl) 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.

**TLALOC** (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 TOTEK** (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.

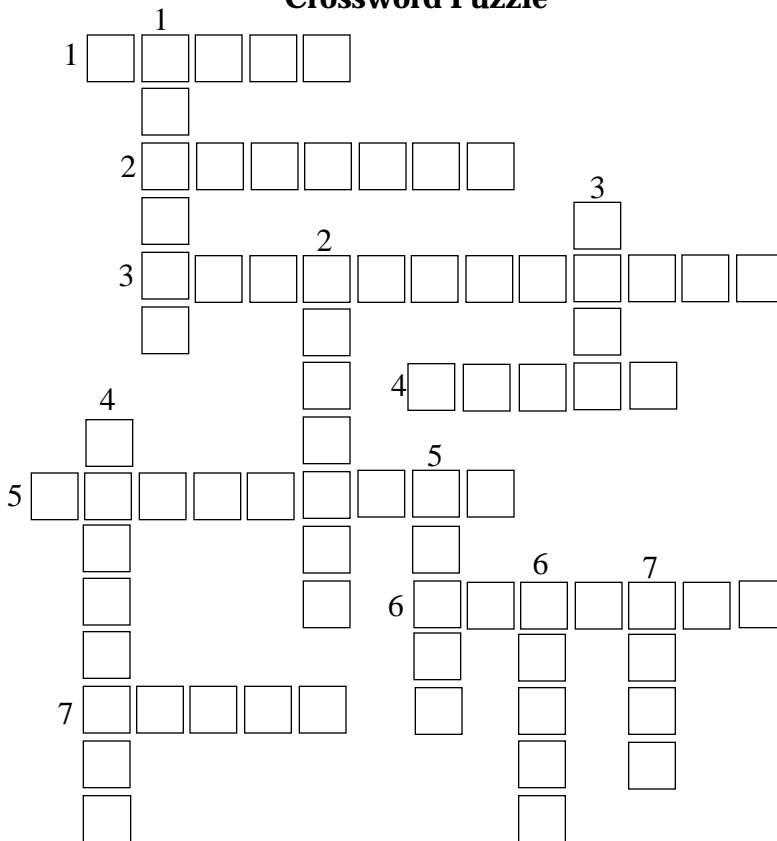
**ZERO** The numerical equivalent of the idea of nothing. The concept of zero is necessary for number systems using “bases,” such as our base-10 system. The Mayas used a number system with a base of 20.

**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.



**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