

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

• What makes a culture unique?

THE STORY BEGINS...

LESSON 2

Life in the Americas

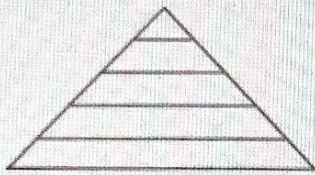
John lit the lantern in his tent and pulled off his boots. He was exhausted. He and his men had ridden all day in the oppressive heat and humidity, and the jungle had seemed to be closing in from all sides. It had been worth it, however; the city of Copan had proved to be spectacular. He flipped to the next empty page in his journal and began to write about his day of exploration:

“[W]e dismounted, and, tying our mules to trees near by, entered the woods, Jose clearing a path before us with a machete; soon we came to the bank of a river, and saw directly opposite a stone wall, perhaps a hundred feet high, with furze [a spiny bush] growing out of the top, running north and south along the river, in some places fallen, but in others entire. It had more the character of a structure than any we had ever seen, ascribed to [characteristic of] the aborigines of America, and formed part of the wall of Copan, an ancient city, on whose history books throw but little light.”

—John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 1841

The Maya built cities in the jungles of Mexico and Central America, including the city of Copan in Honduras. Copan was settled c. 1000 B.C.E. and peaked in the





ANALYZING KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Read closely to identify the Aztec social classes. Use a chart like this one to place the social classes in order. Use examples from the text to describe the role and importance of the emperor.

INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS

1. EVALUATING ARGUMENTS

What information does the author provide to support the claim that "The ancient Maya faced many challenges . . .?"

2. DISTINGUISHING FACT

AND OPINION Explain how the sentence, "Yet, the ancient Maya prospered," might be considered an opinion.

DETERMINING MEANING

Sinkhole is a compound word; the words *sink* and *hole* have been combined and create a new meaning. Explain how the meaning of each separate word helps you understand the meaning of the compound word.

THE MAYA

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the Maya live in the rain forests of Mesoamerica?*

In 1839, archaeologists John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood discovered an ancient city, hidden for centuries by vines and trees. The people who had built the city were called the Maya. These early Americans were the ancestors of the millions of Maya who live in present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Belize.

MAYA COMMUNITIES

About 200 C.E. the Maya developed a complex culture in parts of southern Mexico and Central America. The ancient Maya faced many challenges in the area that they settled, which was called Petén (peh•TEHN). Thick forests nearly blocked out sunlight. Stinging insects filled the air. Yet, the ancient Maya prospered.

Swamps and sinkholes gave the Maya a year-round source of water. A **sinkhole** is an area where the soil has collapsed into a hollow or depression. Sinkholes gave the Maya access to a network of underground rivers and streams. This water supply helped the Maya grow crops to feed their population.

The Maya worked together to clear forested areas. They planted fields of corn and other crops and built cities under government direction.

The Maya began to develop a society. They set up more than 50 independent city-states. Large city-states like Tikal in Guatemala and Calakmul in Mexico were connected by culture, political ties, and trade. However, they often fought one another for control of territory.

WHAT WAS MAYA SOCIETY LIKE?

Each Maya city-state was ruled by a king, believed to be descended from the sun God. As God-kings, Maya rulers expected people to serve them. The greatest Maya king was Pacal II. He ruled the city-state of Palenque (puh•LENGH•KAY) for

67 years in the 600s C.E. Pacal II built many structures considered to be some of the best examples of Maya architecture.

The Maya city-states had a strict class system. Nobles and priests assisted kings in governing the city-states. Below them were farmers, artisans, and hunters. People of this class paid taxes and worked on large building projects, such as temples and palaces. Serfs and slaves were the lowest class. Serfs worked for the local ruler. Slaves included orphans, people being punished for crimes, and prisoners of war.

The Maya believed that the Gods controlled everything that happened on Earth. Priests performed ceremonies to please the Gods. These ceremonies included bloodletting by the royal families and nobles, who would draw blood from themselves to offer to the Gods. They also included human sacrifice.

When the Maya fought battles, they wanted captives and they wanted land. When drought came and threatened their crops, Maya priests tried to please Chac (CHOK), the God of rain, by offering the lives of their captives.

Women played a significant role in the Maya city-states. In the city-state of Calakmul (kah-lahk-MOOL), at least two women served as ruling queens. One of them might have helped to found the city.

Royal Maya women often married into royal families in other Maya city-states. This practice increased trade. It also helped form alliances—political agreements between people or states to work together.

MAYA ACHIEVEMENTS

Maya rulers turned to priests for advice. The priests thought the Gods revealed their plans through movements of the sun, moon, and stars. By watching the sky, the priests learned about astronomy. They developed calendar systems to **predict** eclipses and to schedule religious festivals.

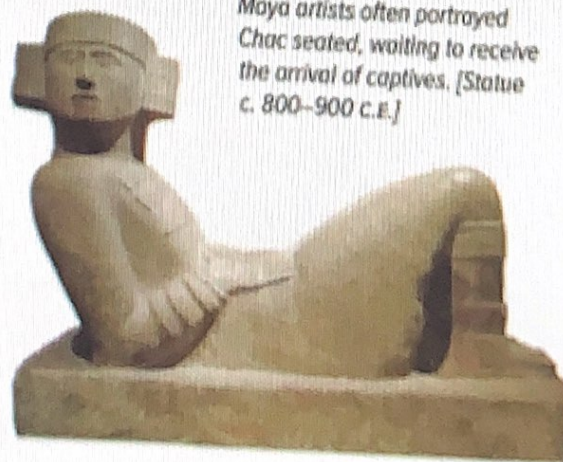
They also used calendars to decide when to plant and harvest crops. The Maya had two major calendars. They used a 260-day calendar for religious events. They used a 365-day calendar for events related to the seasons and agriculture.

The Maya developed a system of mathematics. They invented a method of counting based on 20, and they used the concept of zero. They also developed a written language to record numbers and dates. Like the Zapotec, they used hieroglyphics. They carved hieroglyphics on stone monuments and used them in books.

MAKING CONNECTIONS TO TODAY

THE MAYA TODAY

Modern-day descendants of the Maya speak about 70 different languages. They typically live on farms and grow corn, beans, and squash. As weaving and spinning have become less common, most present-day Maya, especially women, wear traditional clothing made of cloth produced in a factory.



Maya artists often portrayed Chac seated, waiting to receive the arrival of captives. [Statue c. 800–900 C.E.]



In Maya society, a birth in the royal family called for a musical celebration, such as the one depicted above. [Fresco c. 790 C.E.]

ANALYZING SOURCES What does this image reveal about the role of music in the lives of the Maya?

UNDERSTANDING CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

- DESCRIBING** Describe how the dates provided in this section help you understand the information about the Aztec.
- ANALYZING POINT OF VIEW** Why does the author include the detail about the Gods demanding the Aztec build Tenochtitlán?

About 900 C.E., the Maya civilization collapsed. Historians do not know why this happened. Some evidence shows that conflict and warfare increased among city-states. Also, drought, erosion, and overuse of the soil may have caused a drop in food production. Overpopulation and too little food would have led to illnesses and starvation.

✓ CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

- EXPLAINING ISSUES** How did the Maya hope to solve the problem of drought?
- IDENTIFYING CAUSES** Why might the Maya civilization have collapsed?

THE AZTEC

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the Aztec establish their society in central Mexico?*

The Aztec came to power in Mesoamerica during the 1300s. The early Aztec were hunters and warriors. About 1200, they moved into central Mexico. The Aztec admired the Maya and the Toltec and borrowed much from their cities and cultures.

RISE OF THE AZTEC

For many years, the Aztec had been searching for a home they believed had been promised to them by their sun God—the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl (KWEHT•suhl•kuh•WAH•tuhl). In 1325, the Aztec took refuge on a swampy island in Lake Texcoco (tehs•KOH•koh). Although the land was hardly welcoming, the Aztec chose this site to be their new home.

Aztec priests declared that the Gods demanded they build a great city upon this spot. Laborers worked around the clock. The Aztec used the resources they had to build a city. They

built bridges to the mainland with soil dug from the lake bottom. Floating gardens dotted the surface of the lake. The wondrous city they built was Tenochtitlán (tay•nawch•teet•LAHN).

For the next 100 years, Aztec workers built temples, palaces, and homes in Tenochtitlán. The city eventually became the largest city in Mesoamerica. It was the center of a web of trade routes that reached throughout Mexico.

The Aztec **relied** on strong kings, or emperors, who claimed to be descended from the Gods. A council of priests, nobles, and warriors usually named a new emperor from the ruling family. Council members wanted someone skilled in warfare who could lead troops into battle.

Montezuma I (MAHN•tuh•ZOO•muh) was perhaps the most powerful Aztec ruler. He governed from 1440 to 1469. Montezuma used his armies to expand the empire to the Gulf of Mexico. He also built temples, aqueducts, and roads.

By 1500, Aztec armies had conquered much of what is today Mexico. The new empire was a collection of partly independent territories governed by local leaders. The Aztec ruler supported these leaders in return for tribute—goods or money paid by conquered peoples to their conquerors.

AZTEC LIFE

The emperor was at the top of Aztec society. There were four classes of people under the emperor. These were nobles, commoners, unskilled workers, and enslaved people. Most of the Aztec were commoners, who worked as farmers, artisans, or merchants.

From an early age, children learned from their parents about the glories of war and their duties as an Aztec. Boys in Aztec society were taught to be warriors. Girls were trained to work at home, weave cloth, and prepare for motherhood. Although not equal to men, Aztec women could own and inherit property.

Priests played an important role in Aztec society. Some sacrificed war captives because they believed it would please the Gods and prevent the universe from collapsing. Death was considered honorable. The Aztec believed that those sacrificed would be rewarded in the afterlife.

Aztec priests also worked to preserve the religion, history, and literature of their people. Priests recorded

MAKING CONNECTIONS

AZTEC SOCIAL CLASS

The lowest class of the Aztec social order consisted of serfs and slaves. Serfs worked nobles' land and often lived separately from other classes. Slaves were people who had committed certain crimes or who were war prisoners who had not been sacrificed. A person who had considerable debt could also sell himself or a family member into slavery. Slaves could marry and have children, and their children were not considered slaves.

This shield (c. 1500) made of feathers most likely belonged to an Aztec emperor. ▼

INTEGRATING VISUAL INFORMATION Why do you think this animal was chosen to decorate a shield?





According to Aztec legend, in 1325 an eagle was seen atop a cactus with a snake in its mouth. This event fulfilled an Aztec prediction. As a result, this location became the capital of the Aztec Empire, Tenochtitlán. [Painting c. 1300s]

these in books that historians refer to as codices (KOH•duh•seez). Aztec codices were painted on deerskin, cloth, or paper made from the bark of fig trees. Like the Maya, the Aztec developed two different calendars. They used a religious calendar with 260 days to keep track of important ceremonies and festivals. They also had a 365-day calendar for everyday use and for marking the time for planting and harvesting crops. The Aztec made advances in mathematics and astronomy. They created an extensive numbering system using dots, bars, and other symbols. They used astronomy for creating the Aztec calendar and for locating landscapes and cities.

Much of Mexico was not suited for farming. The Aztec overcame this difficulty by irrigating and fertilizing the land. Aztec crafts, as well as fruit, vegetables, and grain from Aztec farms, passed through markets and along trade routes. The trade in these goods and the tribute from conquered peoples helped make the Aztec Empire wealthy.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. **EXPLAINING CAUSES** Explain why the Aztec might have chosen Montezuma I to be their leader.
2. **EXPLAINING ISSUES** Explain how the Aztec overcame the difficulty of Mexico's poor farming conditions.

THE INCA

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the Inca organize their government and society?*

In the late 1300s, the Inca were only one of many groups that fought over scarce fertile land in the valleys of the Andes Mountains. From their capital of Cuzco, the Inca raided nearby groups and seized territory. Within 100 years, the Inca had created a powerful empire.

INCA RULERS

A series of strong emperors helped build the Inca Empire. Pachacuti (PAH•chah•KOO•tee) was the first of these rulers. In the 1430s, he launched a campaign of conquest. The two emperors who followed continued this expansion, building the largest empire in the Americas.

To hold the empire together, Inca rulers created a strong central government. They set up tax bureaus, legal courts, military posts, and other government offices. Inca emperors required people to learn Quechua (KEH•chuh•wuh), the language spoken by the Inca. People also had to work for the government for several weeks each year.

INCA PROJECTS

The Inca had people work on projects such as a system of roads that covered about 25,000 miles (40,234 km). When finished, these roads connected all parts of the empire. This large network helped the Inca overcome geographic barriers. The roads helped move soldiers, goods, and information quickly over the coastal deserts and high mountains.

The Inca also used irrigation and fertilizers to improve the soil. Inca engineers developed terrace farming so that food could be

ANALYZING KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

1. ANALYZING INTERACTIONS

How did the idea that the sun God protected rulers influence the lives of other Inca?

2. SUMMARIZING

Summarize the structure of Inca social groups.

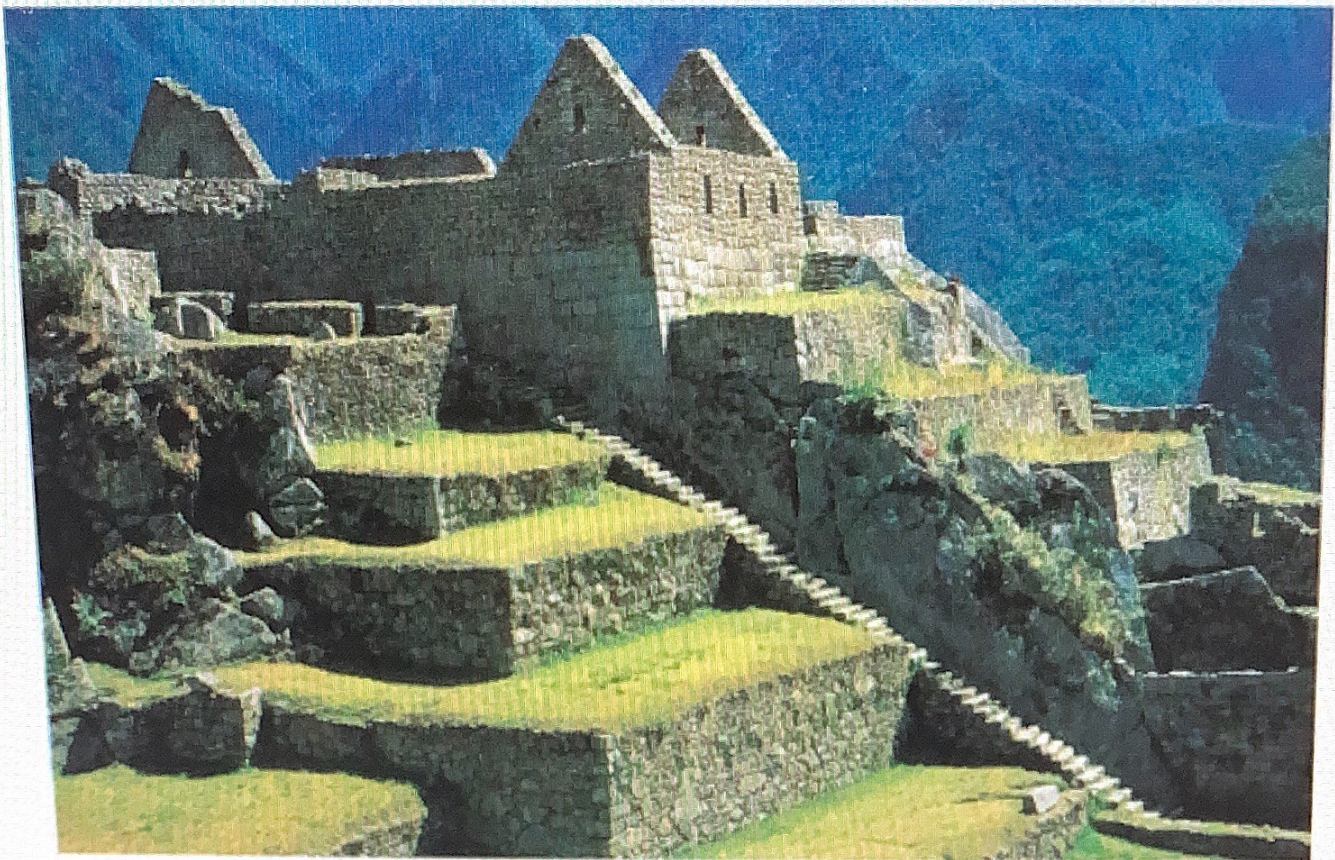
BIOGRAPHY

PACHACUTI (RULED 1438–1471)

As emperor, Pachacuti concentrated on expanding the Inca Empire. When he wanted to conquer a kingdom, he first sent messengers to tell the local rulers all the benefits of being part of the Inca Empire. Pachacuti then asked the other rulers to join his empire. If they accepted willingly, they were treated with respect and given some rights. If they refused, the Inca attacked with brutal force. *[Date of statue unknown]*

INFER Which details in the biography suggest that Pachacuti preferred to expand his empire through peaceful methods?





The ruins of Machu Picchu draw thousands of visitors. Research suggests that this monument was used as a home for the royal family and as a center for celebrations.

DETERMINING MEANING

The prefix *dis-* can mean “to do the opposite of” or “not,” as in *disapprove*, but it also can mean “away” or “apart.” Which meaning of *dis-* is used in the word **distributed**? Explain your answer.

grown in the mountains. Terrace farming uses a series of wide steps built into a mountainside. Each step creates level farmland. Inca farmers grew potatoes and quinoa, a protein-rich grain. Government officials stored food when there were good harvests and **distributed** it when harvests were poor.

HOW WAS INCA SOCIETY ORGANIZED?

The Inca believed their rulers had the protection of the sun God Inti (IHN•tee). As divine rulers, Inca emperors controlled the lives of their subjects. They owned all the land and set rules for growing crops and distributing food.

Below the emperor and his family were the head priest and the leading commander of the army. Next came regional

CITIZENSHIP

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Cultures have used conscription, which is forced or required enrollment in military service, throughout history. Just as all young Inca men were required to serve in the army, American men were required by the government to serve in the military during the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Men were required to enroll for service through a “draft.” Although the draft is not in use today, many Americans consider military service to be a civic duty.

army leaders. Below them were temple priests, local army commanders, and skilled workers. At the bottom were farmers, herders, and ordinary soldiers.

Like the Aztec Empire, the Inca Empire was built on war. All young men were required to serve in the army, which made it the largest and best-armed military force in the region.

CULTURE OF THE INCA

The Inca believed in many Gods. Unlike the Aztec, the Inca rarely sacrificed humans to honor their Gods. They did, however, build large stone structures to please these Deities. They had no system of writing, no wheels, and no iron tools. Yet they built places like Machu Picchu (mah•choo PEE•choo), a retreat for Inca emperors. Constructed of white granite and thousands of feet high, Machu Picchu was located in the Andes.

Building enormous structures like Machu Picchu required the Inca to develop a method for doing mathematics. The Inca used a **quipu** (KEE•poo), a rope with knotted cords of different lengths and colors. This was a useful tool for both mathematics and for record keeping. Like the Aztec, the Inca relied on oral tradition to pass on most of their wisdom and knowledge. The Inca calendar was closely aligned with astronomy. It was based on the sun and moon and their relationship to the stars. It included the names of 12 lunar months and their association with farming.

The Inca were also skilled engineers. Inca workers fit stones so tightly together that they needed no mortar. Because the stone blocks could slide up and down during earthquakes, many Inca structures have survived.

✓ CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. **IDENTIFYING EFFECTS** What were the advantages and disadvantages of joining the Inca Empire?
2. **EXPLAINING CAUSES** Why did the Inca build large stone structures?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

ORAL TRADITIONS

The Maya, Aztec, and Inca used storytelling, songs, and dance to pass on their knowledge and cultures. Their oral traditions often began as a way to please or worship their Gods. Some oral traditions were meant to ensure a bountiful harvest. The Aztec used songs and dances to train new priests. The Inca used songs and storytelling to communicate their history. Later, the Maya and Aztec developed writing systems. The Maya used their writing system to record oral traditions and history in the *Popul Vuh*, which means "council book."



A quipu was a system of strings that were knotted to represent numbers for record keeping. (c. 1430–1532)