

- What did the Aztecs think of the Spanish explorers? Share with the class parts of an Aztec account on the arrival of the Spanish in Tenochtitlán (see www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/aztecs1.html). Discuss the changes in the Aztec attitudes towards the Spanish and the reasons why.
- The night that Cortés and his men fled Tenochtitlán after the Aztec revolt is referred to as “La Noche Triste” — the Sad Night. Divide the students into groups to research the events leading up to and following this night. Then have the groups create Spanish and Aztec accounts of this night, perhaps in the form of a newspaper front page or a news interview (with both Cortés and an Aztec warrior) or a storytelling. Students may share their work with the class.
- Historical records of Hernán Cortés’s meetings with Moctezuma II mention “La Malinche” or Doña Marina, a native slave who served as Cortés’s interpreter. Some call her a traitor who helped the Spanish take control of Mexico, while others say she was a heroine who helped save many people’s lives by bringing down a cruel empire. Share with students a description of Doña Marina and discuss her significance.
- While the Aztecs did not have a formal written language, they did keep record of events, daily life and legends using glyphs, or a form of picture-writing. Collections of the glyphs, called *codices*, were compiled before and after the Spanish conquest. Share with students images from these codices. In groups, have students examine the pictures for details about Aztec life: How were warriors depicted? What colors were used?
- Diego Rivera was a famous Mexican muralist. He created panoramic murals about Mexico’s culture, history and daily life. Share examples of Rivera’s work and encourage the class to notice how Rivera depicted Aztec life and the Spanish encounter. Then, divide the class into groups to paint murals depicting the Aztec Empire and the defeat by the Spanish. (Excellent resources for images of Rivera’s works include ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~border/resource_pages/rivera.html and www.diegorivera.com/murals/index.html.)

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.ancientmexico.com/

This site explores the art, culture and history of Ancient Mesoamerica. Interactive features include a map of the area with major Aztec settlements, a flash presentation about the arrival of the Spanish and passages from historical documents, including letters from Cortés.

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- www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/eurvoyya/index.html
A tutorial on the European voyages of exploration, with detailed information and historical illustrations and documents regarding Spain’s explorers, including Hernán Cortés.
- www.lib.uci.edu/libraries/exhibits/meso/sacred.html
An online exhibit featuring “Early Written Records of Mesoamerica.” The *Aztec Codices* and *Colonial Codices* feature scenes from daily Aztec life, traditions and the Spanish encounter.
- www.lib.utah.edu/digital/aztec/
An online digital collection of Mesoamerican Manuscript Facsimiles, including the *Codex Laud*, from the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the *Codex Magliabecchi*, both excellent sources of Aztec picture-writing.

Suggested Print Resources

- Flowers, Charles. *Cortés and the Conquest of the Aztec Empire in World History*. Enslow Publishers, Inc., Berkeley Heights, NJ; 2001.
- Mathews, Sally Schofer. *The Sad Night: The Story of an Aztec Victory and a Spanish Loss*. Houghton Mifflin, New York, NY; 2001.
- Smalley, Roger. *The Aztecs: Rise and Fall of a Great Empire*. Red Brick Learning, Mankato, MN; 2003.
- Tanaka, Shelley. *The Lost Temple of the Aztecs: What It Was Like When the Spaniards Invaded Mexico*. Hyperion, New York, NY; 2000.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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ANCIENT AZTEC: THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE

Grades 3–7

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting this program. The guide provides you with a summary of the program, pre-viewing and follow-up questions, activities, vocabulary and print and Internet resources.

Before Viewing: Give students an overview of the program. Use the program summary to help provide this introduction. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary and discuss what students learned. Use followup questions and activities, and encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Historical Overview

Over 550 years ago, the Aztecs controlled a strong and wealthy empire across the region of present-day Mexico. The capital city, Tenochtitlán, was the focal point of an expansive trading network and government as well as the religious and spiritual center of the empire. All this changed, however, with the arrival of Spanish *conquistadors*, led by Hernán Cortés, in 1519. Seeking to acquire wealth and land for Spain and to convert native peoples to Christianity, Cortés formed alliances with the Tlaxcalans, enemies of the Aztecs, and fought for control of Tenochtitlán, then ruled by Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II. In 1520, the Spanish temporarily retreated after an Aztec revolt, but within a year they laid siege to Tenochtitlán. In 1521, the Aztec Empire fell. Cortés claimed the region in the name of Spain, and the Spanish destroyed Aztec buildings and converted the Aztecs to Christianity. Spanish priests worked to translate Aztec *codices*, or collections of picture writing. Today in Mexico, the Aztecs live on through archaeological artifacts, art, music, dance, crafts, food and the Nahuatl-speaking descendants.

Vocabulary

Aztecs — An indigenous Central American people who established an advanced civilization and powerful empire in the area of present-day Mexico that existed for approximately two centuries before the Spanish arrival in 1519.

Lake Texcoco — A lake in central Mexico with small islands, one of which became the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. Today, Mexico City covers Lake Texcoco.

Tenochtitlán — The island-city capital of the Aztec Empire.

Moctezuma II — Ruler of the great Aztec Empire and city of Tenochtitlán until Spanish *conquistadors*, led by Hernán Cortés, imprisoned him in 1520.

Quetzalcóatl — The Aztec god of wind, morning and life.

Hernán Cortés — (1485–1547) *Conquistador*, or Spanish explorer, best known for conquering the Aztec Empire and claiming its lands and wealth for Spain.

Tlaxcalans — A Native American people who allied with the Spanish against the Aztecs.

causeway — A raised roadway across a body of water.

siege — A blockade of a city or a fortified building that compels the inhabitants to surrender.

New Spain — Lands claimed by Spain during the European settlement of the New World, encompassing Mexico, parts of the U.S., and parts of South America.

convert — To change someone's beliefs (often religious beliefs).

monastery — A place where communities of monks vow to live and practice their religion.

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codices — The collective term given to the painted manuscripts depicting Aztec culture and history, produced before and after the Spanish conquest.

Diego Rivera — (1886–1957) A famous Mexican artist who created panoramic murals of Mexican culture, history and daily life.

Time Line

1492	Christopher Columbus lands in the West Indies
1519	Hernán Cortés arrives in Mexico, allies with the Tlaxcalans and meets Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II
1520	Cortés takes Moctezuma II prisoner; Aztecs revolt against the Spanish, who flee Tenochtitlán; Moctezuma II is killed
May 1521	Cortés and his allies lay siege to Tenochtitlán
August 1521	The Spanish defeat the Aztecs, leading to the fall of the Aztec Empire

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Locate Mexico and Spain on a world map. Inform students that the video will convey information about the Aztec people and their encounter with Spanish *conquistadors*, or explorers. Encourage students to share what they know about the Spanish arrival and exploration of the Americas. From the map, have students trace possible routes of the explorers. What landforms would they need to travel over to reach Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City)?
- For the Aztecs, the goal of battles was often not to destroy the enemy but instead to integrate their community into Aztec society and thus expand the empire. Warriors from defeated tribes were often sacrificed in religious ceremonies. As a class, discuss how other tribes may have felt about the Aztecs. Share ideas about the pros and cons of belonging to the Aztec Empire.
- Ask students to imagine what it would have been like to be an explorer in the 16th century. What challenges did the explorers face? What thoughts may have gone through their heads? What could they hope to gain as a result of their journeys? Did the rewards balance the hardships?

Focus Questions

1. Why did the Aztecs, including Moctezuma II, believe that their god Quetzalcóatl would return?
2. What were the objectives or goals of Hernán Cortés and his men?
3. What did the Tlaxcalans offer the Spanish?
4. Why was Tenochtitlán difficult to attack?
5. How did Moctezuma II greet Hernán Cortés? Why?
6. How did the Spanish soldiers react to life in Tenochtitlán?

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7. How did Moctezuma II die?

8. Why did Cortés and his men leave Tenochtitlán in July 1520?

9. What is a siege? How long did the siege of Tenochtitlán last?

10. What happened to the Aztec people after the fall of the empire?

11. Why did monks and priests come to New Spain?

12. What were the Aztec codices?

Follow-up Discussion

- Review the interactions between the Aztecs and the Spanish. Why did Cortés come to Mexico? How did the Aztecs react to the Spanish? How did Cortés feel about the Aztecs? Discuss the challenges the *conquistadors* faced and the actions they took. Were they reasonable or unfair?
- Discuss why the Tlaxcalans agreed to ally with the Spanish. Ask students whether they believe the alliance was in the Tlaxcalans' best interest. Invite students to share what they think would have happened if the Spanish had lost to the Tlaxcalans.
- Discuss Moctezuma II's position and actions regarding Cortés and the Spanish soldiers. Was he right to invite the Spanish into the city? Have students discuss how the Aztec people may have felt about the emperor after the Spanish arrived.
- Discuss the legacy and accomplishments of the Aztecs. Had the empire not fallen to the Spanish, what do students think would have happened to the Aztec civilization?

Follow-up Activities

- Encourage students to research the myths and legends around the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl. Students can retell the stories aloud or create graphic versions of the legends. Invite students to research and review Aztec depictions of Quetzalcóatl from the codices.
- Cortés and his men landed on the coast of Mexico and had to travel inland to reach Tenochtitlán. Have students research the geography, climate, and plant and animal life of the region. Through what kind of terrain did the Spanish travel? Ask students to write a journal entry as soldiers traveling over this great distance on foot or horseback. Encourage them to describe what the journey was like, what the soldiers saw and how they felt.
- What was life like at Moctezuma's palace? Share with students an excerpt from Bernal Diaz's eyewitness account *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* (1560) describing an imperial feast at Moctezuma's court (See www.ancientmexico.com/content/documents/aztec_imperial_life.htm). What kinds of special treatment did Moctezuma receive from his people? Have students create pictures or paintings to depict the scene.

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