

The Aztecs lived in Central Mexico. They migrated into the Valley of Mexico as early as the 1100s. Learning to grow corn and acquiring other skills from their neighbors, the Aztecs developed a powerful civilization. They developed a calendar and constructed pyramids. They also built a new capital called Tenochtitlan on an island in Lake Texcoco. The Aztecs built their island capital of Tenochtitlan in 1325. As many as 300,000 Aztecs lived in the capital. Causeways, or paved roads over water, connected the island capital to the mainland. The Aztec capital had temples, pyramids, palaces, gardens, and markets. The king, his family, and thousands of servants and officials lived in an enormous palace in the capital. The capital also had a library and a zoo.

Religiously, the Aztecs worshipped many gods. Aztec priests believed that the sun god – who was also the god of war – needed human sacrifice. They believed that the sun would not rise if Aztec priests did not sacrifice humans to the sun god. For this reason, the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice on a massive scale. Captured warriors from other tribes were sacrificed, as well as Aztecs who volunteered for this honor, believing their sacrifice was necessary to keep the universe in motion. For nearly 200 years from the 1300s to the early 1500s, the Aztecs made war with neighboring tribes. Sometimes the Aztecs engaged in war just to capture people to sacrifice.

In 1519, Hernan Cortes, a conquistador from Spain, sailed to Mexico with a force of soldiers in search of gold and silver. Cortes met the Aztec Emperor Montezuma. At first, the Aztecs believed the Spaniards were gods and showered them with gifts. Later, Cortes allied with the enemies of the Aztecs. With a few hundred Spaniards and several thousand native allies, Cortes defeated the Aztecs in 1521.

Questions:

1: Discuss the accomplishments of the Aztecs.

2: Where and when did the Aztecs live and what was significant about their capital?

3: Why did the Aztecs engage in human sacrifice?

4: Who was Cortes and why was he able to defeat the Aztecs?

The ancient Aztecs believed in many gods. However, the sun god was most important. The Aztecs believed that the sun god needed human blood and hearts in order to make its journey across the sky each day. As farmers, the sun's journey meant the difference between life and death. The sun had to rise every day. Therefore, the Aztecs supplied their god with the blood it needed to rise by sacrificing some people from their own tribe but mostly capturing victims from neighboring tribes. Of course, neighboring tribes hated them.

In the past, it was said that each time the Aztecs tried to settle down and build a city of their own, other tribes in the area would band together to chase them away. No one wanted the Aztecs for a neighbor. The Aztecs were very sad about this. They desperately wanted a city of their own.

One day, the Aztecs believed that they were visited by one of their gods. The god promised the Aztecs that they would have a city of their own. To find it, the Aztecs were to look for an eagle, perched on a cactus, holding a snake. When the Aztecs found the magical place of the eagle, snake, and cactus, they were not to make war with their neighbors. Instead, they were to settle down peacefully until they had gained strength. They were to use that time to build a glorious Aztec city, a city of their own.

For the next 200 years, the Aztecs wandered in the Valley of Mexico. They never doubted their god. They never gave up. They were always on the lookout for an eagle, perched on a cactus, holding a snake in his mouth. One morning, an Aztec priest was standing on the swampy shore of Lake Texcoco. He yawned and looked out across the lake. He could not believe his eyes. On one of the many small islands that dotted the lake, he saw an eagle, perched on a cactus, with a snake wiggling in its mouth.

The Aztecs had found their home at last. Aztec legend says the cactus grew immediately into an island. It was on that island that the Aztecs founded their civilization. They named the island Tenochtitlan, "the Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus." The Aztec capital had been found.

Questions:

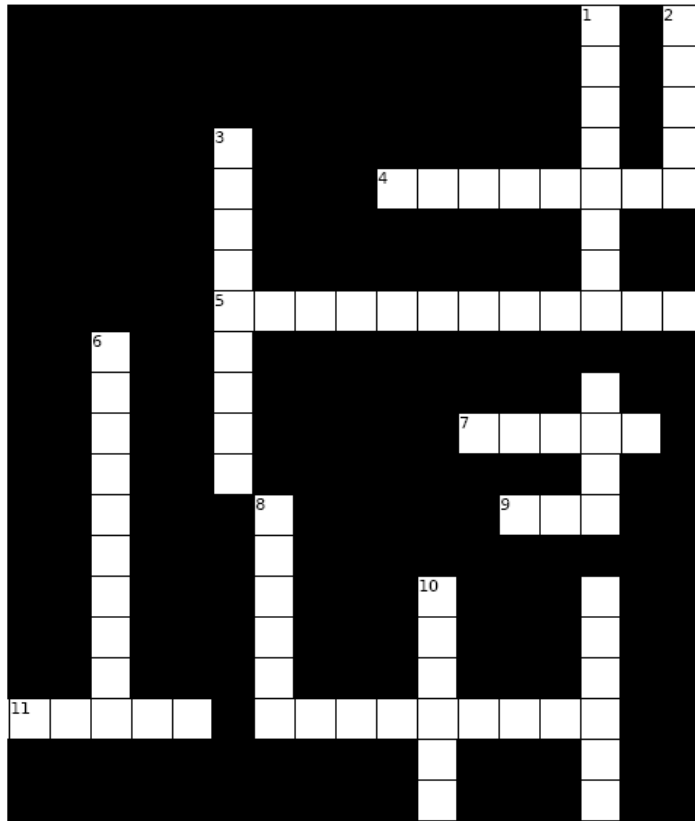
1: According to the legend, why were the Aztecs unable to find a capital city?

2: What did the visiting god tell the Aztecs to look for? Why?

3: Why did the Aztecs name their island capital Tenochtitlan?

The Aztecs worshipped a war god called Huitzilopochtli, who took on the likeness of the sun over time. It was thought that in order to ensure the sun's arrival each day, a steady supply of human hearts had to be offered in holy sacrifice. The Aztecs believed that the sun and earth had already been destroyed four times, and in their time of the 5th sun, final destruction would soon be upon them. In order to delay this dreadful fate, the practice of human sacrifice became a major element in Aztec society and livelihood.

The most common form of sacrifice was performed outside, on the top of a great pyramid. The victim was spread-eagled on a round stone, with his back arched. His limbs were held, while a priest used an obsidian knife to cut under the rib cage and remove his heart. This method was used when honoring the sun god, Huitzilopochtli. Each god apparently preferred a different form of sacrifice. For the fertility god, the person was tied to a post and shot full of arrows. His blood flowing out represented the cool spring rains. The fire god required a newly wed couple. They were thrown into the god's altars and allowed to burn and at the last minute they were taken out and had their hearts removed as a second offering. The earth mother goddess was extremely important. At harvest time, a female victim was flayed and her skin was carried ceremoniously to one of the temples. Her skin was worn by an officiating priest who then symbolized the goddess herself.



- Across
- 4 Like the Mayas, the Aztecs built these architectural structures.
- 5 It was the Aztec island capital.
- 7 This Native American group had a writing system and the concept of zero.
- 9 This god required human blood and hearts to make its journey across the sky.
- 11 The Aztecs engaged in this regularly to ensure that their world would not be destroyed.

- Down
- 1 This geographic feature made farming difficult in South America.
- 2 This Native American civilization lived in the Andes mountains.
- 3 This geographic feature isolated people in South America.
- 6 It is the belief in many gods.
- 8 This Spaniard conquered the Aztecs.
- 10 The Aztecs lived in this modern-day nation.

Word Bank:

Polytheism, Sun, Mayas, Cortes, Mexico, Pyramids, Mountains, Tropical Rain Forest, Tenochtitlan, Human Sacrifice, Incas

In Latin America, the Maya and the Aztec civilizations were similar in that they

- 1. showed little evidence of urbanization**
- 2. lacked a strong central government**
- 3. developed complex mathematical and calendar systems**
- 4. used military weapons superior to those of Europeans**

The Incas

The Inca Empire developed in the Andes Mountains of South America. The Incas had originally settled in a valley of the Andes Mountains around 1100. By 1400, the Inca began extending their rule across the Andes. Eventually, the Incas ruled an empire covering much of present-day Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile. The Incas built roads stretching over ten thousand miles to unite their vast empire. One Incan road was 2,500 miles long! In addition, the Incas built their capital – Cuzco – high in the mountains in present-day Peru. Unlike the Maya, the Inca never developed a form of writing. Instead, they used quipu – knotted and colored ropes to count, keep records, track crops, and send messages. The Incas also invented the crowbar, which is an iron bar that a person uses as a lever. Incan doctors set broken bones and even knew how to perform brain surgery! They also developed medicines from plants. Their artisans wove beautiful cloth and made fine pottery. Incan artisans also made beautiful gold and silver jewelry for Incan priests and nobles.

Because the Incas lived in the mountains, they had no flat land for farming. They had to build wide step-like areas called terraces for farming. Through terrace farming, the Incas were able to provide for all people in the empire. Technically, all land belonged to the Incan emperor. But he let other people farm it and pay him taxes. Incan men had to serve some time in the army and on government projects like constructing roads. In addition, all young men had to marry. If a young man did not choose a wife, the government chose one for him. The government also took care of sick, poor, and old people. The government of the Incas was the first government to provide so thoroughly for the disadvantaged.

The Incas grew potatoes and other crops that could resist cold nights. They kept llamas and alpacas for their meat and wool, and to carry goods. Superb engineering skills allowed the Inca to construct vast stone buildings high in the Andes. The ruins of Machu Picchu, an ancient fortress city high in the Andes Mountains, provide the best surviving example of Inca building skills. Its walls were made of blocks expertly cut and fitted together without the use of mortar. The Incas cut stone blocks together so perfectly that they did not need mortar.

Although the Inca Empire was powerful, it had no horses or guns. In 1533, a small group of Spaniards led by Francisco Pizarro conquered the Incas with their guns and horses. The mighty Incan Empire had fallen.

Questions:

1: Who were the Incas and where and when did they build an empire?

2: Discuss the accomplishments of the Incas.

3: What was the Incan emperor's relationship to the land and how did he use the land?

4: Why did the Incas engage in terrace farming?

5: What responsibilities did Incan men have?

6: What was Machu Picchu and why is it so spectacular?

7: What was the quipu and how was it used?

8: What happened to the sick, the elderly, and the orphaned in the Incan Empire?

8: Who was Francisco Pizarro and what did he do?

Machu Picchu is a city located high in the [Andes](#) Mountains in modern-day Peru. Its name means “Old Peak” and it was most likely a royal estate and religious retreat. It was built between 1460 and 1470 AD by an Incan ruler. The city has an altitude of 8,000 feet, and is high above the Urubamba River canyon cloud forest, so it likely did not have any administrative, military or commercial use. Machu Picchu is comprised of approximately 200 buildings, most being residences, although there are temples, storage structures and other public buildings. About 1,200 people lived in and around Machu Picchu, most of them women, children, and priests. The buildings are thought to have been planned and built under the supervision of professional Inca architects. Most of the structures are built of granite blocks cut with bronze or stone tools, and smoothed with sand. The blocks fit together perfectly without mortar, although none of the blocks are the same size and have many faces; some have as many as 30 corners. The joints are so tight that even the thinnest of knife blades can't be forced between the stones. Another unique thing about Machu Picchu is the integration of the architecture into the landscape. Existing stone formations were used in the construction of structures, sculptures are carved into the rock, water flows through cisterns and stone channels, and temples hang on steep precipices.

Conclusions:
