

Aztecs, Incas, and Mayans

The Aztec Empire

Mexico City, the capital city of Mexico, has a rich history. Before the President's Palace was built, there was the Palace of Montezuma. Montezuma was a great **emperor**¹ of warrior Indians called the Aztecs. Before a Catholic cathedral was built for Spaniards to use for worship, a huge Aztec temple stood in its place. Before it was the capital of Mexico, Mexico City was Tenochtitlan, the center of the Aztec Empire.

To picture Tenochtitlan at its greatest, imagine an **intricate**² system of canals that served as roads for boats. The Aztecs' land was partly underwater, so the people built little islands. They could channel water in between these islands. These channels of water, or canals, made the land dry enough to be the foundation of the city. Sidewalks made of stone lined the canals to give pedestrians a way to travel. There were neighborhoods throughout the city. Each had its own temple, school, land, and council for government.

More than 200,000 people walked about Tenochtitlan every day. Some lived in the city's neighborhoods. Others came from the countryside to the **bustling**³ marketplace to trade their goods. When the Spanish first saw Tenochtitlan in 1519, it may have been one of the biggest cities in the world. Though most Mexicans speak Spanish today, more than one million still speak the native Aztec language, Nahuatl, as their **primary**⁴ language. In fact, even the word "Mexico" comes from the Aztec word "Mexica." The Aztecs called themselves "Mexica" people.

At the heart of the Aztec civilization were nature and natural forces. This was the Aztecs' religion. Gods were very important to the Aztecs because they represented things like the sun and rain, which is what made the crops grow. As part of their religion, Aztecs were fierce warriors. During battle they would

¹ **emperor** – a king or ruler

² **intricate** – having many parts, complicated

³ **bustling** – busy

⁴ **primary** – main or first

capture natives from other tribes. Often, these captives would be **sacrificed**⁵ at temples. The Aztecs thought that the gods needed human sacrifices to remain happy.

⁵ **sacrificed** – killed as part of a religious ceremony

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which was built first: the Palace of Montezuma or the President's Palace?

- a. the Palace of Montezuma
- b. the President's Palace
- c. They were both built at the same time.
- d. There was no Palace of Montezuma.

2. According to the passage, how was transportation made possible in Tenochtitlan?

- a. Most of the Aztecs traveled on horseback.
- b. Sidewalks were built, and boats passed through the canals.
- c. An intricate road system was created along the canals.
- d. People swam between the little islands that were built.

3. Which conclusion is correct based on the information in the passage?

- a. The city now known as Mexico City has changed over time.
- b. Tenochtitlan has endured intact over hundreds of years.
- c. Nahuatl is a language spoken throughout the world.
- d. The Spanish came to Tenochtitlan to help the Aztecs.

4. What was important to the Aztec civilization?

- a. the President's Palace
- b. Spain
- c. a Catholic cathedral
- d. nature and natural forces

5. What is the purpose of this passage?

- a. to explain how the Spanish invaded the Aztec Empire
- b. to describe the religious practices of the Aztecs
- c. to provide a glimpse into the Aztec Empire
- d. to show the historical transformation of Tenochtitlan

6. Describe the religious practices of the Aztecs.

7. Reread the first paragraph and explain what may have been the author's purpose in writing that paragraph.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ of the canal construction, the land was dry enough to create sidewalks of stone so that pedestrians could travel.

- a. Unlike
- b. Likewise
- c. As a result
- d. Therefore

9. Answer the following question based on the sentence below.

Tenochtitlan may have been the biggest city in the world when the Spanish first visited it in 1519.

What? Tenochtitlan

(may have been) What? _____

When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** intricate: having many parts; complicated.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: Mexico City, the capital city of Mexico, has a rich history as the birthplace of the Aztec Empire.

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6. Describe the religious practices of the Aztecs.

Suggested answer: The religion of the Aztecs revolved around nature and natural forces. They worshipped gods that represented things like the sun and rain. In order to keep the gods happy, the Aztecs, who were fierce warriors, would sacrifice natives they had captured from other tribes at temples to the gods.

7. Reread the first paragraph and explain what may have been the author's purpose in writing that paragraph.

Suggested answer: The author wrote that paragraph as an introductory paragraph to briefly illustrate the evolution from Tenochtitlan to Mexico City as a way of providing historical context for the city to be discussed throughout the passage. It informs the reader that before Mexico City, the President's Palace, and a Catholic cathedral, Aztec counterparts once existed – Tenochtitlan, the Palace of Montezuma, and a huge Aztec temple.

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What? Tenochtitlan

(may have been) What? **the biggest city in the world**

When? **when the Spanish first visited it in 1519**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** intricate: having many parts; complicated.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.