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the idea book
for educators

HistoryInternational.com/classroom

Mexico: A Story of Courage and Conquest

classroom: Parts I-IV
October 4th-7th



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Its history is written in the blood of conquest. Forged in the conflict between the Old and New Worlds, it is Mexico. From the glory of Incan and Mayan cultures to the chaotic heart of the modern capital, from Cortés' arrival to Pancho Villa's famous raid, *Mexico: A Story of Courage and Conquest* travels across the country and through its past. It is a compelling chronicle of a land shaped by the rise and fall of empires, the exploits of men like Montezuma and Maximilian, and the near-constant battles for freedom, sovereignty, and independence. Before Cortés arrived in 1519, the land that would become Mexico had already seen some of

the greatest leaders and warriors in human history. But in the collision between the Old and New Worlds, its future was forged. *Mexico: A Story of Courage and Conquest* presents the early history of Mexico up to the conquest by Cortés and Spain. It provides an excellent opportunity for students to compare this ancient civilization with those of Greece and Rome, and to consider the ways exploration and conquest transformed the North American continent.



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objectives

Students will observe the events that changed the land of Mexico from a glorious empire to a colonized society, and finally to an independent nation. They will analyze the differences between a society ruled by indigenous peoples and one ruled by foreign invaders, and how these societies combined to form a new and unique society that eventually became modern day Mexico. They will also learn how world events transform societies and influence their histories, and how global events shaped Mexico.

vocabulary

Students should identify the following terms. Visit www.merriam-webster.com for definitions.

antiquity
chaos
coffers
deities
devastation
emissaries

guile
ingenious
logistics
mercenary
nomadic
obsidian

placated
propitiate
protégé
quintessential
ritualistic
sage

supplanted
temperate
trepidation
tribute
undaunted
volatile

curriculum links

Mexico: A Story of Courage and Conquest would be useful for History and Social Studies courses, and for lesson plans connected with Hispanic Heritage Month. It is appropriate for middle school and high school students. It fulfills the following standards outlined by the National Council for History Education: Civilization, Cultural Diffusion, and Innovation and Patterns of Social and Political Interaction.

discussion questions

- It is believed that Native Americans came from Siberia. How did Ice Age hunters get from Siberia to Alaska, and then to the Americas?
- Many factors influence a society's culture. What is the role of climate in determining culture?
- Why is the valley of Mexico called the "cradle of Mexican civilization"?
- Were you surprised to find that both Aztecs and Mayans practiced human sacrifice? What role did this ritual play in these cultures?

discussion questions (con't)

5. What were some of the major innovations of the Mayan civilization? What were some of their major technological advancements?
6. Why did the Aztecs go to central Mexico? What did they encounter once they got there?
7. When Hernán Cortés and his men arrived in Mexico, Montezuma and the Aztecs believed they were gods. Why? How did the Spaniards use this to their advantage?
8. What is a conquistador? What was their role in Mexican history?
9. Why did the Spaniards come to the New World? What did they hope to achieve?
10. What kinds of sources have historians used in determining the history of the Aztecs and Mayans? What are some of the limitations of these sources?
11. What are some of the reasons historians give for the decline of Mayan civilization?

activities

extended activities

1. Although we traditionally associate pyramids with Egypt, they were also constructed by the Mayans. Break up into groups of four or five. At the library or using the Internet, research the Mayan pyramids. Determine how these pyramids were shaped, who built them, and how they differed from Egyptian pyramids. Then, in your groups, construct a Mayan pyramid. You can use clay or other materials to build your pyramid, or if these materials are unavailable, create a drawing of a Mayan pyramid on posterboard or a piece of construction paper. Assign a topic for each member of your group to report to your larger class and, as a group, give a brief presentation on your discoveries.
2. Historians have faced serious challenges in unearthing the history of ancient Mexican civilizations. These civilizations left behind few records, leaving historians with the puzzling task of determining what the civilizations looked like and how they developed. With this program as a guide, do your own research into the methods historians have used in order to write the history of these ancient cultures. Choose one of these methods and write a short essay, pretending you

are a historian conducting research on the Mayans or Aztecs. You can include your own process of determining the facts, as well as your own speculation about aspects of these histories which may not be easily verified but about which we can hypothesize.

3. Imagine that you are either one of Cortés' men or an Aztec warrior. Write a journal entry about your encounter with the other culture. Using the background provided by this documentary, include details about how a conquistador or an Aztec warrior would have interpreted the other cultures they came in contact with and how they would perceive the actions of the other. Be sure to include specific examples of cultural differences of interpretation and meaning, if possible.



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websites

An informative site on Mayan civilization:
<http://www.kidskonnect.com/AncientMayan/AncientMayanHome.html>

Fun activities and information on the Mayans:
<http://www.mayankids.com/mkintro.htm>

Helpful background information and links on the Aztecs:
<http://montezumas.com.au/aztec.htm>

books

Clendinnen, Inga. *Aztecs: An Interpretation*. (Cambridge), 1995.

Coe, Michael D. *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*. (Thames & Hudson), 2002.

Herr, Myra, and Christine Ronan. *Ancient Mexico*. (GoodYear), 1992.

Leon-Portilla, Miguel. *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*. (Beacon), 1992.

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