



# MEXICO

## A STORY OF COURAGE AND CONQUEST

### CLASSROOM GUIDE

#### Identification Terms

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Using the dictionary at [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com), an Internet resource such as [History.com](http://History.com) or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

Conquistadors

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Deities

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Guile

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Ingenious

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Manifest Destiny

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Nationalization

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Obsidian

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Protégé

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Ritualistic

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Temperate

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Undaunted

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Volatile

#### Introduction

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A nation forged in the conflict between the Old and New Worlds, this program tells the story of Mexico. From the glory of Aztec and Mayan cultures to the chaotic heart of the modern capital, from the arrival of Cortes to Pancho Villa's famous raid, *Mexico: A Story of Courage and Conquest* travels across Mexico and through its past.

This program tells stories 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 transformed.

*Mexico: A Story of Courage and Conquest* presents the early history of Mexico up through the 20th century. 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 shaped the North American continent.

#### Curriculum Links

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*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.





## Discussion Questions

1. What sources do historians use to learn about ancient Mexican cultures? What are the limitations of these sources?
2. The ancient city of Teotihuacan was considered the largest city in the world during its time. What factors allowed this city to flourish?
3. Why do you think the Aztecs chose to build their capital city on an island in a lake? What were the advantages and disadvantages of this location?
4. Who was Moctezuma? How did his belief in the legend of Quetzalcoatl influence his decisions regarding the Spanish conquistadors?
5. What were the first interactions between the Aztecs and the Spanish like? What were the aims of the conquistadors? What advantages did they have over the Aztecs? What challenges did both groups face?
6. How did the Catholic Church gain power in Mexico? What were some of the ways native inhabitants of Mexico adapted their traditional belief systems to the religion of Catholicism?
7. Miguel Hidalgo is often called the “Father of Mexican Independence.” Why? What role did he play in Mexican history?
8. Why did Anglo-Americans start settling in Mexico in the early 19th century?
9. Who was Porfirio Díaz? What policies did he advocate?
10. How did Francisco Madero manage to wrest power from Díaz? How would you compare these two leaders?
11. What role did the U.S. play in Mexico in the 19th and 20th centuries? What are relations between the two countries like today?
12. If you could go back in time, which period of Mexican history would you like to live in, and why?





## Activities

- 1. New Encounters.** 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 culture 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.
- 2. Living in a Material World.** Historians and archaeologists examine artifacts from ancient civilizations in order to better understand these cultures of long ago. Working in small groups, create a list of artifacts or objects that could help you understand the Toltecs, Aztecs, Mayans or another group explored in this documentary. Then, create a virtual exhibit or presentation about these items and objects in PowerPoint or another format.
- 3. Cry of Dolores.** In September 1810, Father Miguel Hidalgo issued his infamous "Cry of Dolores." What was the main message of his speech? Research Hidalgo's statement and write a newspaper or short article about his role in the Mexican struggle for independence.
- 4. One Hundred Years of Change.** Between 1810 and 1910, Mexico went through enormous transformations. Create an illustrated timeline of this period, marking the major events that took place in this time frame. You can also include other world events on the timeline to help put Mexican history into context.
- 5. Ley Lerdo.** Reform movements throughout Mexico's history have attempted to address issues of inequality and injustice. First, define the term "reform." Then, research the Mexican law known as "Ley Lerdo" enacted in the mid-19th century. Write a short newspaper article or letter to the editor about this law and its influence on Mexican society.

- 6. Comparing Constitutions.** After achieving independence from Spain, Mexican leaders looked to many models in constructing a constitution. It wasn't until 1917 that the government adopted a constitution with staying power. Research this constitution and compare/contrast it with the U.S. Constitution. What is unique about both documents? What do they have in common?

## Books

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

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

Herr, Myra, and Christine Ronan. *Ancient Mexico*. (Good Year Books, 1992).

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

## Additional Websites

Articles and videos about Mexico on **History.com**:  
[www.History.com/topics/mexico](http://www.History.com/topics/mexico)

Additional background about Mayan history and culture:  
[www.History.com/topics/maya](http://www.History.com/topics/maya)

Additional information about ancient Mexico:  
<http://ancientweb.org/explore/country/Mexico>

