Mesoamerican and Andean Civilizations
Aztecs, Maya, and Inca

Guiding Questions

1. How did prior civilizations influence the Aztecs, Maya, and Incas?

2. How were the major political, economic, social, and cultural developments of the Aztecs, Maya, and Inca similar and different?

Mesoamerican Civilization Origins
Olmec
1500 BCE – 200 CE

- Called “Cult of the Jaguar”
- City state government that united for religious celebrations under the authority of a Priest/shaman
- Dirt and clay pyramids used for political power and religious ceremonies

Colossal Heads

- More than a dozen found
- Largest stands 11 feet tall
- Experts think they depict individual rulers

Possible Migrations of the First Americans
Olmec Religion: Polytheist nature worship

- shaman ruled, claimed to shape-change, control nature (rain, sun, crops), fly, killing enemies from a distance, and bear off-spring even though they are men.
- Jaguars seen as magical animals and shamen claimed to shape shift into them
- foundation of later Maya civilization.

Olmec Influence on the Mayans

- Maize
- Ceremonial centers with temple pyramids
- Calendar based on the Olmec one
- Ball games
- Rituals involving human sacrifice

Agriculture

- Maize Domesticated 3000BCE
- Major staplecrop in Mesoamerica
- Also domesticated cotton, cacao, feathers, pelts, woods, rubber

Olmec Art: Jade Sculpture

Some say this represents dynasty – the child is emerging and representing the heir to the throne

Olmec La Venta Pyramid

Most of what is left of ancient Mesoamerican civilization has been swallowed by the landscape.
Pre-Columbian Civilizations

The Maya

- Mayan civilization stretched from what is now southern Mexico to El Salvador
- Cities are supported by trade and agriculture
- Nobles rank highest, followed by merchants, artisans, and peasants

Chichen-Itza - Pyramid

How did the construction of these huge buildings reflect the Mayan feelings toward their gods?

If someone finds Mount Rushmore many years after the decline of the United States, what will they think about us?

Chichen-Itza - Ball Court

Mayan Glyphs

Mayan Mathematics
Mayan Religion

- Mayans worship many gods and create elaborate rituals
- Mayan calendars, math, and astronomy support their religious practices
- Their written language is preserved in stone carvings and a few remaining books
  - Glyphs

Aztecs

- The valley of Mexico provides a fertile home for several powerful cultures
- Teotihuacan becomes a major city-state and trade center
- The Toltecs rise to power
- Aztecs settle in the valley of Mexico and found the city of Tenochtitlan
- The Triple Alliance takes over Mexico

Lands of the Aztecs

[Image of a map showing the lands of the Aztecs]

Quetzalcoatl

The God of Wisdom & Learning

Tenochtitlan

The “Venice” of the Americas
The Codex Mendoza

- History of the Aztec rulers and their conquests
- List of the tribute paid by the conquered,
- Description of daily Aztec life
- In traditional Aztec pictograms with Spanish explanations and commentary

Chinampa

Origins in the Toltec language family still spoken by a half million people today

“floating gardens”
- chinampas were artificial islands

Math and Astronomy: Measuring Time

- The way in which a culture measures time reflects the needs of that society
- A reliable method of keeping time is needed to predict natural phenomena, synchronize activities, or hold rituals on specific dates
- Cultures use a variety of ways to measure time, including calendars, sundials, clocks, and watches
Religion

- Polytheistic
- Many Temples based on astronomy for worship, agricultural planning and sacrifice
- Each holiday included ceremonies involving human sacrifice/cannibalism
- Fatalistic and cyclical view of the world

Aztec Decline

- During the time of Montezuma, the empire begins to weaken
  - The growth of the empire required more sacrifices and tribute \( \rightarrow \) the demand for more made people mad and led to unrest and rebellion
  - 1520-1521 Smallpox kills about half of the remaining population

Heart Sacrifice on an Aztec Temple Pyramid

Social

- Large gap between upper/lower classes
- Role of Women – decide fate of prisoners, domestic chores (grinding maize), can inherit land
- Common people in constant fear of war/sacrifice/slavery

The Inca settled in the valley of Cuzco, establishing an 11-family royal lineage

Machu Picchu
Economy

• Agriculturally based
  – terrace farming
  – different crops based on location and altitude
• Lots of labor/workers necessary for transport of goods
• Excellent Roads/infrastructure for transfer of goods from coastal desert to jungle to mountain villages
• Trade from different regions provided lots of different food to eat
• Domesticated and bred hundreds of varieties of potatoes, tomatoes, peppers

Incan Rulers

• They believe the Incan ruler is descended from the sun god
• The Inca conquer a vast territory, using military power and wise diplomacy

Incan Terrace Farming

The Quipu – An Incan Database

No written language

Government

• The Inca create a central bureaucracy to rule their empire
• They build cities and roads to unify the empire and create a state-run economy
  – 14,000 miles of roads and bridges
  – Chasquis traveled the roads as mail carriers
• The Inca develop calendars and accounting methods but not a written language

Religion

• Religious tolerance but must worship Incan gods
• Polytheistic, sun god is most important
• Human sacrifice rare
• Great Inca – emperor, descendant of the sun god
Discord in the Empire

• The Incan ruler dies and his sons launch a civil war to determine who will rule
• When the Spanish arrive, they are able to divide and conquer the Inca Empire
  – Where have we seen this before?
  – What does divide and conquer actually mean?
  – Remember what the Belgians did to the Hutu and the Tutsi?

What do we know?

*Compare the Mayan, Aztec, and Incan religion, government, and culture to determine the similarities and differences.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievements</th>
<th>Olmec (until 1200 BC)</th>
<th>Maya (250 AD to 900)</th>
<th>Inca (1200 AD to 1572)</th>
<th>Aztec (1400 AD to 1521)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stone temples</td>
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<td>Carved statues</td>
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<td>Number system</td>
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<td>Calendar system</td>
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<td>Writing system</td>
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<td>Corn, tomatoes, squash, cocoa, cotton</td>
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<td>Terrace farming</td>
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<td>Formed cities, traded goods</td>
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<td>Temples and courtyards</td>
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<td>Palaces with gardens and running water</td>
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<td>Writing language</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>Tenochtitlan</td>
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<td>Written language</td>
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<td>Knew mathematics</td>
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