

The Aztecs

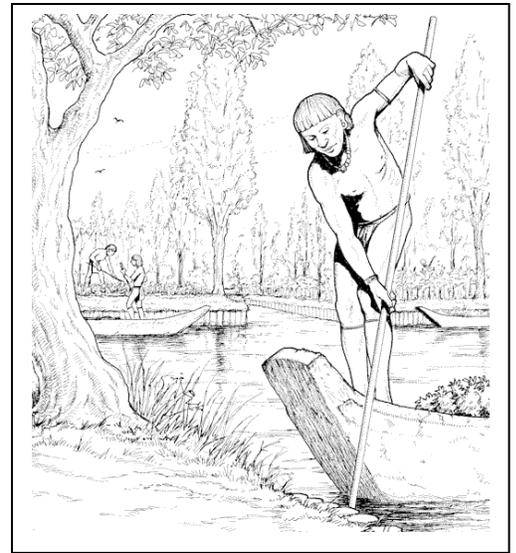
Around 700 years ago a group of wandering people called the Aztecs settled in the Valley of Mexico. They were led by a chieftain named Tenoch who had a dream that he must lead his people to a swampy island in the middle of Lake Texcoco. In the dream he was told to look for an eagle perched on a cactus, growing from a rock or cave surrounded by water. They were to build their city there and thank their most important god Huitzilopochtli for his brilliant idea by sacrificing humans. The city they built was named Tenochtitlán, or the city of Tenoch. It is for this reason the eagle perched on the cactus is part of the Mexican flag.



It was very hard to build Tenochtitlan because the Aztecs only had a small piece of land in the surrounding swamps. The Aztecs made the swampy, shallows of the lake into chinampas. These were like floating islands that allowed them to grow their crops above the water. They made islands by piling up mud from the lake bottom. Many people also lived on chinampas. People

moved about between their chinampas and the main road to the city in canoes which they hollowed out from trees. Eventually most of the lake surrounding Tenochtitlan was filled with chinampas.

When the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez arrived from Europe the Aztecs received him with welcome arms. In fact, many Aztecs thought that he was a god because of his pale skin which they had never seen before. The Aztec king Montezuma was tricked by Cortez to come to a dinner and was later captured by Cortez and his men. Cortez offered to return the Aztec king in exchange for gold, but after he received his gold he broke his bargain and killed Montezuma. A war erupted between the Spanish explorers and the fierce Aztec warriors, but the Aztecs were overmatched. Although they had many more men, the Spanish had guns. As the war dragged on, many Aztecs died because of disease brought to the new world by Europeans. In the end, the Cortez and his men would claim the Aztec lands for Spain.



1. Where did the Aztecs settle? _____
2. What was their main city called? _____
3. Why was it hard to build Tenochtitlan? _____
4. What are chinampas? _____
5. What was the name of the explorer who conquered the Aztecs? _____
6. What was the name of the Aztec king who was killed? _____
7. Why did the Aztecs lose the war? _____

In the space below, describe some of the characteristics of the city of Tenochtitlán...

Directions: When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the Aztec Empire looking for gold, they were impressed by the great market at Tlateloco. However, the Aztecs and conquistadors had different ideas of what items at the market were most valuable. Below is a list of items that might have been found at the Aztec market. In the column labeled Aztecs, number the goods for 1 to 12, with 1 being the item you think was the most valuable to the Aztecs and 12 being the items of least value. Do the same for the column labeled Conquistadors. This time, number the items according to which ones you think were most valuable to the Spanish conquistadors.

Item sold in the market	Aztec Ranking	Conquistador Ranking
Mantles or cloaks		
Cacao beans		
Fruits, vegetables, meat, fish		
Slaves		
Pottery and baskets		
Bright-colored parrot feathers		
Animal skins		
Copper axes		
Jade, imported turquoise		
Goose quills full of gold dust		
Maize of many kinds and color		
Sandals mad of cactus fiber, cotton capes, and skirts		

1. Explain how you chose the ranking for the Aztecs.

2. Explain how you chose the ranking for the conquistadors.

3. If you had to choose and item which one would be most important to you today and why?