



Teacher's Guide

The Aztec Empire **Time Compass**

Grade Levels:

4-8

Subject Areas:

Social Studies

Synopsis:

Innovative animation and a tongue-in-cheek approach to ancient history provide a sound introduction to the Aztec Empire. Beginning with the Olmecs and Zapotecs, the episode traces the Aztec takeover from the North, their military conquests, and their sacrifices to the sun god. It also covers Aztec ingenuity in the construction of garden sites on swampy ground and achievements, such as a public education system, Aztec calendar, and Aztec mathematics. Students learn that human civilization began to take form once nomads learned to farm and that the Aztecs developed staple crops that are commonplace today. They also learn of Aztec religious beliefs and why the Aztecs welcomed Hernan Cortéz as a god, rather than a military leader, who would eventually destroy their civilization. The episode compares the history of the Aztec Empire with that of the Ottoman Empire that was expanding rapidly under Suleiman's leadership.

Learning Objectives: Students will:

- Describe the unique characteristics of Aztec society.
- Understand why the Aztecs believed they could appease the sun god by performing sacrifices.
- Describe Aztec contributions to agriculture and farming.
- Describe the symbolism of Aztec inscriptions.
- Explain why Aztec warriors were so ferocious and how they instilled fear in their opponents.

Vocabulary:

chinapas, sacrifice, inscriptions, nomads, irrigation systems, aqueducts, appease, famine, drought

Pre-Viewing Discussion:

What do you know about the Aztecs? Where was the Aztec civilization established?

Has anyone ever heard of the “Feathered Serpent” or the sun god, Quetzalcoatl? Can you imagine what Aztec images of these gods resembled?

Why do you think the Aztecs worshipped a sun god? If there was lots of rain and sunshine, what would happen to any crops the Incas might have planted?

Some of the vegetables and fruits first grown by the Aztecs are foods most of us eat today. Do you know what some of these foods are?

Post-Viewing Discussion:

When there wasn't enough land to grow food for his people, what did Acatonale design? How were these gardens created? How successful was his plan?

Why did the Aztecs build pyramid temples? Why did they offer sacrifices to the sun god? How did the Aztecs believe human history would end?

How were the Aztecs able to educate their children when there was no alphabet for the Aztec language? What did the Aztecs use instead of a written language? How do we know that they loved poetry and music?

Since the Aztecs were fierce warriors, why didn't they fight against Cortez and the Conquistadors? What did the Spanish hope to achieve by conquering the Aztecs?

Further Activities:

Find other examples of Aztec images or Aztec masks. Use your imagination and design a painting or a mask in the style of the Aztecs.

Discover the name of the great city that was built on the site of Tenochtitlan. Find out if remains of the original Aztec city can still be seen there.

Learn about ancient Aztec dances and ceremonies that are still performed in the central square of Mexico City.

Further investigate the events that happened when Cortéz and Montezuma II met and appeared to develop a friendship.

Related New Dimension Media Titles:

Mexico (Beyond Our Borders Series)

Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (series)

Great Civilizations of the Ancient World (series)