

OLMECS AND AZTECS OF MEXICO

Mark It on the Map

Refer students to the maps on pages 3 and 4 in *Ancient Mexico*.

Introduction

Ask students whether they know of any ancient civilizations that flourished in Mexico before the arrival of Europeans. Have them summarize what they learn from the group discussion in their notebooks under the heading "What We Already Know About Ancient Mexican Civilizations." Students should then generate questions they would like to answer as they read these issues.

Vocabulary

hieroglyphic	excavated
archeologist*	scepter
amends (n.)	garland
codices	

*also spelled "archaeologist"

Questions for Discussion

- What were the greatest achievements of the Olmec civilization?
- What was the were-jaguar, and what did it mean to the Olmecs?
- What was the Maya civilization like at its height, A.D. 300 to 900? How was it similar to the Olmec civilization?
- Describe Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital city. How did it compare to European cities of its time?
- Tell about the Aztecs' way of life: their occupations, trade, arts, social classes, schools, and warfare.
- Why did Montezuma visit Teotihuacán every twenty days? What was the city like, and who built it?
- Why did the Aztecs believe that they had to offer human blood to the sun?
- Who was Quetzalcoatl? Why did the Aztecs think that Hernando Cortés was Quetzalcoatl?
- What may have caused each of these civilizations to decline and vanish: Olmecs, Toltecs, Maya, Aztecs.

Presentation Projects

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- Give an illustrated talk on the Olmecs and their achievements. Tell how they influenced the other civilizations of ancient Mexico.
- Create a chart comparing the Olmecs, the Teotihuacáanos, the Maya, and the Aztecs. List the time period in which each group flourished and its outstanding achievements.
- Make a model or mural of what Teotihuacán looked like. Write a guidebook to your replica of the city and read it aloud to the class while pointing out the sights.
- Design a travel brochure describing a trip to Mexico to see the most important sites of its ancient civilizations. Include an illustrated map.
- Put together a "Taste of Ancient Mexico" fair. Set up places where the class can play *patolli* on a board that you create, eat popcorn and listen to a reading of the story "Pop Goes the Popcorn" (pages 13–15 of *Ancient Mexico*), eat *quesadillas*, browse through books on ancient Mexican civilization, and look at a mural showing the art, architecture, and gods of these peoples.
- Present your research in a panel discussion. Each panel member can become an expert on one aspect of the ancient Mexicans. Take questions from the audience.
- Read some myths of the Aztecs (see pages 39–40 of *Ancient Mexico* for references). Dramatize one of the myths and, wearing appropriate costumes, present it to the class.

Follow These Footsteps

Montezuma
Tlaloc
Toci

Hernando Cortés
Chalchiutlicue
Tezcatlipoca

Quetzalcoatl
Itzamna
Huitzilopochtli