

Emiliano Zapata and the Mexican Revolution of 1910

This important leader of the Mexican Revolution was a *mestizo* (of European and Native American descent) by birth and in his late teens a tenant farmer. At the age of 18, he started to protest on behalf of other peasant farmers against wealthy landowners who were taking away their lands.



“Tierra y Libertad – Land and Liberty”

In 1909, at the age of 30, his village elected him to lead their board of defense. He tried to negotiate with the landowners for reforms but his attempts failed. Finally Zapata resorted to radical change and began to form his own army. They began to take properties from the wealthy landowners and redistributed them to the peasants and farmworkers.

In 1910 when the liberal reformer Francisco Madero called for free elections in Mexico, the dictator in power, Porfirio Díaz resigned. Zapata formed an alliance with Madero hoping that he would support land reforms for the poor people of Mexico. When Madero was elected president in 1911 he changed very little. Zapata withdrew his support for Madero and went back to leading his army and taking back lands under his plan of fair distribution.

Zapata then began to help draw up the **Plan of Ayala**, reaffirming (confirming) the ideals for a Mexican Revolution of the lower classes. Zapata then led his army in a revolution. Using guerilla tactics to avoid direct fighting against the more powerful government army, Zapata soon became a threat to the authorities.



As the revolution continued, Zapata along with fellow guerrilla leader **Pancho Villa** (shown left), started an alliance with the politician Venustiano Carranza. Zapata and Villa hoped that when Carranza became president, he would support their land reform policies.

Carranza double-crossed the revolutionaries. He sent an army to defeat the army led by Villa and then turned on Zapata. The Mexican government lured Zapata into a “meeting” where they ambushed his men and shot Zapata to death.

Today, both Zapata and Villa are seen as Mexican heroes and martyrs for the Mexican poor.

“I am glad to have fought in the same cause with Zapata, and so many of my dear revolutionary friends who were left behind in the hills, their bones eaten by animals. I wasn’t afraid. Just the opposite, I was glad. It’s a beautiful thing to fight to realize an ideal.”

- Zeferino Diego Ferreira, peasant soldier in the Mexican Revolution.

Name: _____

Answer the following key questions based on information shown in the handout.
Use complete sentences for your answers.

1. What was the **Plan of Ayala**?

2. How did Zapata's motto "*Tierra y Libertad*" reflect his goals?

3. What were the conditions in Mexican society that the revolutionaries wanted to change?

4. Why do you think that Ferreira was happy to fight with Zapata, regardless of the danger?
