

# The Olmec, Maya & Aztec

# Mesoamerica



- **Mesoamerica** refers to a geographical and cultural area which extends from central Mexico down through Central America.
- The term “Meso” means middle. (Middle America)
- Many important Ancient Civilizations developed in this area.
- A **civilization** is a culture that has developed complex systems of government, education, and religion.

# Mesoamerica

*Aztecs*





# The Original Olmec

# Olmec Civilization

- The Olmec civilization existed from 1300 BC to about 400 BC.
- The Olmec are believed to be the earliest civilization in the Americas.
- The Olmec people established a civilization in the area we know today as southern Mexico.



# Map of Olmec Empire:

*Aztecs*



# The “Mother Culture”

- Many historians consider the Olmec civilization the “mother culture” of Mesoamerica.
- A mother culture is a way of life that strongly influences later cultures.
- The Olmec empire led to the development of other civilizations, such as the Maya and the Aztec.

# Olmec Daily Life

- The Olmec were very good at farming. The land in this region was very fertile and food supply was steady.
- They lived in villages near rivers and also fished for food.
- Olmec people also were good at making pottery and weaving.





# Olmec Daily Life

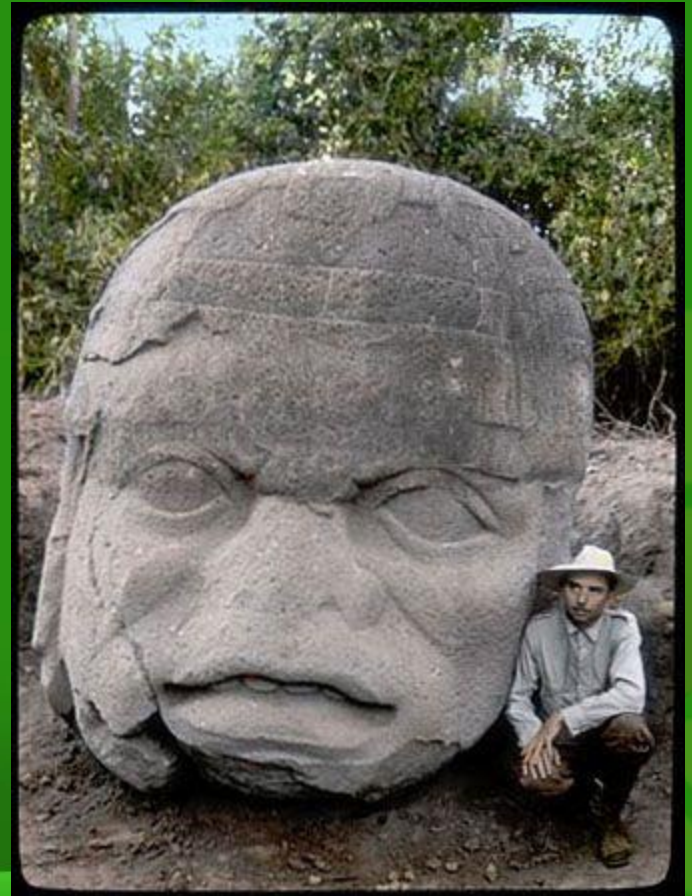
*Aztecs*



- The Olmec played a game called “pok-a-tok” where, you must shoot a rubber ball through a stone ring without using your hands or feet.
- Huge ball courts built by the Olmec suggest that the game was popular with spectators.

# Olmec Art

- The Olmec carved large heads from basalt, a type of volcanic rock.
- What the giant stone heads represent or why the Olmec built them is a mystery.



# Olmec Technology

*Aztecs*



- The Olmec used an early form of glyph writing to record events, dates, and to tell stories.
- Glyphs are pictures that represent words.
- They were incredible astronomers.
- They developed a calendar that was amazingly accurate for its time.

# Olmec Trade

*Aztecs*

- It is believed that the Olmec did not focus on warfare and conquest, but instead, influenced other cultures mainly through trade.
- Most Olmec cities served as trade centers.



- They mainly traded for luxury items, such as precious stones. Knowledge and ideas were also exchanged at these trade centers.
- As a result, the Olmec culture spread throughout much of Mesoamerica.

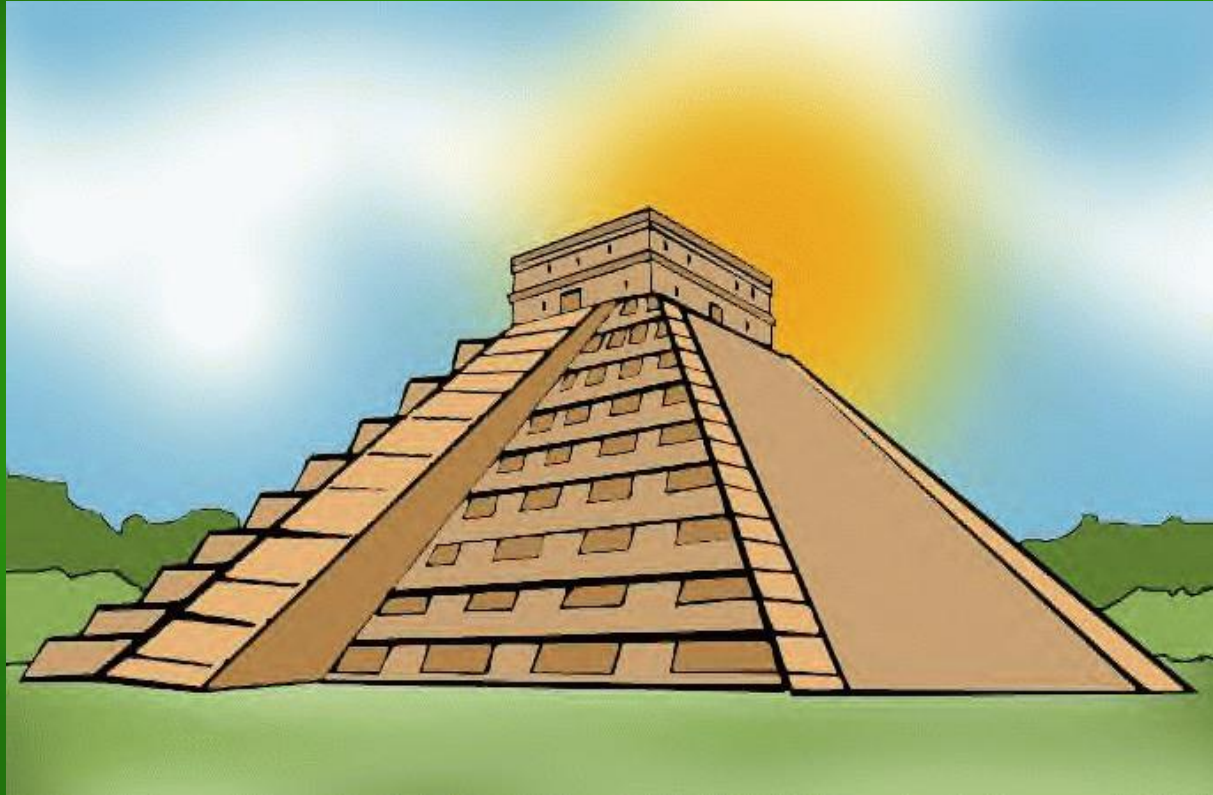
# Olmec Religion

*Aztecs*

- The Olmec were polytheistic. They worshiped gods such as a fire god and corn god, but their main god was the jaguar god.
- They believed that the jaguar god brought rain.
- Pyramids built in the center of their cities were probably used for religious reasons.



# The Mysterious Maya



400 BC–900 CE (AD)

Southern Mexico & Central America

# Maya Civilization

- The Maya civilization existed from 400 BC to about 900 CE (AD).
- At its peak, the Maya civilization covered the Yucatan Peninsula and stretched down to the northern parts of El Salvador and Honduras.
- This area had natural barriers, such as mountains and water, that helped to protect the Maya civilization for 1300 years.



# Discovering the Maya

*Aztecs*



- To find the ruins of ancient Maya cities hidden deep in the rainforest, archaeologists had to travel on foot.
- An **archaeologist** is a scientist that looks for and studies evidence from long ago.



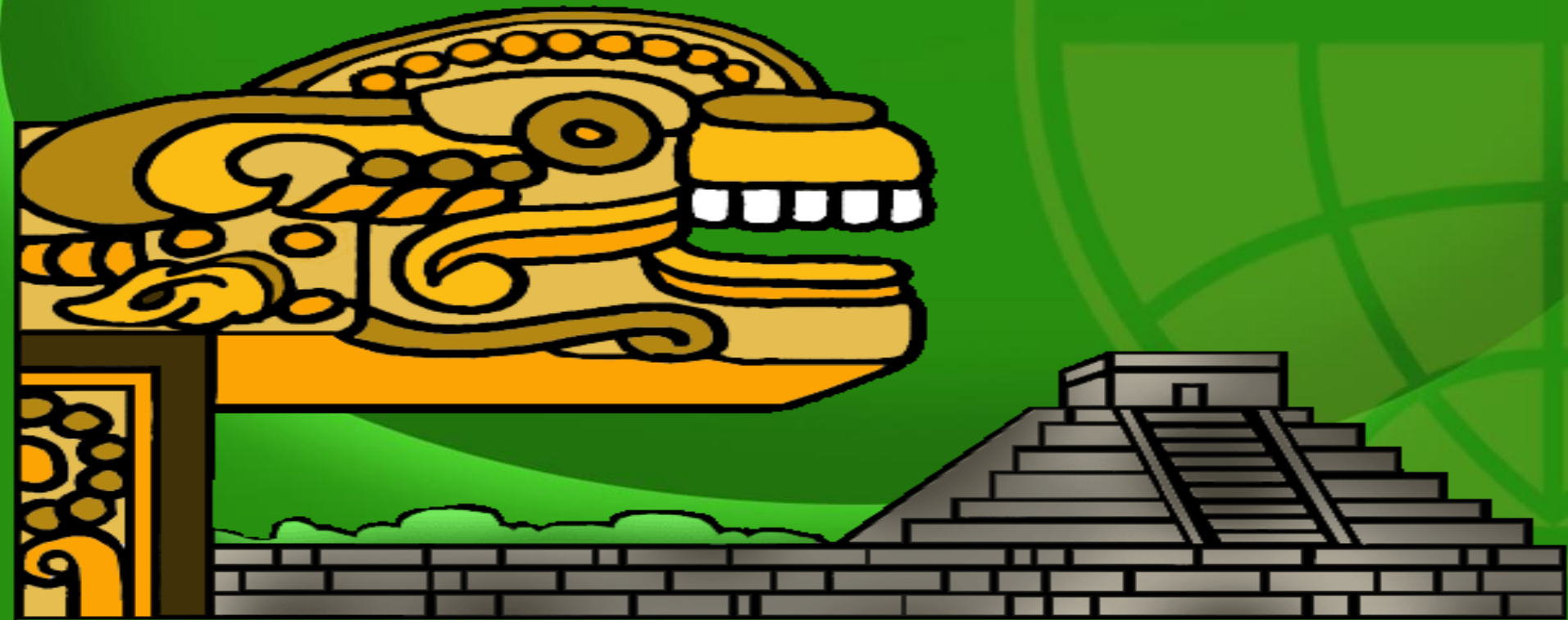
# Maya Farming

- Like the Olmec, the Maya were expert farmers.
- They grew several crops but their main source of food was corn. They called it Maize
- Because there was plenty of food, the Mayan population grew.
- Over time, some Mayan farming villages grew into great cities.

# Maya Cities

*Aztecs*

- The Maya were master builders.
- They did not have metal tools—they used stone, bone, and wood tools to build hundreds of magnificent cities.



# Maya Cities

- Cities were centers of religion and learning.
- Every Maya city had a palace for its ruler, a marketplace, an open-air plaza where people could gather, at least one huge pyramid, a large temple, and one pok-a-tok ball court.
- People came to town to shop, to worship, and to watch ball games.



# Maya Cities

Two of the largest cities were












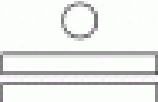
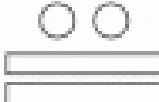
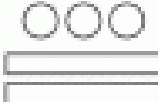
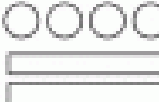
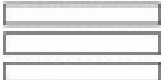
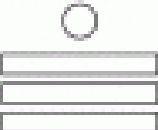
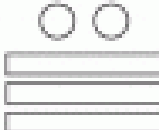
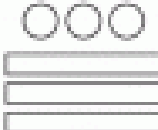

- **Tikal** (tee-KAHL), located in the present-day country of Guatemala. Its population was about 50,000.
- **Copan** (ko-PAHN), located in the present-day country of Honduras



**QUESTION:** What were three things you could find in every Maya city?

# Maya Number System

- The Maya invented of the idea of the number zero.
- This invention made the Maya's calendar accurate.

0	1	2	3	4
				
5	6	7	8	9
				
10	11	12	13	14
				
15	16	17	18	19
				

# Maya Calendar



# Maya Religion



- The Maya worshipped the gods of nature. Some of their gods were the god of Rain, god of Maize, and the god of Sun.
- They believed that without the help of these important gods, there would be no crops and everyone would starve.
- To get help from the gods, the Maya fasted, prayed, and offered sacrifices.
- Most sacrifices were animals but occasionally they did made human sacrifices.

# Maya Religion

- The Maya had many religious ceremonies, performed by priest, on top of the pyramids.
- Priests were the most powerful people in the Maya civilization.



- The priests decided when to plant crops and when people could marry and to whom. Before doing pretty much anything, one had to ask for a priest's approval.



# The Legend of Mirrors

The Maya believed that one could communicate with a god by looking into a mirror.

**Legend says...**warriors going into battle wore mirrors on their backs. The idea was that if an enemy warrior tried to sneak up on a Maya warrior, a demon might reach out from the underworld and snatch the enemy.



# The Mysterious Downfall

Aztecs

- Around 800 CE the Maya began to abandon their cities and their population declined.
- The reasons for these events are still a mystery.
- The demise of the Maya Civilization **may** have been caused by food shortages, disease, or wars.



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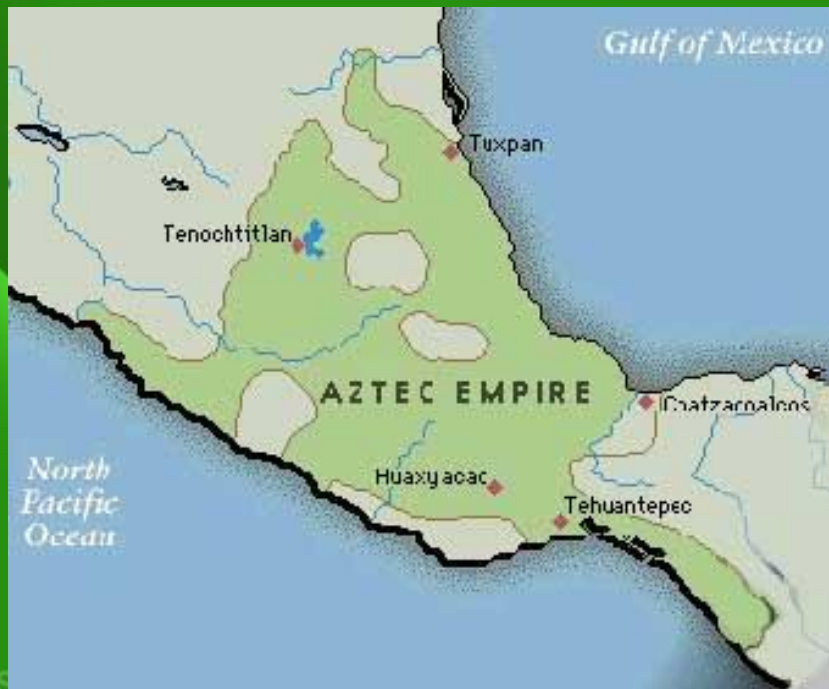


# The Awesome Aztecs

# Aztec Civilization

*Aztecs*

- The Aztec tribe lived in southern Mexico from about 900 CE (AD) to 1521.
- In the 1100s the Aztec settled in the Valley of Mexico on the swampy shores of Lake Texcoco and on a small island in the lake.



- The Aztec named this place Tenochtitlan (te noch tee TLAHN) and it eventually became the capital of their civilization.

# School

*Aztecs*



- To build Tenochtitlan into the city they wanted, the Aztec knew that they would need many engineers, builders, and other specialist.
- To solve this problem, the Aztecs set up a system of public schools.
- All Aztec children went to school where they learned Aztec history, religion, and a specialized profession.

# Specialized Professions

- Aztec children were trained to be a specialist in some area. Boys studied how to be farmers, traders, engineers, builders, astronomers, and doctors.
- Students who became builders and engineers designed and built the amazing Aztec cities, including the capital city of Tenochtitlan.



# Mighty Tenochtitlan

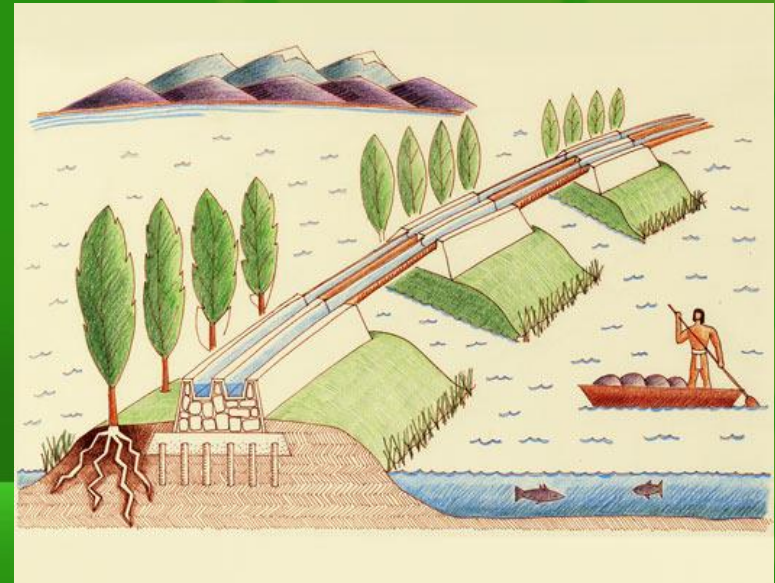
*Aztecs*



- Tenochtitlan had broad avenues, beautiful plazas, markets, temples, and palaces.

# Aztec Life

- At first, life was hard on the swampy land, but the Aztec gradually built up the city.
- They built causeways and bridges to connect the island to the main land.
- A **causeway** is a raised road or path usually built across a body of water.





# Farming

- To solve the issue of growing crops in a swampy area, the Aztec built chinampas.
- **Chinampas** are “floating” gardens built on a series of rafts, which were anchored to the lake bed. They piled dirt on top of the rafts and grew crops on them.
- The gardens were quite successful. The Aztecs grew chili peppers, squash, corn, tomatoes, and beans.



# Aztec Religion



Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec sun god.

- The Aztecs believed that human sacrifice was necessary to feed their gods.
- They believed that if their gods were not fed, they would not do their jobs.

# War

- War was an important part of Aztec life.
- The Aztec conquered over 400 cities in Mexico.
- The Aztec often used the prisoners they captured as slaves or as human sacrifices to feed their gods.



# The Fall of the Aztec

- In 1521, Spanish conquistadors and their Native American partners defeated the Aztec and ended their empire.
- A **conquistador** is a Spanish soldier.
- Tenochtitlan was destroyed and a new capital, Mexico City, was built on top of the ruins of the destroyed city.