**The Aztecs**

**#19**

**I. Introduction**

The Aztecs were the rulers of what is now Mexico between about 1300 and 1500 A.D. According to Aztec legend, at the beginning of the 12th century until the 13th century, the Aztec peoples came south to the Valley of Mexico in search of a place to live. Their capital was at Tenochtitlan (Ten-oc-tit-lan). Soon, the Aztecs created one of the strongest countries in the Americas. Some of their cities at that time were as large as any in Europe. Aztec peoples practiced a religion that was important for every part of their lives. To honor their gods, they built great temples, huge sculptures, and held ceremonies that included bloody human sacrifices. In 1521, the Spaniards destroyed and took over the Aztec empire. The Aztecs are a very important part of Mexican culture.

**DIRECTIONS: Actively read (highlight/underline important information and circle words you do not understand) the various contributions of Aztec civilization. Then, evaluate if the Aztec civilization was a great civilization or not. EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWERS in the template below.**

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| **AZTEC ACTIONS &ACHIEVEMENTS** | **EVALUATION (E, G, S, F)** |
| **Causeways**  The city of Tenochtitlan was on an island and it could only be reached from two ways. First, a person in a canoe could paddle toward it or second, a traveler could reach the city by three causeways (long roads that cross over bodies of water/they are not bridges) stretching from the shore of Lake Texcoco, across the lake itself, and then the city. The causeways met in the heart of the city in the great central plaza, which contained the temples of gods and the palace of the Aztec ruler. These causeways were interrupted by bridges that allowed canoes and other traffic to pass freely. The bridges could be pulled away if necessary to defend the city. The city itself was connected with a series of canals, so that all sections of the city could be visited either on foot or by canoe. |  |
| **Chinampas**  As the population grew, Aztecs found new ways to create more farmland. They built chinampas, or floating gardens. The Aztecs wove giant reed mats and placed them on top of water. They made a fence around the mat and placed mud, silt, and rotten vegetables on it. Then willow trees were placed on all sides of the chinampas. The willow trees grew very quickly and their roots bound the soil to keep from washing away. On these floating gardens, they raised corn, chili peppers, potatoes, squash, and beans. |  |
| **Social Classes**  Aztec people were made up of nobles, common people, slaves, or they belonged to a special group such as craftspeople or merchants. Nobles usually had an important government job or were priests or warriors. Women could own property and run their own businesses. Nobles were expected to do their work well. In return they received fine houses and servants and could afford to entertain with lavish banquets (dinners).  Most people in the empire were peasant farmers. The whole family worked long hours together to grow, store and prepare the food they needed. Aztec farmers were commoners. They had certain rights protected by law. In return they paid taxes in the form of food and clothing. Men could be made to fight and work on public projects. |  |
| **Human Sacrifice**  The Aztec practice of human sacrifice (offerings to the gods) was an important part of their religion. Human blood was the correct food for the gods. It was believed that the sun needed human blood in order to survive and rise again. The fear that human sacrifice created helped the Aztec empire keep their power. Most victims included war captives and criminals. Rain rituals (ceremonies) involved killing children hoping that their tears would bring rain. Springtime rituals included priest wearing the skins of the dead, other ceremonies involved shooting arrows into prisoners that were tied up. The most common form of sacrifice was to pull male prisoner up the steps of a pyramid, where they were stretched across a sacrificial stone while 4 priests held his arms and legs and another priest stabbed a black obsidian (stone) knife into his chest and pulled out his beating heart. |  |
| **Education**  Aztec schools offered a formal system of education. Every child had to attend, including girls and slaves. School was mandatory and free. Teachers were highly respected. Schools included instruction in song and in dance, not because it was a beautiful art, but because songs and dances were important to religious festivals. Sons of upper class taught law, writing (hieroglyphics), medicine, engineering and building, interpretations of dreams and omens, and self-expression. Students were taught how to speak well. They also learned details of their history and of their religious beliefs. This was a tough school. The boys were made fun of and humiliated to toughen them up. The other school was for the commoners. Its main goal was to train warriors and farmers. Unlike the school for nobles’ sons, this school was pretty peaceful. Boys had to sleep under skimpy blankets. They were given hard bread to eat. This school also taught history, religion, manners, correct behavior, and important rituals, along with singing and dancing. |  |

Aztec civilization started in what is now present day Mexico. They accomplished many things in their civilization. The Aztec empire was **great civilization/bad civilization (choose one).**

There were several reasons why the Aztec empire was a **great civilization/bad civilization (choose one).** One reason is **(state and explain your reason)** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Even though there are some reasons that the Aztecs empire could be a **great civilization/bad civilization (choose opposite)**, for example **(give reason for the opposite argument)** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, other reasons outweigh this, such as **(explain two more reasons that match your original argument)**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.