

Objectives

- ◆ To identify the area known as Mesoamerica
- ◆ To identify five cultures of Mesoamerica and South America

**Reading Strategy:
Questioning**

Study the photographs and artwork in this lesson. Ask yourself how they relate to what you are reading.

More than 10,000 years ago, in a valley in what is now Mexico, an ancient hunter walked in the mud for 30 feet. In 2006, archaeologists discovered 13 of his footprints preserved in solid rock. Today, we call the area where he walked Mesoamerica. *Mesoamerica* means “middle America.” It is the name given to the land between the continents of North and South America. It is in Mesoamerica that American Indians reached their highest level of cultural development. The Olmecs, the Mayas, the Toltecs, and the Aztecs created these advanced Mesoamerican civilizations. The Inca Empire on the continent of South America is another important example of a highly advanced civilization in the Americas.

What Were the Cultural Contributions of the Olmecs?

The Olmecs were ancient people living in the heart of Mesoamerica between 1200 B.C. and 400 B.C. During this time, the Olmecs developed the first important civilization in this area. The Olmecs created the first system of writing in America. They were good mathematicians and astronomers. They used the zero many centuries before the Greeks. They developed a calendar of 365 days and a special 260-day religious calendar. The best example of Olmec art is 10-foot-tall stone heads. The purpose of the giant stone heads is a mystery.

What Were Olmec Settlements Like?

Olmec settlements contained up to 1,000 people. They lived in a rich agricultural area and grew maize, squash, and beans. Around 900 B.C. they built a very tall earthen mound shaped like a pyramid with a flat top. Some anthropologists believe that the Olmecs were the “mother culture” of Mesoamerica. This means that the Olmecs’ cultural developments laid the foundation for the achievements of the Mayas, the Toltecs, and the Aztecs.

DAY 6

Reading Strategy: Questioning

What do you already know about the Mayas?

Why Are the Mayas Considered the Most Advanced Culture in Mesoamerica?

Maya civilization is considered the most advanced in Mesoamerica. It started around A.D. 250. The Mayas developed an excellent written language. It equaled the complex written languages of the Europeans and Chinese. The Mayas were scientists, master mathematicians, and excellent astronomers. These skills allowed them to keep track of time in the past and into the future. The Maya calendar began in 3114 B.C. It was based on 13 cycles of 400 years each. The Mayas thought that this calendar would end in 2012. After this date, a brand-new calendar cycle would begin.

Maya civilization was a complex agricultural society. The Mayas farmed an area for up to five years. Then they planted nothing there for five to 10 years, allowing the soil to recover. Their favorite drink was chocolate. Chocolate was so special it was reserved for political and religious leaders.



A large, stone temple stood in the center of each Maya city. This photo shows the temple and surrounding areas of the Maya city of Chichén Itzá in Yucatán, Mexico.

DAY 7

The Mayas were skilled engineers. They cleared jungles and built large cities throughout the area. These cities contained impressive buildings and boulevards. The Mayas were also known for their beautiful artwork, especially their colorful murals. Ancient artists in other cultures were not identified. However, Maya artists added their names to their art work. Today, the descendants of the Mayas still live in the land of their ancestors.

What Kind of Political System Did the Mayas Have?

A king ruled the Mayas. A central council headed by the king ruled on very important matters. There was a court system with local judges. Taxes were paid to tax collectors. To keep expanding their territory, the Mayas had a well-organized army. The army conquered other people who were then brought into the Maya civilization.

How Was the Toltec Civilization Different from the Olmecs and Mayas?

Around A.D. 900, the Toltecs moved into the Valley of Mexico. There they found a city called Tula. The city of Tula became the center of a great Toltec Empire. The Toltec culture was different from the Olmecs and the Mayas. Political and religious leaders were most important in those cultures. But in the Toltec culture, a special class of warriors gained power. Warriors of the Jaguar, the Coyote, and the Eagle were names for organized military units. For 200 years, the Toltecs' military might made them the strongest culture in Mesoamerica. By A.D. 1200, a less advanced invader destroyed the Toltec Empire. Eventually the city of Tula was destroyed. However, for another 200 years, Toltec influence could be seen throughout the area. The ideas and achievements of the Toltecs heavily influenced the Aztec civilization.

DAY 7

What Caused the Aztecs to Settle on an Island in Mexico?

Around A.D. 1200, the Aztecs began moving into the Valley of Mexico. Their culture was a simple one. They were not a powerful people. In fact, other groups looked down upon them. At this time, the Aztecs had no written records. But they told a story of how, around A.D. 1300, a god spoke to their leader. The god told their leader, Tenoch, to take his people to an island in Lake Texcoco. On the island he should look for an eagle eating a snake. The eagle would be sitting on a cactus growing from a rock. It was on that spot that Tenoch was told to build a great city. They named the city *Tenochtitlán*, or "the city of Tenoch." The island was not a good building site. Large buildings gradually sank into the wet land. The Aztecs kept building new buildings on top of those that sank below ground. Eventually, the wet land was filled in. Tenochtitlán became a magnificent city. To connect the island to the mainland, the Aztecs built raised stone roads.

How Did the Aztecs Become an Empire?

In 1376, they selected their first emperor. Their leader's ancestors were the Toltecs. The Aztecs sought to recreate the influential Toltec civilization. Like the Toltecs, the Aztecs began to conquer other groups by military force. They forced these conquered people to pay part of their food or other valuables to them. By the early 1500s, the Aztecs had built a large empire and had become a harsh military power.



This is a sun stone or a calendar from the temple at Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital city.

**Reading Strategy:
Questioning**

What details are important to understanding the Incas' problems?

Who Were the Incas?

The empire of the Inca was located in the valleys of the Andes Mountains in South America. Their capital city of Cuzco was built high in the mountains of what is now Peru. Around A.D. 1100, the Incas began conquering tribes from the surrounding lands. By 1453, the Inca Empire covered a large area containing more than six million people. The Inca Empire included parts of five modern nations: Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia. It was the largest empire in North and South America.

The Inca Empire faced more difficult problems than the empires in Mesoamerica. One of the problems was how to govern such a large area with so many different kinds of people. First, the Incas divided the empire into four geographic areas. They call their empire the "Land of the Four Quarters." *Inca* was the name they gave their emperor. Second, once a tribe was conquered by military force, they asked the tribal leaders to become partners in the empire. The Incas set up rules that the tribal leaders had to follow. In this way, local leaders could make many decisions for their own tribes but still remain loyal to the Inca Empire.

**Biography****Pachacutec Inca Yupanqui: died 1471**

The year of Pachacutec's birth is not known. His name means "he who changes the world." He became emperor of the Inca people in 1438. Pachacutec proved himself to be a brave warrior and a good ruler. He also served as the religious leader of his empire. During his rule, Inca territory expanded, and the Incas built a system of roads. He developed an effective government and economy. Pachacutec was responsible for many building projects. It is thought that he built Machu Picchu as a place to go to relax. Machu Picchu, also known as the "Lost City," is high in the Andes Mountains. Many historians consider Pachacutec to be one of the greatest rulers of all time.



DAY 8

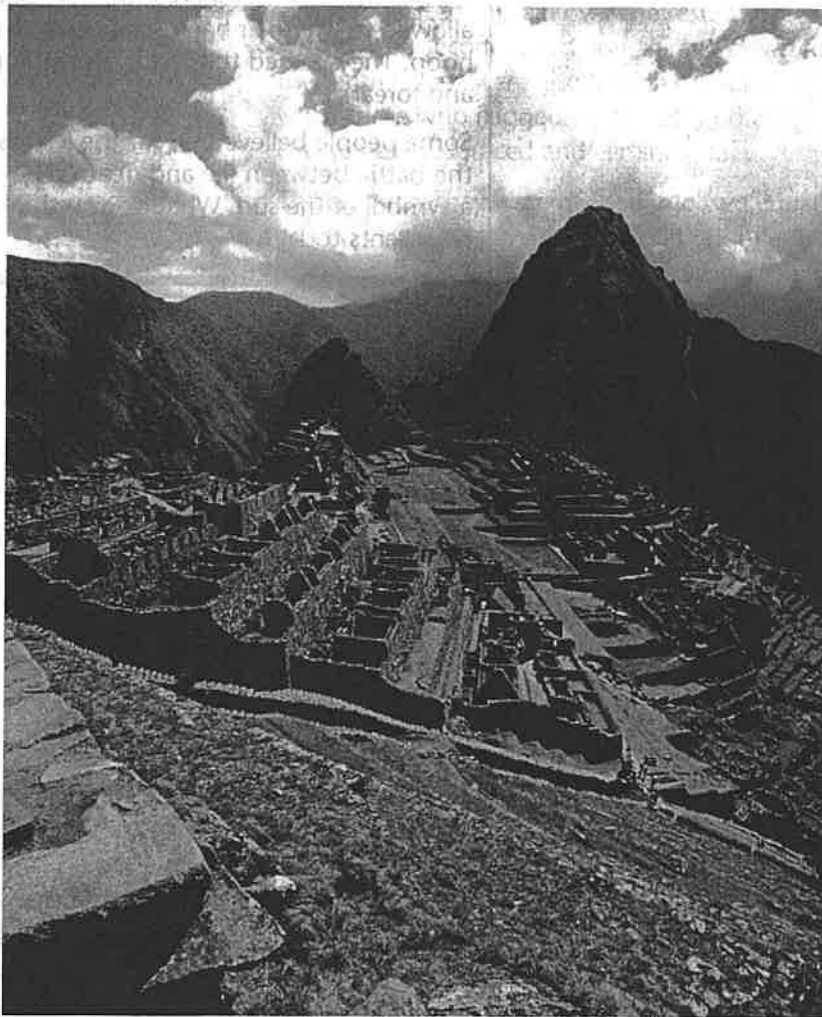
Writing About History

Imagine that you are visiting one of the Olmec, Maya, Incan, or Aztec cities. Research the architecture and layout of such a place. In your notebook, describe it. Include a drawing.

Why Were Roads So Important to the Incas?

The empire covered about 2,500 miles from the northern to the southern end. Cuzco was the capital city. From Cuzco, the Inca emperor needed to communicate with the rest of the empire.

The Incas were skilled engineers. They built more than 14,000 miles of roads. The network of roads connected the coastal areas and the valleys. In the mountains, roads rose to heights of 5,000 feet. Using the network of roads, the Incas created a fast communication system by using relay runners along the roads. There were rest areas that contained food and water.



Machu Picchu, in Peru, is an important archaeological site.


Then and Now
How About a Game of Basketball?


In the center of Maya cities near the temples and palaces, you might have found a large court. Its shape was like today's basketball court. Tall stone walls stood on the two long sides of the court.

High in the middle of each wall was a stone ring, or hoop. Often, it was 30 feet above the ground! The Mayas put the hoop straight up and down instead of parallel to the ground. The Mayas used the court to play a game with a ball made of solid rubber. The ball weighed about five pounds. Players were not allowed to use their hands or feet to get the ball through the hoop. They passed the ball back and forth with their hips, knees, and forearms.

Some people believe that for the Mayas, the game represented the battle between life and death. The rubber ball may have been a symbol of the sun. What do you think the game of basketball represents today?

Lesson 4 Review On a sheet of paper, write the answer to each question. Use complete sentences.

1. What is Mesoamerica?
2. What was the culture of the Mayas like?
3. Why do some anthropologists think that the Olmecs may be the "mother culture" of Mesoamerica?
4. Why did the Aztecs build their city on an island in a lake in Mexico?
5. Why did the Incas build so many miles of roads?

What do you think? 

What is the most important thing you have learned by studying these ancient Mesoamerican cultures?

Spotlight Story

The Lady of the Lines

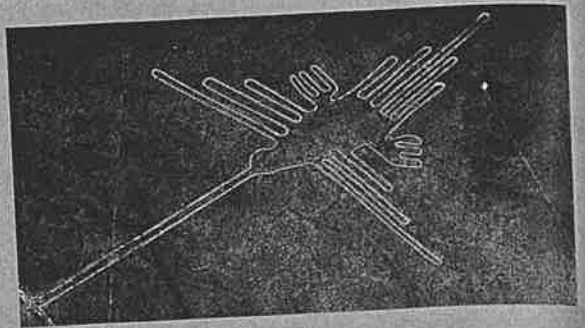
Before the Great Incan Empire existed, the Nascan people lived near Peru's southern coast from 200 B.C. to A.D. 650. Today, because of the work of Maria Reiche, we now know that the Nascans created mysterious, gigantic drawings in one of the world's driest deserts. Nasca means a "hard place to live." Each of the more than 70 drawings was created by a single line. The drawings are known as the Nasca Lines of Peru.

Maria Reiche was born in Germany in 1903. In 1940, although a mathematician, she became an assistant to an archaeologist studying the Nasca Lines. Most of the drawings are of animals or geometric designs. They are so large that they can be seen only from an aircraft. What one can see on the ground are straight paths with dark rocks lining the sides.

Maria made the study of the Nasca Lines her life's work. The work was physically difficult. The wind continually covered the lines with pebbles. She had to sweep the pebbles away. The people in the area called her the "crazy woman sweeping the desert." Maria said, "What compelled me on this quest was my curiosity."

Maria Reiche especially wanted to know how and why the drawings were made. She thought that the Nascans created the drawings by first drawing crisscrossed parallel lines, called a grid, on cloth. They then drew a picture on the grid to use as a model. Next, they drew a larger grid on the desert floor. They then copied the smaller cloth drawing onto the larger desert grid. By doing this they were able to create enormous drawings.

Maria noticed that at different times of the year many of the lines directly pointed to the



rising and setting of the sun and the moon. She thought the Nascans used the drawings to determine when to plant seeds to assure a good harvest. The drawings, she thought, were a sky calendar.

Maria Reiche, the Lady of the Lines, died at age 95. She said that the Nasca Lines "should be treated like a very fragile manuscript that is guarded in a special room in a library." Because of her work, in 1995 the United Nations declared that the location of the Nasca Lines was a World Heritage Site.

Wrap-Up

1. Why did Maria Reiche want to study the Nasca Lines?
2. What did the people in the area think of her?
3. How could her background as a mathematician help Reiche in her study of the Nasca Lines?
4. Why don't we know exactly why the ancient society in Peru created the Nasca Lines?
5. Why is it important to preserve historical sites like this one?

Chapter 9 REVIEW

DAY 10 Q. 1-15

Word Bank

Anasazi
Aztec
Clovis
Hohokam
Incas
Inuit
Mayas
Mogollons
Olmecs
Toltecs

On a sheet of paper, use the words from the Word Bank to complete each sentence correctly.

1. Scientists think the _____ people were among the first Americans.
2. The _____ are known for their rock art—images of insects, fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals.
3. The _____ built cliff dwellings in the rock near where Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado meet.
4. Because they lived in the desert, the _____ had to build irrigation canals to water their crops.
5. The _____ created the first system of writing in the Americas.
6. The _____ are known for their calendar, which was based on 400-year cycles.
7. By the early 1500s, the _____ people had become a harsh military power.
8. The _____ built more than 14,000 miles of roads to connect people in their large empire.
9. _____ civilization was different from others because of the importance of their military.
10. The _____, or Eskimo, people built shelters out of blocks of snow.

On a sheet of paper, write the letter of the answer that correctly completes each sentence.

11. The settlement of _____ was an important place for the Hohokam.
A Clovis B Folsom C Snaketown D Cahokia
12. Archaeologists named the _____ after the mountain ranges in which they lived.
A Hohokam B Mogollan C Anasazi D Adena

DAY 10 Q. 1-15

13. The _____ people created a very large earthen Snake Mound.
A Hohokam B Mogollan C Iroquois D Hopewell
14. The _____ culture was unusual because even though they were not farmers, they had the resources to build large earthen structures.
A Anasazi B Adena C Poverty Point D Cahokia
15. The _____ tribes lived in Puget Sound, a large body of water surrounded on three sides by land.
A Pacific Coast C Inuit
B Plains Indian D Iroquois

On a sheet of paper, write the answer to each question. Use complete sentences.

16. Choose one of the cultures you have just studied. How did the environment determine what kinds of shelters they built and how they farmed?
17. How did George McJunkin know that the bones he discovered in 1908 were an important scientific discovery?
18. Besides water for their crops, how did the Hohokam use the water from their canals?
- Critical Thinking** On a sheet of paper, write your response to each question. Use complete sentences.
19. After the Incas conquered a tribe by military force, they asked the tribal leaders to become partners in their empire. How did this make the Incan Empire stronger?
20. Why do you think archaeologists have found so few artifacts from the earliest Americans?



Test-Taking Tip

Try to answer all questions as completely as possible. When asked to explain your answer, do so in complete sentences.