

Adapted unit: What can we find out about the Aztec civilisation from what has survived?

HISTORY
YEAR 4

About the unit

In this unit the children find out about how people lived in central Mexico during the Aztec period from archaeological discoveries. The children will develop their understanding of characteristic features of a society; identify the different ways the past is represented; and use sources of information to make simple observations, inferences and evaluations. They will also extend their skills in literacy and creativity.

Where the unit fits in

This unit introduces children to a non-European society. It builds on previous work in history on the Tudors, which is contemporary with the Aztecs. This link helps to develop the children's chronological awareness and their understanding of contemporariness by enabling them to relate this period to a period in British history. The unit shows how key skills and enquiry skills, understanding of archaeological evidence and creativity can be developed in relation to a history study.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most children will: recognise that the past can be divided into periods, *eg Aztec period*; demonstrate factual knowledge and understanding of characteristic features of life in Aztec times; identify some of the different ways the past is represented; ask and answer questions about the past by using sources in ways that go beyond simple observations; communicate their learning, making appropriate use of specialist terms

some children will not have made so much progress and will: make simple observations about sources of information; describe different representations of the past; answer questions about the past by making simple observations about sources of information

some children will have progressed further and will: make a reasoned judgement about the validity of different representations of the past; answer questions about the past by selecting and combining information from sources and giving reasons for their selection.

Prior learning

It is helpful if the children have:

- used a range of sources of evidence, including artefacts, pictures and written sources
- sorted historical sources into categories
- studied how people lived a long time ago.

Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit children will be able to understand, use and spell correctly:

- words associated with the passage of time, *eg century, period, AD*
- words associated with aspects of society, *eg food and farming, science, technology, architecture, beliefs*
- words associated with the Aztecs, *eg Tenochtitlán, Texcoco, Mexica, codices, eagle warrior*
- words associated with Aztec beliefs, *eg gods, slaves, pyramids, festivals, obsidian.*

Resources

Resources include:

- maps of Mexico
- a class timeline from AD900 to present day
- information about life in Aztec times, *eg videos, pictures of artefacts, history books, postcards, internet resources, CDs*
- replicas of Aztec objects, available from the British museum
- examples of food imported from Mexico, *eg maize, chocolate, tomatoes*
- written sources, *eg short, carefully selected extracts from 'The true conquest of the Indies' by Bernal Diaz (Spanish account) and 'The broken speras', by Miguel Leon-Portilla (Aztec account).*

Adapting the unit for a different age group

Years 5 and 6 children could:

- broaden their study of the Aztecs by finding out about the nature of the Aztec empire, significant emperors and Moctehozuma II
- discuss who are the most significant emperors and why
- find out about and discuss the different interpretations of Moctehozuma II
- be critical of the evidence that we have, *eg the Spanish texts as a source of information about the Aztecs.*

Section 1: What do we know about the Aztecs?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to locate the Aztecs in time and place that information can be classified in different ways to recall information about Mexico and the Aztecs. 	<p>Bring in a selection of foods from Mexico, <i>eg chillies, chocolate, tomatoes, maize</i>. Talk about where they all originated from and how the Aztecs grew them. Ask the children who these people were and where they lived.</p> <p>Ask the children if they already know anything about the Aztecs. Read a non-fiction account about Aztec life to the children. Help them to group new and existing knowledge under headings, <i>eg daily life, costume, religion, warfare</i>.</p> <p>Ask the children what they already know about the Aztecs. Use a map or globe of the earth and a timeline to locate the Aztecs in space and time.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> locate Mexico on a map and place the Aztec period on a timeline group information in appropriate categories recall information about Mexico and the Aztecs. 	<p>Discussion about foods involves children's interest immediately, especially information about chocolate.</p> <p>Further discussion could add to this introduction, by explaining how many foods, <i>eg turkeys, tomatoes, maize, chillies</i>, originated in Mexico and were eaten by the Aztecs. Other common foods, such as the potato, originated in North America.</p>

Section 2: What can we learn about the Aztecs from objects?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to observe objects in detail • to make inferences • to record these inferences • to make observational drawings of artefacts • to introduce new vocabulary. 	<p>Show the children pictures or replicas of a number of Aztec objects. Provide questions to encourage the children to observe the objects carefully and to guide group discussions about them. Ask groups to report back to the class.</p> <p>Discuss the questions, 'What do the objects tell us about Aztec life?' and 'What do objects not tell us?'</p> <p>Link with aspects of literacy. The children write brief sentences to record their conclusions, perhaps in the form of descriptive writing.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observe and discuss objects in detail • make inferences and deductions from objects • record these inferences • learn new vocabulary. 	<p>Discussion and planned questioning will help children to notice detail, which they need in their writing and drawing.</p> <p>A simple writing frame could be provided to support children who are less able to write unaided. More able writers could be encouraged to write more detailed explanations for their conclusions.</p>

Section 3: What do the pictures and plans of Tenochtitlán tell us about what life might have been like in Aztec Mexico?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to make deductions about life in the past from pictures and plans of Tenochtitlán about how the city came to be built how much life in the capital depended on tribute. 	<p>Give the children pictures and ground plans of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital city. Tell them the story of the Aztec creation myth.</p> <p>Ask them to complete a grid with two headings: 'Reasons why the Aztecs might have chosen to live here' and 'Reasons why the Aztecs might not have preferred to live here.'</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> extract information about Tenochtitlán from pictures and plans extract information from a story provide answers that show the relationship between the location and topography of Tenochtitlán and the way of life of the Aztecs. 	<p>The story will provide more information about possible reasons why the Aztecs decided to settle where they did, and about the disadvantages of the area.</p> <p>Discuss with the class how the island in lake Texcoco, although snake-infested, would have provided a refuge for the Aztecs when they were a nomadic people, and how agriculture in the 'floating gardens' provided many of their foodstuffs.</p> <p>Discuss also how life became more difficult as the population expanded, and how the Aztecs came to depend on tribute from their empire for food and raw materials.</p>

Section 4: What do the pictures and drawings of Aztec men, women and children tell us about what life might have been like in Aztec Mexico?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to make deductions about life in the past from pictures and drawings of Aztec men, women and children how the Aztecs were skilled in many crafts to record their observations in sentences. 	<p>Give the children pictures of men, women and children, and also of priests, warriors and the emperor. Consider how status was shown in the type of dress worn. Ask the children to look carefully at the way items of dress were made and the materials used to make them.</p> <p>Link with literacy. During a shared writing time, write sentences about the observations the children have been able to make.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> observe closely the way Aztecs from different levels of society dressed begin to understand how Aztec costumes were made and the materials they were made from record in sentences their observations. 	<p>If possible, provide some examples of Mexican cotton clothes and weaving. These can be obtained from shops selling products from Latin America.</p>

Section 5: How can we re-create some of the things the Aztecs used?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to create their own versions of Aztec objects, such as items of dress, masks, codices, and musical instruments, using a variety of media • to write simple instructions about how to make one of these. 	<p>Provide the children with a variety of materials, <i>eg card, fabric and feathers</i>, and help them design and make their own versions of Aztec artefacts and items of dress. Discuss and teach the techniques and skills needed to make them.</p> <p>Link with literacy. Once they have made an object they could write simple instructions about how to make one of these.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make their own versions of Aztec objects and clothes • begin to appreciate the skills of Aztec craftsmen • write simple instructions about how to make one of these objects. 	<p>Pottery and weaving were handmade, and could be replicated in the classroom, following traditional Aztec styles and designs.</p> <p>The codices are easy to make, in the form of 'concertina' folding books. The children enjoy making up their own stories and writing them in 'picture writing'.</p>

Section 6: How useful are the objects and texts that survive from Aztec times?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the range of sources which have survived from the Aztec period • that what we know about the past is dependent on what has survived • to list what they have learned from the sources and say how the source is useful 	<p>Give the children a range of sources, <i>eg photographs of architecture, examples of Aztec art, codices, artefacts, Spanish texts.</i></p> <p>Ask the children to list what they can learn from these different sources and discuss why these sources have survived. Finally, ask the children to evaluate them.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask and answer questions about what has survived from Aztec times • begin to evaluate at a simple level a range of sources in terms of how much they reveal about the past • list what they have learned from the sources. 	<p>Some sources provide more direct information than others. Children could work in pairs to list what they can find out from a variety of artefacts and pictures of architecture.</p> <p>They might then discuss their findings and report back about which source they found more useful, giving simple reasons for their decisions.</p>

Section 7: What did the Aztecs believe about the world?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about Aztec pyramids and deities • to use sources of information in ways which go beyond simple observation • to write labels and captions based on their own research. 	<p>Give the children information about Aztec beliefs, religious rites and gods.</p> <p>Link with ICT. Ask the children to select pictures of objects from books and the internet to provide evidence about Aztec beliefs.</p> <p>Ask them to draw the objects and label them showing what the object might tell us, <i>eg an idol - the Aztecs believed in many different gods.</i></p> <p>Link with literacy. Ask the children to create a museum by selecting pictures about Aztec beliefs and gods by producing interesting captions for the audience to read.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • select pictures about Aztec beliefs • create a museum display about Aztec beliefs and gods • write labels and captions based on their own research. 	<p>The issue of Aztec religious rites and practices will need to be handled sensitively, especially the use of illustrations in some books produced for children, which highlight this characteristic.</p>

Section 8: What happened to the Aztecs when the Spanish conquerors arrived?

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the Aztec defeat at the hands of the Spanish conquistadors • that poetry was used by the Aztecs to describe their feelings • to write descriptive words and phrases to describe their own feelings as they listen to the poems • to recreate the past using drama/role play. 	<p>Tell the children the story of the Spanish conquest and in particular, about the meeting between Cortes and Moctehozuma.</p> <p>Read the poem 'Flowers and songs of sorrow' to the children and ask them what it tells us about the feelings of the Aztecs at the time.</p> <p>Link with literacy. The children write down descriptive words and phrases to describe their own feelings.</p> <p>Ask the children to use drama/role play to recreate some of the scenes of the Aztec defeat using costumes and artefacts they produced earlier. They could also include extracts from the poem and music for effect.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the key events in the defeat of the Aztecs • begin to appreciate the usefulness of Aztec poetry for finding out about the past • write descriptive words and phrases • use drama/role play to recreate the past. 	<p>A writing frame or similar structural device could be used to help the children plan their dramas/role plays.</p>

Section 9: How sources and historical accounts can differ

Learning objectives	Possible teaching activities	Learning outcomes	Points to note
<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about differing interpretations of the conquest of the Aztecs • that historical accounts can be based on different views. 	<p>Give each half of the class a short extract to read and discuss: one taken from an Aztec account of the conquest and the other an extract from a Spanish account.</p> <p>Links with literacy. Ask the children to note the key points in each account and then report back to the class.</p> <p>Discuss the different views of the conquest and how historians' accounts can differ depending on the sources they use.</p>	<p>Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read and discuss different interpretations of a past event in Aztec times • note key points from each account • infer different points of view that can be derived from sources on the conquest of the Aztecs. 	<p>There is a very useful and close link here between literacy objectives about fact and opinion and history objectives about interpretation.</p> <p>These links can be used to good effect when comparing different versions of the same event.</p>