

Growing Up in Meso-America

Grade Level: 5th Grade: World History

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Length of Unit: 5 Lessons: 30 Days

I. ABSTRACT

This is a Social Studies unit that falls under the Core Knowledge category of World History. The focus of this unit is the early Meso-American tribes of the Maya, Aztecs and Incas. The unit covers topics outlined in the Core Sequence for fifth grade. There are seven lessons to this unit on topics that relate to the Meso-American civilizations. The unit takes approximately 1 month to cover, but extra time may be needed to adequately plan the culminating activity, which consists of a role-playing simulated Mayan/Aztec market scenario.

II. OVERVIEW

A. Concept Objectives:

1. Students will gain knowledge of the Meso-American civilizations and their influence on modern societies.
2. Students will understand the complex nature of a given culture, how religious beliefs play a role in a society's development and actions, and how a culture's success depends on their natural resources, technological development and location.

B. Core Knowledge Content:

1. World History: Meso-American Civilizations
2. Geography: Central America & South America
 - a. Andes Mountains
 - b. Amazon River
3. Maya, Inca and Aztec Civilizations
 - a. The Maya:
 - 1) Lived in southern Mexico and parts of Central America.
 - 2) Had a complex social structure.
 - 3) Developed a system of hieroglyphic writing.
 - 4) Were accomplished astronomers, mathematicians and artists.
 - b. The Aztecs:
 - 1) Were a warrior culture and occupied most of central Mexico.
 - 2) Crafted massive temples and aqueducts.
 - 3) Practiced human sacrifice
 - c. The Incas:
 - 1) Ruled an empire stretching along the Pacific coast of South America.
 - 2) Built great cities in the Andes Mountains
 - 3) Had a well developed road system.

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- A. For Teachers: To teach this unit effectively, the teacher should have a broad overview of the three cultures. This is best accomplished by reading up on the cultures, watching videos and visiting websites dedicated to the Mayas, Aztecs and the Incas. Listed below are some valuable resources any teacher will find helpful.
1. Step Into The Aztec & Maya Worlds (See listing in Resources) This book is an excellent resource for the teacher. It not only gives the teacher some knowledge of the two civilizations, but also provides the teacher with creative ideas and projects for exploration of the two cultures.

2. Create A Culture (See listing below) An excellent source in helping the teacher plan the Culminating activity to this unit. This book provides a framework for students to create a culture.
 3. Aztec, Inca & Maya Eyewitness Books (See listing below) An excellent resources for photographs and illustrations of artifacts from all three cultures. Gives a simplistic, easy to follow overview of topics which are covered in the unit.
 4. Prior Core Knowledge Unit on Meso-Americans can be found at:
<http://www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/resrcs/lessons/5AZTEC.htm>
- B. Students: Prior knowledge:
1. Students should already have a broad base of knowledge about the Mayas, Aztecs and Incas from their exploration of the subject in the 1st grade Core Sequence on World History.

IV. RESOURCES

A. Book Resources:

- A Coloring Book of Incas, Aztecs & Mayas. Santa Barbara , CA: Bellerophon Books: 1998
 Baquendano, Elizabeth. Aztec, Inca & Maya Eyewitness Books. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993. ISBN 0-679-83883-X
- Macdonald, Fiona. Step Into The Aztec & Maya Worlds. New York: LorenzBooks/Anness Publishing, 1998. ISBN 1-85967-763-0
- Nordgaarden, Carol. Create A Culture. Santa Barbara, CA: The Learning Works, 1995. ISBN 0-88160-240-X
- Wood, Marion. Growing Up In Aztec Times. USA: Troll, 1994. ISBN 0- 8167-2723-6
- World Book, Encyclopedia. Aztecs. Chicago, Ill: World book Inc., 1998. ISBN 0-7166-7249-9 (This is a CD-Rom and Book)

B. Online Resources:

1. Maya:
 - a. http://www.op.net/~uarts/munoz/social_life.html
 - b. <http://library.advanced.org/11577/>
 - c. <http://www.totw.com/valleystream/mayans.htm>
 - d. <http://www.halfmoon.org>
 - e. <http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/4273/tindex0.htm>
 - f. <http://shl.ucsd.edu/archaeology/mayas.html>
2. Aztecs:
 - a. <http://luther.ci.burbank.ca.us/~luther/azttees/azlearn.html>
 - b. <http://schools.ci.burbank.ca.us/~luther/azt/alexis/azriseqz.html>
 - c. <http://aztecs.cjb.net/>
 - d. <http://scrtec.org/tracks/t00849.html>
3. Incas:
 - a. <http://www.sscf.ucsb.edu/~ogburn/inca>
 - b. http://www.windows.umich.edu/mythology/pachamama_earth.html
 - c. <http://shastahome.com/machu-picchu/disappear.html>

V. LESSONS

Lesson One: Great Civilizations: Meso-America Timeline

A. Daily Objective:

1. Lesson Content: the great civilizations of Ancient Mexico
2. Concept Objectives:
 - a. Students will gain knowledge of the Meso-American civilizations and their influences on modern societies.

- b. Students will understand the complex nature of given culture, how religious beliefs play a role in a society's development and actions, and how a culture's success depends on their natural resources, technological development and location.
 - 3. Skill Objectives:
 - c. create a timeline
 - d. research and identify
- B. Materials:
 - 1. Map of Central America.
 - 2. Books on the Aztecs, Incas and Mayas (to be used as reference and for visual aids)
 - 3. Internet Access
 - 4. Encyclopedias
 - 5. String
 - 6. index cards
 - 7. markers
- C. Key Vocabulary:
 - 1. Maya
 - 2. Aztec
 - 3. Inca
 - 4. Central America
 - 5. culture
- D. Procedure/Activities:
 - 1. Spend one day reviewing each Meso-American Culture. Discuss with students the major accomplishments of each culture. Show students on a map the region of Central America where each culture lived.
 - 2. Talk about the three main periods of Meso-American history: Preclassic: (2000 B.C- A.D. 250) The Olmecs were in power. Classic: (A.D.250-900) The rise of the Maya. Postclassic: (A.D. 900-1500) The Toltecs and the Aztecs rule.
 - 3. Discuss the similarities and the differences between each tribe. They all worshipped the same gods, had a 260 day calendar, built large cities, practiced human sacrifice etc.
 - 4. Use the World Book Encyclopedia CD-Rom. With the class, click on the timeline history area and review with the students. Use the book to augment computer information. Make sure specific battles are noted.
 - 5. Activity: Make a classroom timeline. Divide students into three groups, one group for each era of Meso-American history. Have groups research their time period and write important milestones for their era on index cards to be placed on the timeline. When timeline is finished, review the important dates in Meso-American history.
- E. Evaluation and Assessment
 - 1. Play a trivia game asking students information from their timeline.

Lesson Two: Religious Beliefs

- A. Daily Objectives:
 - 1. Lesson Content: the religious beliefs of the Meso-American tribes
 - 2. Concept Objectives:
 - a. Students will gain knowledge of the Meso-American civilizations and their influences.
 - b. Students will understand the complex nature of given culture, how religious beliefs play a role in a society's development and actions, and how a culture's success depends on their natural resources, technological development and location.
 - 3. Skill Objectives:
 - a. identify and research
 - b. prepare a report

- B. Materials:
 - 1. Overhead transparencies of various God and Goddesses (See coloring book resource)
 - 2. Pictures of Meso-American temples, artifacts
 - 3. clay & modeling tools
- C. Key Vocabulary:
 - 1. god
 - 2. goddess
 - 3. temple
 - 4. priest
 - 5. sacrifice
 - 6. shrine
- D. Procedures/Activities:
 - 1. Using the overhead transparencies, discuss with students the various types of Gods and Goddesses found in Meso-American civilizations. Point out that most Gods and Goddesses were taken from nature.
 - 2. Discuss with students the role of the Temple Priest in religious ceremonies and sacrifices.
 - 3. Show the students some pictures of Meso-American ruins. A video of the ruins may be good to use as well.
 - 4. Talk about the practice of sacrificing human life in exchange for favors from the gods.
 - 5. Discuss with students various myths, legends and omens.
 - 6. Clay God: Have students pick a Meso-American God or Goddess and have them make a statue out of clay of their God or Goddess. Have the students research their God or Goddess on the Internet and prepare a small report.
 - 7. Display the report and the God/Goddess around the room. These statues will then become sale items at the Meso-American Market Day.
- E. Evaluation and Assessment:
 - 1. Using the clay figures and research the students have done, make up a “ matching “ test where the student matches the god/goddess statue to the research information on that statue.
 - 2. Writing activity: Have students pick a particular god or goddess and write about why the feel that particular god/goddess was important to Meso-American culture.

Lesson Three: Daily Life (This lesson spans several days.)

- A. Daily Objectives:
 - 1. Lesson Content: the family life of the Meso-American tribes
 - 2. Concept Objectives:
 - a. Students will gain knowledge of the Meso-American civilizations and their influences .
 - b. Students will understand the complex nature of given culture, how religious beliefs play a role in a society’s development and actions, and how a culture’s success depends on their natural resources, technological development and location.
 - 3. Skill Objectives:
 - a. re-create drawings
 - b. write about an experience
 - c. compare and contrast
- B. Materials
 - 1. Books on Meso-American culture
 - 2. Corn Flour
 - 3. Butter

4. Oil
5. Electric Fry Pan
6. Clay
7. Paper Plates
8. Tissue Paper Streamers
9. Colored Feathers
10. Glue
11. Semi-sweet chocolate
12. Milk
13. String
14. Construction paper
15. Brown & white paint
16. Copy of 20 Aztec day symbols for each student

C. Key Vocabulary

D. Procedures and Activities:

1. Using books, videos or CD-Roms about Meso-American culture, discuss with students what daily life was like for the Meso-Americans. Be sure to include: food, family roles, hunting and gathering, housing, clothing etc. Discuss one or two aspects a day and do accompanying projects.
2. Day 1: Discuss with students the importance of families to the Meso-American culture. Talk about family roles. Talk about arranged marriages.
3. Day 2: Discuss with students the types of food that Meso-American tribes ate. Discuss how they got this food (hunting and gathering, farming). Point out that women traditionally cooked the food and the men provided it. **Activity:** Have the girls in the family groups make tortillas while the boys in the families make war shields.(See Appendix A for tortilla recipe) The boys will fashion shields out of paper plates, feathers and glue. Have boys use pictures of Animal Gods for the center of their shields. Attach feathers and streamers to bottom of shields. (Keep shields to sell at Market Day) Discuss the importance of the cocoa bean in trade, in religious ceremonies and as a beverage.(You can make hot cocoa by melting semi-sweet chocolate, adding milk, and boiling.)
4. Day 3: Discuss the function of the family home with the students. Homes were not just safe places, but places to work ,too. Talk about what types of houses Meso-American folk lived in. Discuss furniture and sleeping quarters. Talk about the different chores Meso-American women had around the house. **Activity:** Make clay pots. Have students use paperclips to etch decorations into their pots.
5. Day 4: Discuss with students the medicinal practices of the Meso-Americans. Meso-American medicine was a mixture of herbalism, religion, magic, and first aid. Read some of the remedies used by Meso-Americans to cure common ailments out loud to the students, for example, chiles and salt were mixed to cure tooth aches. **Activity:** Have students come up with their own recipes for curing an illness. Share the recipes with the class.
6. Day 5: Show students pictures of Meso-American fashions. Talk about the use of gold and jewelry by nobles. Discuss with students the Maya practice of binding their babies heads to flatten them and in encouraging their children to grow up cross eyed by hanging something between the eyes of babies. **Activity:** Have students design a pendant based on a Meso-American god or goddess. Make the pendant out of construction paper and string
7. Day 6: Sports and Games: Discuss with students the importance of games in Meso-American culture. Show students pictures of the ball court ruins of the Maya. **Activity:**

- Make a patolli board (See Appendix B for instructions) Use board on Market Day.
8. Time, Sun and Stars: Discuss with students the calendar of Meso-American culture. The calendar was broken into 260 days and 13 cycles of 20 days each. Farmers used a calendar with 360 days. The 5 extra days were unlucky days. Festivals were calculated on 584 day calendars. **Activity:** Make a sun stone. (See Appendix C for instructions)
 9. Scholars and Scribes: Discuss with the students that the Maya were the only Native American tribe to use a complete system of writing. The Aztecs had a system too, but it was much simpler. Both systems used pictures. The Aztec and Mayan's called their encyclopedias codices or singular codex. **Activity:** Create a codex using the codex drawings found in books about Meso-Americans. Show students drawings from codices and have them re-create these drawings in their own codex book. Keep the books to sell at Market Day.
- E. Evaluation and Assessment
1. Have students write about their experiences being in a family situation. Have students share their thoughts with the rest of the class. Have students compare their real life family situations to that of the Meso-Americans.

Lesson Four: Merchants, Markets and Crafts

- A. Daily Objective:
1. Lesson Content: the Meso-American market system
 2. Concept Objectives:
 - a. Students will gain knowledge of the Meso-American civilizations and their influences.
 - b. Students will understand the complex nature of given culture, how religious beliefs play a role in a society's development and actions, and how a culture's success depends on their natural resources, technological development and location.
 3. Skill Objectives:
 - a. create a mosaic mask
 - b. identify items used for bartering
 - c. identify the components of a traditional Meso-American market
- B. Materials:
1. Balloons
 2. Paper mache materials
 3. Masking tape
 4. Scissors
 5. Paint
 6. Self-drying clay
 7. Blue construction paper
- C. Key Vocabulary
- D. Procedures and Activities:
1. Use the World Book Encyclopedia CD-Rom to guide a discussion on the Meso-American markets, merchants and crafts. If you do not have this CD, use a variety of resources like the Internet and books to guide students' learning.
 2. Discuss with students what a traditional Meso-American market place is like. Talk about the different types of people found in a market place. Discuss the roles of the Great Speaker (Aztec), the merchants, farmers, priests, warriors, slaves etc.
 3. Define the term barter. Talk about the items the Meso-Americans used for bartering (feathers, cocoa beans, gold-dust).
 4. Talk about the different types of crafts found in the marketplaces. Discuss with students the types of craftworkers found in Meso-American cultures. Show students pictures of

- different Meso-American crafts.
5. **Activity:** Make a mosaic mask. (See Appendix D) Keep masks for sale at Market Day.
- E. Evaluation and Assessment
1. Students will be assessed on how they demonstrate their knowledge of the Meso-American culture on Market Day.

Lesson Five The Order of Things: Social Structure of Meso-America

- A. Daily Objective:
1. Lesson Content: the social structure of the Meso-American culture
 2. Concept Objectives:
 - a. Students will gain knowledge of the Meso-American civilizations and their influences.
 - b. Students will understand the complex nature of given culture, how religious beliefs play a role in a society's development and actions, and how a culture's success depends on their natural resources, technological development and location.
 3. Skill Objectives:
 - a. write a paragraph
 - b. identify the role of the military in the Meso-American culture
 - c. identify the laws that governed the Meso-American culture
- B. Materials:
1. Construction paper
 2. Dry Beans (for currency)
 3. Markers
 4. Create A Culture Book (optional)
 5. Any book on Meso-American culture
- C. Key Vocabulary
- D. Procedures and Activities
1. Using a book on Meso-American culture, guide students in a discussion on the social structure of Meso-America. Point out the levels of class structure. Talk about the roles each group (nobility, priests, merchants, farmers etc.) plays in society. Be sure to discuss the role of women in Meso-American culture.
 2. Discuss with students the laws that governed Meso-American societies and rituals.
 3. Discuss with students the role of the military in Meso-American culture.
 4. Show students pictures or a video on Meso-American culture.
 5. **Activity:** Create a simulated Meso-American culture. Assign roles to students. Elect a leader. Have students decide what the currency will be, how much taxes they will pay, who will be responsible for paying collecting etc. Have students decide what goods and services will be worth. Use the "Create a Culture" book to help guide students in their exploration. Spend a week designing the culture and then set aside a 1/2 hour each day for another week to run through the simulation.
- E. Evaluation and Assessment
1. Have students write a paragraph about their experience in the role playing simulation. Have students share their impressions with the class.

VI. CULMINATING ACTIVITY:

Using what they have learned in the unit, students will create a Meso-American market day for the lower grades to enjoy. This market day should try its best to replicate a real market day in Meso-America. The students should be assigned different roles for the market day. These roles should include a Great-Speaker, merchants, high-priest etc. Time should be made to allow students to

create crafts that they can “sell” during market day. The students should also create games similar to those that the Maya, Aztecs and Incas played for the market day participants to take part in and should set up craft activities for the younger students to make.. Have parents, PTA or Booster Clubs donate supplies, candy etc. that can be used as prizes for the games and as food goods for the merchants to sell. Some sample food items would be hot chocolate, nachos, tortillas and cheese etc.. Market day should be set up in a wide-open area like a cafeteria or playground for best results. In keeping with the Mayan and Aztec traditions, money should be in the form of beans. The Mayans and Aztecs used Cocoa beans, but due to the high cost and low availability of such beans, coffee beans or pinto beans can be used instead. Have students set up monetary amounts for their goods in advance, but tell them to leave open room for bartering with the younger students. You should block a 2-hour time frame for the market day activities: 25 minutes set up, 25 minutes clean up and the rest for the actual event. Allow time each day leading up to market day for students to work on posters, make crafts to sell, come up with simple costume ideas and to research information on Meso-American tribes. Part of this activity is for the students to teach the younger children interesting facts about Meso-Americans. Select guides to help the younger students to navigate the festivities. These guides should not only help the younger students get around, create projects, but should give them information on the history of the activities and projects they are taking part in.

VII. HANDOUTS/WORKSHEETS

See attached appendices A-D

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

See Resources

Appendix A- Growing Up in Meso-America: Tortilla recipe

8 oz of corn flower
1 tsp of salt
1 1/2 oz butter
1/2 cup of cold water

Directions:

- 1) Weigh out the ingredients
- 2) Mix the flour and salt together in a bowl. Rub the butter into the mixture with your fingers until it looks like bread crumbs. Pour in water.
- 3) Use hands to mix all the ingredients together until you have a loose ball.
- 4) Knead dough for at least 10 minutes. Add flour if dough gets too sticky.
- 5) Divide dough into 12 balls.
- 6) Roll out on board with a rolling pin or flatten with hands.
- 7) Fry tortilla in pan. 1 minute per side.

Appendix B- Growing Up in Meso-America: Patolli Board Game



Directions:

- 1) On a piece of Butcher paper, draw a large cross shape.
- 2) Draw seven pairs of spaces along each arm. The third space from the end should be a double space. Paint triangles in it.
- 3) Draw 8 jaguar heads and 8 marigold flowers on different colored paper. Cut them out. Paint the face of the sun god in the center of the board.
- 4) Stick the jaguars and the marigolds around the board randomly. Paint a blue circle at the end of one arm and a crown at the opposite end. Repeat in Green.
- 5) Make dice by painting dots on the center of 5 dried beans. Make two markers: 1 green and 1 blue

Game Instructions:

Start each marker on the circle of the same color. The goal is to move your marker to the crown of the same color and back again. You lose a turn if you land on a jaguar and get an extra turn if you land on a marigold.

Appendix C- Growing Up in Meso-America: Sun Stone (Drying process takes a few days)

Materials: Scissors, cardboard, self-drying clay, modeling tool, rolling pin, masking tape, glue, brown paint, white paint, paintbrushes.

Directions:

- 1) Cut a 10 inch in diameter circle out of cardboard. Roll out clay and cut a matching circle. Place the clay circle on the cardboard one.
- 2) With a modeling tool, mark a small circle in the center of the clay circle. Use the roll of masking tape as a guide. Do not cut through the clay.
- 3) Carve the sun god's eyes, mouth, teeth and earrings. You can use the real Aztec sun stone as a guide.
- 4) Roll out more clay and cut out some sun's rays, a tongue and eyebrows. Glue them to the clay circle. smooth the edges with water and let dry.
- 5) Copy the 20 Aztec symbols for calendar days onto squares of thin cardboard. The squares should be no bigger than 3/4 of an in x 3/4 of an in. Cut out and paint brown.
- 6) Cover the clay circle with a thin coat of brown paint. Let it dry and then add a thin coat of white paint to make the circle look like stone.
- 7) Glue the cardboard symbols evenly around the edge of the inner clay circle. Paint the sun stone with a thin layer of glue to seal and varnish it.

Appendix D - Growing Up in Meso-America: Mosaic Mask

Materials: balloons, Vaseline, newspaper, paper mache mixture, paint brush, scissors, glue, paints, self-drying clay, masking tape, cardboard, plaster paste

Directions:

- 1) Inflate the balloon to the size of your head. Cover with Vaseline. Soak strips of newspaper in the paper mache mixture and add five layers to the front end of the balloon.
- 2) Once dry, pop the balloon. Draw a mask shape on to the paper mache and cut it out. Use clay to add eyes and a nose. Cover the edges with masking tape. Let dry.
- 3) Mix white and blue paint to create three different shades of blue. Paint one sheet of cardboard with each. Cut the cardboard into little squares.
- 4) Cover the mask except the eyes and the mouth with plaster paste. Press cardboard squares into paste, gluing those that don't stick.
- 5) Paint the eyes with black and white paint. Cut out the teeth from white cardboard and carefully glue into position. Leave the mask in a warm place to dry.
- 6) Coat the whole mask with a thin white covering of glue to seal the mask.