Maya, Aztec, and Inca Civilizations
Mesoamerica

Mesoamerica = Mexico & Central America
Mesoamerica

- Some of the greatest civilizations in the Americas developed in Mesoamerica.

- The Maya and Aztec lived in the Mesoamerican region.
How did people first get to the Americas?

- Theory #1 = **Bering land bridge**

Humans migrated into North America from Asia by crossing over a land bridge between Alaska and Siberia...
How did people first get to the Americas?

- Theory #2 = Coastal migration

Humans migrated to the Americas by crossing the seas, most likely the Pacific Ocean, and settling along the western coasts of the Americas...
Where did the ancient Maya live?

- The **Maya** settled on the Yucatan Peninsula in central America.
Maya Political Structure

- The Maya were NOT AN EMPIRE and NOT UNITED politically...

- Maya civilization was made up of city-states

- Each city-state had its own ruler
Maya Architecture

- built towering temples and palaces

- Atop the temples, priests performed religious ceremonies and sacrifices while people watched from the plazas below

- Ceremonial platforms, temples, pyramids, observatories, ball courts all built by the Maya
Maya Religion

- The Maya were polytheistic
- The Maya practiced human sacrifice
The Maya created a writing system of hieroglyphics.
Advances in learning

- The Maya created a set of numerals
- Also developed a 365-day calendar
What happened to the Maya?

- The Maya abandoned many of their cities around 900 A.D.

- Archaeologists DO NOT KNOW WHY Maya civilization declined

- Theory: Around 900 A.D. there was a severe drought. Many died due to starvation others migrated away.
Maya today

...more than 2 million Maya people live in Guatemala and southern Mexico today.
This National Geographic video shows the Mayan Pyramids. It is part of the series Lost Temples and it tries to give an answer to the question "Why did the Maya abandon their magnificent city of Chichen Itza?" There is reference to Maya culture.
Where did the Aztecs live?

The Aztecs lived in what is known as the Valley of Mexico in central Mexico.
Tenochtitlan

- **Tenochtitlan** was the capital city of the Aztec Empire.
The gods told the Aztecs to search for an eagle holding a snake in its beak perched atop a cactus. This is where they were to build their capital city. The Aztecs saw this sign on a swampy island in lake Texcoco.
Legend of Tenochtitlan
How did the Aztecs build a city in the center of a lake?

- Tenochtitlan was built on an island.
- It was connected to the mainland by causeways leading north, south, and west of the city.
- The city was interlaced with a series of canals, so that all sections of the city could be visited either on foot or by canoe.
Tenochtitlan

- Today, Tenochtitlan is Mexico City
The Aztecs created an empire through conquest.

Conquered people and local rulers had to pay tribute to the Aztecs.

The Aztecs had an emperor.

*The Aztec Emperor’s main job was to lead in war.*
Religion & Mythology

- Aztecs were polytheistic
- Huitzilopochtli was the main Aztec god.
- The Aztecs built massive temples and pyramids dedicated to their gods.
Religion & Mythology

Pyramid of the Sun

Pyramid of the Moon
Human Sacrifice

- Human sacrifice was a common practice of the Aztecs.

- For the reconsecration of Great Pyramid of Tenochtitlan in 1487, the Aztecs reported that they sacrificed 84,400 prisoners over the course of four days.

- To give the sun strength to rise each day, human sacrifices were offered.
What happened to the Aztecs?

- Spanish conquistadors led by Hernan Cortes conquered Tenochtitlan and defeated the Aztecs in 1521.
Aztec Video Clips

“Engineering An Empire”

“What the Ancients Did For Us”
Inca
Where did the Inca live?

- The Inca controlled an empire in the **Andes Mountain** region of South America.
The Sapa Inca (emperor) had absolute power.

The emperor claimed to be the son of the sun.

The emperor was also the empire’s religious leader.

The empire was divided into four regions with the capital at Cuzco.
Uniting the Empire

- The Inca built a massive road network through mountains and across rivers and gorges.
The Inca constructed stone temples without using mortars yet the stones fit together so well that a knife would not fit between the stones.
Religion

- The Inca were polytheistic.
- The primary god was **Inti**, the sun god.
Religion

- Inca believed in **reincarnation**.

- The Inca practiced **cranial deformation**.
  - They achieved this by wrapping tight cloth straps around the heads of newborns to alter the shape of their soft skulls into a cone-like shape.
Medical Advances

- The Inca performed successful skull surgery.
- The Inca also used medicines to make patients unconscious during surgery.
Organization

- Each family in a community was assigned a specific job.

- Government officials arranged marriages.

- The government organized mandatory public service building projects.
What happened to the Inca?

- Civil war in the empire broke out...

AND

- Smallpox spread, killing much of the Inca...
Fall of the Inca

- BUT ultimately, it was Spanish conquistadors led by **Francisco Pizarro** that brought about the fall of the Inca Empire.
Inca Video Clip