



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1992 Volume II: Writing and Re-writings of the Discovery and Conquest of America

The Indians' Discovery of Columbus

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The history of the Aztecs according to George C. Vaillant in his book, *Aztecs of Mexico: Origin. Rise and Fall of the Aztec Nation*, is a "synopsis of the rise of Indian civilization and its doom" (2). The purpose of this curriculum unit entitled, "The Indians' Discovery of Columbus", is to present the conquest of Mexico and the subsequent downfall of the Aztecs, not from a European standpoint but rather from the perspective of the Aztecs themselves. By presenting the conquest in terms of the "tragic loss that resulted from the destruction of indigenous culture" (León-Portilla xv), it is hoped that we may increase our awareness of how essential it is to our own American society that we seek to preserve its multi-cultural make-up.

The suggestive title I have chosen is not an actual summation of my unit contents, as will be readily apparent: My main focus, in fact, is on Hernando Cortés and the conquest of Mexico as viewed by the Aztecs. Rather, "The Indians' Discovery of Columbus" is indicative of an approach to the study of history, viewing major historical events such as those of the New World explorations and conquests from a different perspective, thus departing from the traditional Euro-centric view. It is by examining events from the perspective of the Indians that we gain real insight into the tremendous culture clash that occurred in the New World and that we can judge events more for their impact on those conquered.

I wish to begin my unit with Christopher Columbus, whose four voyages planted the first seeds of the Spanish Empire in America and inspired other explorers to venture into new frontiers. From this introductory overview we will move to a more detailed study of Hernando Cortés whose conquest of Mexico and subjugation of the Aztec people inaugurated three centuries of Imperial Spanish domination in Central America. The story of the conquest will be presented from the 'Indian' point of view, allowing us to examine various events and their implications from a different perspective. We will take a look at the conflict that resulted between these two advanced and positive civilizations, focusing on one salient institution of Aztec society: *religion* on which foundation the whole civilization could be said to have been built. We will examine the basic tenets and practices of the Aztec religion and compare that with the Spaniards' perception of and response to them in order to more clearly demonstrate the real 'culture clash' that occurred. The ultimate impact of the Spanish conquest of Mexico will be examined with a view to gaining a greater understanding of how such a fascinating and advanced culture as the Aztec could be so decisively destroyed in the height of its apparent strength.

My curriculum unit will be designed as the feature element of a third-grade Social Studies program, will cover a 4 to 8 week time period, and will incorporate map, critical reading, creative writing and role-playing-skills. The main objectives of this unit are:

1. To compare 15th-century European notions of the world (its make-up and size) with what we know today, incorporating basic map-skills practice. In this context, then, we can explore the reasons why the conquistadors came to the New World.
2. To acquire a fuller and deeper understanding of the meaning of discovery (= conquest) by contrasting it with the corollary notion of 'being discovered' (= being conquered). In other words, —to study the conquest of Mexico from the Aztecs' point of view.
3. To study the nature of the confrontation between the Old World and the New World civilizations. In particular, to develop an appreciation of the Aztec culture, notably their religion.
4. To cultivate a rudimentary feeling for the complex cause effect relationship of historical events.

This curriculum unit will be divided into four sections:

Chapter I — A look at 15th-century Europe and the factors influencing men like Columbus to venture into the New World

Chapter II — A study of Hernando Cortés and his times, from which a representative portrait of the conquistador will emerge.

Chapter III — A narrative of the conquest of Mexico from the Aztecs' point of view.

Chapter IV — An examination of the culture clash that ensued between the Spaniards and the Aztecs, focusing on the Aztec religion to demonstrate this contrast.

Chapter I We will begin with a look at how the world was viewed by fifteenth-century Europe. It is important to note that at that time, Italy, Germany, and eastern Europe were still in the throws of 'Balkanization' and serfdom. The fact that Spain Portugal, France and England were the only distinct polities had significant bearing on the later founding of what would become the great overseas empires.

By the 1400's, most educated Europeans were vaguely aware that the earth was round, but influenced by the second-century geographer, Ptolemy, they still assumed that the only continents that existed were Europe, Africa and Asia (which they called the Indies), and that there was one great 'Ocean Sea'. What was missing from Ptolemy's world were the Americas and the huge Pacific Ocean.

There was increasing interest in finding sea-routes circumnavigating Africa and, then, heading eastward to the Indies for the gold, jewels, silk and spices that were known to be in such abundance. There existed between Portugal and Castile a long rivalry along the African coast and in the Atlantic. The small Portuguese nation, limited by how much money it could raise for expeditions to find new sea trade-routes to Asia, had to confine itself to exploration around the Cape of Good Hope rather than venturing westward across the Atlantic, still referred to at that time by its Arabic name, the 'Sea of Darkness'. Many a sailor was highly discouraged by the tales of this body's profound darkness, high waves, dangerous winds, many storms and frightening monsters

that inhabited it, and they contented themselves with sailing resolutely close to the coasts.

Columbus was influenced both by Ptolemy's view of the world and by that of the famous Italian astronomer, Toscanelli. He believed that the shortest and easiest way to reach the Indies would be to sail west across a relatively narrow Atlantic Ocean. He never imagined that, in fact, a whole continent lay between Europe and Asia! Approaching first John II of Portugal in 1483 or early 1484, Columbus claimed that he could find Cipangu (Japan) and India by sailing west. The Portuguese king rejected his proposal then, and again, four years later (after Bartolomeu Dias discovered an eastern route around Africa, thus opening the eastern route to India). It is important to note that, as early as 1480, Columbus had broached his plan to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, but they, like the Portuguese) did not share his belief in a comparatively short Atlantic crossing, and in 1487 Columbus was again rebuffed.

It was only in 1492 that the Spanish monarchs finally agreed to sponsor his expedition. This was because it was only early in that year that the last of the Moorish rulers Boabdil, surrendered Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella. When Spain finally overcame this last stronghold of the Moors (whose occupation of Andalusia had lasted some 700 years), it could then focus its attention on increasing its commerce with other nations. It was Queen Isabella in particular, who was receptive to Columbus's plan and agreed to finance his enterprise, to grant him the titles he requested along with one-tenth of all revenues from his discoveries.

Columbus's obsession to reach the land of spices was not only a result of his eagerness to test out his geographical speculations, but was also greatly determined by his religious zeal. His plan, as presented to the Spanish monarchs, included using revenues gained from his voyage to the Indies to finance the recovery of Jerusalem from the Moors. He firmly believed that his mission to navigate the Atlantic Ocean was supported by God, and that he was, indeed, empowered by the Holy Spirit to set out and find this earthly paradise.

As a result of his four voyages from Spain and back, he discovered and explored the Bahamas and the Greater Antilles, encountered the great South American land-mass, and coasted the Caribbean side of the Isthmus of Panama, all the time believing that the Indies were 'Asia' and that he had reached the earthly paradise upon landing on the coast of South America .

We begin with Columbus because it was his four voyages which inspired other explorers to venture into new frontiers, thus playing a major role in the subsequent colonization of the New World. One of the greatest of these explorers was Hernando Cortés.

Chapter II What was viewed by the Europeans as a discovery of new territory was, from the point of view of the native inhabitants of these lands, an *invasion* . We will now move on to a more in-depth study of Hernando Cortés and the conquest of Mexico, with the purpose of gaining a greater appreciation of these two differing perspectives.

Hernando Cortés the quintessential 'Quattrocento man'. was a true figure of his times, and by studying him a representative portrait of the conquistador (conqueror) will emerge. Cortés was born in 1485 and grew up in the harsh and poor province of Extremadura, an environment that would aptly prepare him in many ways for the hot and often unbearable climate of Mexico, where he sought to find his fortune. He grew up in a part of the world accustomed to both military organization and tradition. The young men adopted a very glorious image of war, considering it an ideal way to test one's manhood .

Cortés was born at a time when the medieval 'Spains' were giving way to a new Spain. In 1469 the marriage of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella unified the nation under the banners of Castile and Aragon, not only

forging a political and religious unity but also a new national spirit and image. These monarchs also built an army which would later become the most powerful one in Europe. As already noted, the Spanish people(s) had struggled against foreign invaders, the Moors, for some seven centuries. This age-old struggle, The Reconquista, “had shaped a warrior people, created a dominant language, Castilian, and fostered ardent Catholicism” (Lyon 30). The Spanish people had had to match Muslim religious ‘fanaticism’ with a brand of their own, —a fact often offered as explanation for the notorious nationalistic and warlike character of Catholicism of the type which Cortés was to bring with him to Mexico.

After two years at university studying law, Cortés, restless and dissatisfied, decided to seek his fortune in the New Worlds where, as in the case of many conquistadors, he would be able to live as a nobleman, a lord of serfs and villages, while in the Old World there would be no such opportunities (White 37). It was in 1504 that Cortés, barely nineteen years old, sailed for the New World.

The motives of the conquistadors were, of course, complex, —love of adventure, penetrating new frontiers, desire for fame and fortune (particularly in gold), the service of God, king and country. As White describes in his book, *Cortés and the Downfall of the Aztec Empire* , “entire nations would be swept away in order to assuage that headlong drive towards wealth and success” (38). The conquistadors identified themselves with the heroes of antiquity, such as Caesar and Hannibal. They were quite willing to fight, but they expected a compensation for their efforts, either in the form of gold or of an entitlement. In competition with the Portuguese to find a western route to the East, they ultimately lost the race to Magellan, but their reward was to be the great empire they founded in Central America .

Influenced by the Spanish Inquisition, Cortés and his men firmly believed it was their Christian duty to invade and annex the ‘Indies’ in order to bring ‘heathen souls’ to God. His conquest of Mexico was often portrayed as ‘the last of the Crusades’ .

In 1518, Cortés’s great opportunity came in the form of a proposition offered to him by Diego Velázquez to command a third expedition to the mainland (Mexico). He had previously joined Velázquez in the conquest of Cuba. What particularly appealed to Cortés was the opportunity to *command* an expedition, as he did not wish to serve in a subordinate position. It was this fierce independence which Velázquez later feared in Cortés, and, regretting the commission he had given to him, Velázquez actively tried to have it rescinded, but in vain. Carefully equipping the expedition (and actually going bankrupt in the process) with some six hundred men, 16 horses and 10 field pieces, Cortés set sail for Mexico.

Chapter III We might begin our study of the conquest with a consideration of the very interesting issue of the eight ‘bad omens’ recorded by the Aztecs themselves (fully described in *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* which was edited by Miguel Leon-Portilla) that predicted the coming of the invaders.

Ten years before the arrival of the Spaniards a series of particular phenomena closely succeeded each other in occurrence and were witnessed by many Indians. First, a column of fire, described as a flaming ear of corn, was seen at midnight throughout a full year. Second, the temple of Huitzilpochtli was destroyed by a sudden fire while the third bad omen took the form of the temple of Xiuhtecuhtli being destroyed by lightning strangely unaccompanied by thunder. The fourth sign was the sighting by day of a comet, and for the fifth, sudden waves came up on the Lake of Taxcoco. When many people heard a woman crying night after night, “My children, we must flee far away from this city” and “My children, where shall I take you?” this was taken as a sixth omen. Perhaps most evil of all was the seventh omen in which a bird with a mirror on its head reflecting the heavens was discovered. It was said that when Montezuma, to whom this strange bird was

brought, peered into the mirror for a second time, a party of armed men could be seen. The eighth sign took the form of monsters, two-headed men, who walked the city streets but when brought to Montezuma, disappeared as soon as he saw them.

These omens greatly affected the morale of the Aztec people and made them particularly receptive and susceptible to the rumors of coming invaders. According to White, the Aztecs, including their leader, Montezuma, felt a real terror of the Spanish invaders at their shores. Their actions were tempered by their expectation that some form of divine punishment was inevitably to befall them, and that their empire was now “overripe” and destined to fall (197).

In fact, the Aztecs regarded Cortés and his men as *desires* as incarnations of Quetzalcoatl and other gods who were fulfilling an old vow to return from over the sea. The conquistadors with their fierce mastiffs, horses, canons, muskets and crossbows certainly must have presented quite a forbidding sight to the Aztecs, who had never seen such animals or weaponry before.

Despite all of their ‘supernatural’ advantages, it quickly became apparent that the Spaniards were vulnerable to Indian attacks. Both the soldiers and their strange animals could be injured and killed. What is remarkable is the fact that, later, even after showing themselves to be mortal, the Spaniards were still treated with extreme deference by the Aztecs, —especially Montezuma. This treatment is ably described by Vaillant, who explains how Montezuma tried on numerous occasions to be conciliatory with the Spanish, bribing them with gifts and asking them to leave and go back where they came from. The question is, then, —why did the Aztecs opt for this approach rather than descend upon their conquerors en masse and annihilate them? The conquistadors, Vaillant explains, were not themselves gods but were symbols of “unearthly forces bent on establishing a new social order” (244). It was the *supernatural* quality of the Spanish which so affected the Aztecs’ attitude toward them.

Another factor working to the disadvantage of the Aztecs was their methods of attack warfare which proved so ineffective against the varied maneuverings of a Spanish force well-drilled in tried military tactics. Whereas the Aztecs waged war in a very ceremonial way, European tactics were founded on realistic calculations. As Frances F. Berdan in his book, *The Aztecs* . describes, the Aztecs used only a small part of their forces to fight any given battle, seeking to capture enemies for later human sacrifice, thus often taking daring risks. The Spaniards, in contrast, amassed vast numbers that overwhelmed the Aztec forces, attacking without first parleying. Because their object was to defeat rather than capture, in fighting hand-to-hand the Spaniards struck to kill (98).

Also unfortunate for the Aztecs was the fact that Cortés and his men arrived on their shores at the end of the summer when the various tribes of Mexico were busy harvesting their crops and could not be concerned with military affairs. Food for survival was uppermost on their minds. To complicate this and to hinder them further, the Aztec theocracy consisted of numerous independent city-states with different languages and economies. Many were in continuous revolt and in mutual distrust. There was no political unity joining them together in a true empire. The allegiance of various vassal states was often in question and, in the event, Montezuma was unable to secure the help of even one ally in his fight against the Spaniards. Moreover, the king had to depend on the consensus of the various clans before taking any action. Often criticized by historians for appearing indecisive and taking on an appeaser’s role with the Spaniards, it must be remembered that Montezuma was not an absolute monarch, and had no way of enforcing long-range diplomatic policies. He was “a tribal leader devoid of the constitutional rights of a European sovereign” (White 264).

Descriptions of the Aztecs’ valiant efforts in their fight against the Spanish invaders are many. Their defense

of the capital city, Tenochtitlan, under the leadership of the courageous Cuahtemoc, their new ruler, exemplifies “a heroic group action by individuals fighting for their lives” (Vaillant 264). But it was with the capture of Cuahtemoc that the Aztec resistance soon collapsed, and as an Aztec legend exclaims, on August 13, 1521, “the Mexicans were finished” (Vaillant 261).

It is interesting to note that the confrontation between the Spaniards and the Aztecs was one between two advanced and expansive cultures. Ironically, both nations had recently been unified and were confidently looking to extend their empires at the time of their fateful encounter.

The question often asked is how a meager force could have so completely subjugated some 25 million Aztec people. We have already mentioned the military advantage of using artillery, armor and horses, but they remain virtually insignificant when compared with the sheer numbers of warriors the Aztec empire had at its disposal. Stephan Thernstrom in his article entitled, “The Columbus Controversy” posits two factors playing a major role in the ultimate defeat of the Aztecs. One was the spread of such European diseases as smallpox, typhoid fever, mumps, measles and whooping cough, reaching epidemic proportions in the native population which had no hereditary immunity to these diseases. To their extreme dismay, their enemies, the white men, did not seem to be similarly affected. The second factor which worked in Cortés’s favor was the alliances he formed with such alienated tribes as the Tlaxcalans, who willingly took up arms against Montezuma’s forces and who viewed the Spaniards as “liberators who would free them from the chains of Aztec rule” (31). This expectation was, however, merely an illusion, as, later, all of the native Mexican tribes were to be subjugated to Spanish rule and suffer the same fate of permanently losing their ancient culture.

Mario Vargas Llosa in his article entitled, “Questions of Conquest”, offers another oft-cited explanation as to how such an advanced culture as the Aztec could be so decisively destroyed in the height of its apparent strength. According to this view, the pyramidal, ‘theocratic’ society of the Aztecs is essentially a totalitarian structure which demands that the individual serve unquestioningly in his prescribed role within the structure. Such “bee-hive” societies, Vargas Llosa argues could relatively easily be destroyed by depriving the people of their leaders, so that they are then left directionless, not knowing how to act (47).

Chapter IV In order to better appreciate the tremendous culture clash that occurred between the Spanish invaders and the Aztec inhabitants, let us now consider one of the most salient features of Aztec society, the institution of religion, both as it was! and as the Spaniards viewed it.

In less than one century the Aztecs had progressed from being mercenaries without any roots to the mightiest people in all of Mexico. What was the driving force which led the Indians to become real masters of a large part of Central America and to develop such an advanced civilization? According to Caso in his book, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun* , it was their unique religion (xv).

The Aztec religion grew out of the recognition and due regard for the many forces in nature which acted for good or for evil, and, stated simply, it constituted an attempt to control these forces (Vaillant 169). The Aztecs personalized the forces of nature as gods or goddesses, many of whom had quite distinct and defined attributes. The religion of the Aztecs, therefore, was polytheistic. They worshiped many gods: a rain god, a fire god, a god of the harvest and numerous others. Topmost in their pantheon was the fascinating hummingbird deity, Huitzilopochtli, whose favor could be won only through the sacrifice of human hearts.

Indeed, the primary occupation of the Aztec nation could be said to have been placating the gods. In the case of Huitzilopochtli, if he became displeased with his chosen people, the Aztecs, he would sap the strength of their soldiers, causing the empire’s collapse. War, thus, became a form of worship, a means of supplying their

war god with the sacrifices that he demanded.

It was this polytheistic nature of the Aztec religion, above all, which the Spaniards considered idolatrous and barbaric and which they sought to destroy. Whenever an Aztec temple was seized, the idols were always toppled and replaced with statues of the Virgin Mary and a cross.

For all its apparent 'barbarism', however, it must be pointed out that, in contrast, the Aztec religion was very tolerant in that its adherents willingly and readily accepted into its pantheon the deities of others. In contrasting this deeply ingrained syncretistic principle of the Aztec religion with the militant 'monotheism' of the Spaniards, we can begin to better appreciate the tragic misunderstanding that developed. Whereas the Aztecs recognized many deities and were quite capable of accepting new principles into their hierarchy, the Spaniards were votaries of an exclusive theology, who considered that their churches could only be built upon the ruins of former Aztec temples (Soustelle 116).

This intolerance towards other religions is exemplified by the view of Cortés (as with many 'enlightened' men of his times) that the earth was essentially governed by two forces, the God of the Christians and the Satan of all non-Christians (Padden 142). This view tempered their perception of the invasion and conquest of Mexico as having been divinely ordained. According to Caso, Cortés and his men were simply disgusted by the Aztec religion, considering it "a damnable and revolting mumbo-jumbo of devil-worship" (xix). Thus did Cortés view himself as leading 'the Last Crusade' into Mexico, bringing heathen souls to God, and, of course, their riches to himself as a foretaste of his divine reward.

According to Aztec beliefs, the very order of the universe demanded that the rites of human sacrifice be practiced. The dualistic forces of good and evil were constantly at war with each other. The sun god fought the darkness, and without human hearts this god of light might become weak and unable to continue his struggles, resulting in the world being plunged into eternal night. Cortés and his men justified their pillage and destruction by maintaining that they were ending this custom of human sacrifice, which they viewed not only as revolting but, also, as blasphemous, considering it "an obscene parody of their own Christian rituals" (White 1295). To them, the sacrifice of a human being seems to have all-too-closely resembled Christ's crucifixion, and the subsequent offering of the pagan victim's blood and eating of his flesh was reminiscent of the Christian communion (*ibid.*).

We leave our study of the conquest of Mexico and subsequent destruction of the Aztec civilization at this point, but not without adducing some important lessons for our own time. I foresee this unit concluding with a consideration of ways of preserving and appreciating the multi-cultural make-up of our own American society and a look at the dangers we fall into when we take the view that one culture is better or more viable than another.

Strategies My curriculum unit will make use of the following strategies:

—To help third-graders acquire a fundamental conception of the way in which one historical event leads to another, and to simply provide some perspective on the order of events from the time of Columbus to that of Cortés, a **time-line** will be constructed and adhered to, as an important basis of reference throughout the teaching of the whole unit.

—To better appreciate the limited fifteenth-century view of the world with the wider, more complex world that we now know, students will be given basic **map-work** (reconstructing 'Old World' and 'New World' components, tracing the voyages of Columbus and the inland march of

Cortés, etc.), being introduced also, by the way, to their own geographic point of reference.

—To improve reading and creative writing skills, critical **reading exercises** , using simplified versions of Columbus’s life and voyages (derived from such books as David A. Adler’s *A Picture Book of Christopher Columbus* , Matthew G. Grant’s *Columbus: Discoverer of the New World* and Piero Ventura’s *Christopher Columbus* and of the Aztec culture and the conquest of Mexico (derived from such books as Leonard E. Fisher’s *Pyramid of the Sun Pyramid of the Moon* , W.J. Jacobs *Hernando Cortés* , Anne Steel’s *An Aztec Warrior* , Patricia McKissack’s *Aztec Indians* and Sonia Bleeker’s *The Aztec Indians of Mexico*), will be used in conjunction with **response journals** , in which students react and respond to the assigned readings .

—To further provoke thought, prompt discussion and motivate students to write **photographs and drawings** of the conquest of Mexico (taken from various codices available) will be employed.

—To motivate group-discussion, serving also as a prewriting exercise, role-playing will be used extensively throughout the unit. Interesting **role-playing** situations could easily be created on such topics as how it felt to ride with Columbus on his voyages, how the Indians felt upon the arrival of the foreign invaders on their shores and the problems of communication which ensued, how the Aztecs felt after witnessing a bad omen, etc. Both small and large group discussions can be initiated by such role-playing experiences.

—To help students gain a tangible appreciation of the arts and crafts produced by Aztec civilization **visits** to New Haven’s excellent Peabody Natural Museum and Yale Art Gallery’s pre-Columbian art collection would also be arranged.

—To gain some appreciation of Aztec poetry and of how the Aztecs felt about the conquest, poems taken from Leon Portilla’s *Broken Spears* and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma’s *The Aztecs* will be read and discussed. Following these **poetry readings** , the students would be encouraged to draw pictures or write poetry of their own, thus responding to what they have heard.

—To further reinforce what has been introduced and studied in the unit, portions of the excellent 1991 **PBS program** , *Columbus and the Age of Discovery* will be viewed and discussed.

Lesson Plan One Objectives: Upon completion of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. Locate on a globe and map the main continents and oceans making up the New World.
2. Use cardinal and intermediate map directions to describe locations (i. e. west, north, southwest, northeast, etc.)
3. Compare and contrast this true map of the New World with a version illustrating Columbus’s concept of the world.
4. Trace the four voyages of Columbus from Spain to the New World .

Materials: *Various maps taken from: Jerry Aten's Hooray for Columbus, Jo Ellen Moore's Who Discovered America, Haig A. Rushdoony's Exploring Our World with Maps: Map Skills for Grades K-6, Mary Ellen Sterling's Explorers, a compass, a globe, and crayons.*

Procedure:

1. The teacher will begin with the question, "What is a continent?" Individual students will then be asked to come up and point out on both a large world map and a globe the continent on which they live and the other six continents. Major oceans will also be identified.
2. A large compass rose will be drawn on the board and the teacher will then review both the cardinal and intermediate directions with the class. A compass will be passed around for the students to experiment with.
3. After students, working in small groups, have located and labeled the seven continents and the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea on blank maps of the world, the teacher will offer then practice in using directions through a series of questions such as: Which continent is: east of Europe, north of Australia west of Africa, north of South America, etc.
4. Students will then be given copies of a map designed by Toscanelli showing the world as Columbus believed it to be (its components being Europe, Africa, The Indies (which included India, China, East Indies and Japan) and the Ocean Sea (the Atlantic Ocean). Students, again working in small groups, will be asked to compare and contrast it with their up-to-date maps of the world and to determine what is missing on Toscanelli's version.
5. Before tracing the routes of Columbus's four voyages from Spain to the New World (using a different color of crayon for each voyage) on a new set of blank maps of the area, students will be asked to locate various places using cardinal and intermediate directions (i.e., Where are the Canary Islands in relation to Madeira?).

Lesson Plan Two Objectives: Upon completion of this lesson the students will be able to:

1. Locate the boundaries of the Aztec empire in Mexico.
2. Become familiar with the lakes, surrounding mountains, and cities that were part of the Aztec empire.
3. Trace the route that Cortés took in his famous inland march.

Materials.

Various maps of Mexico showing the Aztec Empire, crayons, pencils.

Procedures:

1. The students will be asked to locate and color in the boundaries of the Aztec empire on blank maps of Mexico.
2. Given reconstructed maps of the Valley of Mexico, the students will be asked to locate various lakes, mountains and cities of the Aztec empire using cardinal and intermediate directions when referring to them.
3. Given a map of Mexico showing the Aztec empire, the students will trace the route of Cortés's march inland in 1519 from Villa Rica De Vera Cruz to Tenochtitlan. This map will be referred to often during the teaching of this curriculum unit.

Lesson Plan Three

Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:

1. Become familiar with the eight bad omens witnessed by the Aztecs ten years before the Spanish Conquest.
2. Write their reactions to various readings and illustrations describing these bad omens in response journals.
3. Illustrate their conception of each of these omens based on the descriptions read aloud.
4. Listen to and discuss four songs of sorrow written by the post-Conquest Aztecs, reacting to these poems in response journals.
5. Gain perspective on how the Aztecs felt about the invasion and conquest of their empire.

Materials:

Readings and illustrations taken from Miguel Leon Portilla's Broken Spears and from Eduardo Matos Moctezuma's The Aztecs, drawing paper, colored pencils.

Procedures:

1. The teacher will begin with a discussion of what "bad omen" means and how it is a universal experience. A very simple illustration would be the example of getting up in the morning and dropping your toothbrush in the toilet and then breaking your favorite coffee cup and then interpreting these omens as a good indication of how the rest of your day will go.

2. Following this, the students will be asked to give examples taken from their own experience.
3. The teacher will then read aloud descriptions of the eight bad omens foretelling the arrival of the Spaniards taken from *Broken Spears* showing the pictures included with these descriptions.
4. Students will then break up into pairs, be given paper and colored pencils and asked to work together to illustrate one of the eight omens which have just been read aloud to them. These drawings will later be shared with the larger group and displayed .
5. Students will be asked to react to these descriptions of the eight bad omens by writing in their response journals considering such questions as: How must the Aztecs have felt about these omens? Which omen was the most fearful to you? How did these omens affect the Aztecs' feelings toward the invading Spaniards?
6. A second type of reading very effective for use in conjunction with response journals are the 'songs of sorrow' written by post-Conquest Aztec poets included in the books, *Broken Spears* and *The Aztecs* . The teacher will distribute copies to students of such poems as: The Fall of Tenochtitlan, The Imprisonment of Cuauhtemoc, Flowers and Songs of Sorrow, and Poem of the Conquest. These poems would be read aloud by the teacher and discussion of their meaning will follow.
7. The students would then be asked to select one of the poems and write their reactions toward it in their response journals
8. The students could also imagine they are Aztec poets and create poems of their own lamenting the destruction and downfall of their empire.

Lesson Plan Four

Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to:

1. Gain perspective on how the Aztecs felt about the Spanish invaders and what motivated the conquistadors to come to the New World through role-play.
2. Create dialogue through impromptu situations.

Materials:

Various art materials to make simple costumes and props.

Procedures:

1. The teacher will divide students into small groups. Each group will be given a situation card on

which will be written the characters and situation they are to act out in an impromptu way. They will be given a designated amount of time to plan and rehearse their situation and to make simple costumes and props. They will then perform their role-play situation in front of the larger group.

2. Such situations as the following could be used:

A) You are fellow conquistadors traveling on the ship now nearing the shores of Mexico. What are you talking about? What are you hoping to find?

B) You are fellow conquistadors who have just entered the capital city of Tenochtitlan. What do you see? How do you feel about it all? What do you talk about?

C) You are Aztecs witnessing the landing of these strangers on your shores. They wear strange clothes, carry strange weapons, and have animals you've never seen before with them. How do you feel? What do you talk about?

D) You are Montezuma and Cortés has just entered the gates of the capital city. What do you say to one another (through your interpreters)?

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