



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

Rediscovering the Aztec Indians

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Be assured that the conquest of the Americas is not fondly remembered by the Indians of the America's. The period of European discovery and conquest has not been kind to the indigenous people. After the coming of the Europeans, many Indian populations were tortured and abused, greatly reducing their numbers and making some extinct. The aftermath of the meeting of the Old World with the New meant that the composition and values of entire populations would be altered forever. In the case of Mexico, the illustrious past of their indigenous Indians has not been forgotten -neither has the period of European conquest. Unlike the United States that rid most of it's land of native Indians, the Mexican population has amalgamated it's Indian and European populations into a new breed.

In stark contrast, Americans for the most part have divorced themselves from the true meaning and implications of the discovery of the "New World." The Native Indian populations have almost been eradicated or placed on "reservations". Only the yearly holiday of Thanksgiving is vaguely associated with the conquest of the Americas. By the way, let us not forget the brief romanticized version taught to us at school of how Christopher Columbus convinced a mighty power to fund his expedition to discover a shorter route to gold and spices.

In retrospect, knowledge of the discovery and conquest of the Americas as presented by my Elementary and High School Teachers was at best brief and very inadequate. Even more distressing to me is the complete lack of knowledge and exposure I was given concerning the people who inhabited the Americas before the "discovery of America." Now, as Teachers should we not ask, "Why does learning about the Indians of the America's not occupy a place in our Social Studies curriculums along side that of the Greeks and the Romans? Is not the way of life and contributions of the Indians of the America's as significant?, If not more majestic?

With the coming of the quincentennial celebration of the discovery of America, I as an Elementary School Teacher of the 1990's felt a responsibility to write curriculum materials that teach students about the forgotten Indians of the Americas. I felt that a good place to start students on their road to discovering the complexity and majesty of one such Indian civilization before the coming of the Europeans was the Aztec Indian civilization of Mexico. I hope that by participating in activities that inform students on the lifestyle and contributions of the Aztecs, children who share in these activities will be given opportunities to learn, and respect all indigenous populations. Furthermore, by giving children the opportunity to experience Social Studies that is taught in such a way as to allow them to make clear connections between the past and the present, children become critical thinkers.

My unit is geared towards the teaching of third and fourth grades. I think it can also be usable for Middle School students and special populations with little modification. Along with using this unit to teach Social Studies, it was also written with the intent of teaching a second language. Please note that although this curriculum was written with this two fold purpose, a teacher need not use all lessons in their entirety to achieve desired objectives. This unit is but a portion of a larger curriculum that is currently being written to serve as a pilot project for the Language Academy in New Haven.

The Language Academy Program Model In linguistic terms, the Language Academy program can be classified as a Content Enriched FLES program for first through fourth grades. From 15%-50% of time is spent by the student learning a second language along with receiving instruction in subject matter.

The Language Academy School contains a disproportionate high number of Hispanic and African-American students. Owing to the nature of the high number of low proficiency language learners, Hispanic students have in the recent past been almost completely isolated from their "other" monolingual classmates. Therefore, an equally important purpose of the Language Academy is to change this situation by reducing alienation and bringing about unity between bilingual (Spanish speakers) and monolingual (English speakers) classroom students. The meeting ground for exchanges between students from these two linguistically and culturally dissimilar groups is during second language instruction sessions that are taught concurrently with that of Social Studies, in a cooperative, two way bilingual setting. Ideally, children that advance through at least three grade levels (K-2) at the Language Academy will acquire second language proficiency in listening, speaking, that will make them ideal candidates to master the subject content that will be presented to them from lessons such as those from the Aztec unit.

Plan of Action and Execution of Lessons Apart from students receiving instruction from their classroom teacher, children at the Language Academy receive instruction from a second language teacher. In order for the objectives of this unit to work, language and classroom teachers must arrange to meet weekly to discuss any important information concerning coordination of resources and the scheduling of certain activities. Auxiliary support staff such as music, art, and gym teachers also have a critical role in incorporating skills that they normally teach their students with that of program objectives. To bring about these far reaching objectives, it is crucial that all teachers work together to achieve open lines of communication in order that the mutual goals of content instruction, second language acquisition, and social integration be achieved.

The lessons about the Aztecs are divided into two or more segments. This allows for the objectives of content mastery and second language acquisition to be met during separate time periods and under appropriate conditions. A background information section to be read by both language and classroom teacher is supplied in order that teachers have the knowledge that they will need to confidently teach the lessons about the Aztecs at their fingertips. By reading the background section, and referring to the bibliography of materials, and additional activities section supplied in each lesson activity, teachers can customize their presentation of the Aztec unit or any other unit in the curriculum.

The teaching of these lessons as a way to enhance second language instruction precludes that the Wang wage teacher prepare his or her students to function in a second language cross-grouping situation. He or she will accomplish this end by teaching towards the vocabulary and basic language structures that are demanded for the specific lesson to be taught. The successful cross-grouping of students and demonstration of cooperative group behavior during the presentation of lessons also preclude that the classroom teacher include in his or her daily repertoire of classroom activities opportunities for cooperative behavior to be learned i.e. "teach your neighbor" time.

Children will be grouped for instruction in two different ways. For part one of the lessons, students will remain with their classroom teacher and homeroom group for the purposes of mastering new knowledge in their native language. In this part of the lesson, children are challenged to begin to acquire the informational content of the topic being presented during an information packed session. This period is essential for giving the student a context for learning related information that will later be presented in the second language. Successful transmission of information to the student in this part of the lesson, will make easier the transfer of knowledge that will take place in the second language portion of the lesson.

In part two of the lesson children are grouped heterogeneously (bilingual and monolingual classrooms are cross-grouped) and taught by the second language teacher who speaks entirely in Spanish or English during the lesson. Through the use of cooperative learning techniques students in these cross-grouping situations are made into active participants of the learning process. The role of the students whose native language is the same as that of the lesson being presented are given the role of “language buddies” for those who are receiving the lesson in a second language. The methods that the language teacher uses aim at developing the students second language as a primary goal. The secondary goal is to complement and enhance the knowledge that the learner acquired in his first language.

Teaching Methodology In order to meet the challenge of engaging and instructing students in the two language situations—mixed language groups and homogeneous language groupings, special approaches need to be in place. In keeping with the parameters of the program, I approached the teaching of the Aztecs through an experiential “hands on” manner that uses both multi-sensory and multi-media approaches in order to communicate meaning to students in both first and second languages.

I have arrived at a method for teaching second language, which I have coined the “Process Approach”. This method has components that have proven for me to work for teaching young children a second language. Children enjoy making things, and the lessons activities incorporate that dimension. Children also learn new language very quickly if it is put to song or presented with a taste of drama. This method uses methodical step by step teacher directed see it, say it, do it demonstrations as a method for teaching language. The beginning of any “ Process Approach” lesson requires that the Language specialist review the previous segment of the lesson in the second language with the use of any visuals, concrete examples, and to body language. His or her review should capitalize on previously mastered language constructs taught beforehand to the students. The use of the “Process Approach” proceeds that of first language teaching. Students who are receiving a “Process Approach” lesson should already have been exposed to information that will allow them to assimilate “core” information in the second language. A “Process Approach” lesson will initially prove to be a challenge for the language teacher, but this will become less so if he or she critically analyzes the essential vocabulary that needs to be newly presented beforehand. Only the “core vocabulary” that is essential to the students understanding of the lesson need be presented.

I feel that the most important aspect to teaching language through this method is to **move slowly** , allowing students to make the cognitive connection between what they see happening before them and the language they hear in the step by step process. Just as important is the **highlighting** of new and important language by repetition. Allow students to review the activity by verbally joining in with the teacher. Next, by chorally (speaking at the same time within a group) verbalizing in groups. Then, depending on the comfort level, children should be given a chance to produce language by themselves. Through the use of this method, the teacher has a built in evaluation tool for how much language was acquired.

Explanation of Unit Structure The subtopics within the Aztec unit are: Archaeology, way of life, art, food,

music/dance, and celebration. These topics have been chosen because they lend themselves to a more creative approach when teaching Social Studies to young children rather than a “lecture” approach, which can be a common pitfall when teaching Social Studies to young children. I feel that the activities presented in the Aztec unit will be of high interest to both student and presenter. These types of activities are aimed at making the cross-grouping of Spanish and English speakers enjoyable. Cross-grouping activities include either singing, dancing, craftwork, cooking, or drama improvisations, which require only basic proficiency in the second language.

These twelve lessons are meant to be taught over a twelve week period of time. The majority of lessons are two part, which will require that the lessons be taught twice a week in order to stay in that time frame.

Background For the Teacher

The Aztec Indians

Introduction

When the Spanish led by Hernan Cortés landed in Mexico with about 550 men, many cannons, horses, and fierce dogs, on Good Friday of 1519, they had no idea of the complex and awesome civilization created by that people that they would find. For not so many years before Cortes’ first encounter with the Aztec people, and other rival Indian neighbors, Columbus had opened the gates to the New World. During Columbus’s voyages of exploration in the 1490’s, he found many modest populaces like those from the island of Hispaniola. There in Hispaniola, he found Indians living in a beautiful world a primitive nirvana that was complete with social customs, established social structures, and belief systems.

It’s no wonder that Cortés and his men were so astonished when they finally arrived at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, which is under modern day Mexico in buried ruins. There Cortés met with the ruler Moctezuma II. Cortés’ soldier Bernal Diaz described what he saw as he marched through a section of Tenochtitlan in these terms:

When we saw those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded These great towns and pyramids and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream. (Clendinnen, p.17)

Truly the Empire of the Aztecs was as magnificent as the Spaniards first described. The “civilized” European capitals they were familiar with were smaller, less developed, and very dirty.

Unfortunately for the Aztecs and the modern world, the coming of the Spaniards brought about the almost total annihilation of the Aztec Indian population through warfare, genocide, and European diseases to which the Aztecs had no immunity. Likewise, the Spaniards destroyed almost all of the Aztec works of art and Bodices (records which visually depicted and explained Aztec life and beliefs). Their grand architecture was also demolished and replaced by “Christian Architecture”. The whole of Aztec civilization built on hundreds of years of Indian ingenuity, religious beliefs, and wisdom almost disappeared.

Undoubtedly, history reveals that the destruction of the Aztec empire was brought about by the Spanish greed for gold. More shocking is the fact that most Spaniards at the time justified their abusive treatment and destruction of the Aztec civilization as necessary to convert the Indians to their “Christian” religion.

Luckily, one can get a fairly accurate picture of Aztec life before the coming of the Spanish as a result of archaeologists who have uncovered ancient Aztec ruins and artifacts. Historians have likewise pieced together personal accounts and records left behind by men such as Friar Bernardino de Sahagun. In addition, today there exists about one and a half million descendants of the Aztec Indians which are referred to as Nahuatl people. They live in Mexico and speak the Aztec language Nahuatl. Determined to keep alive what ever common heritage they have, Nahuatl people have added a new dimension to knowledge of their ancestors, by sharing with Historians their oral traditions, providing a modern day window into the past.

History

The Aztecs were nomadic Indians from the northern valley of Mexico who spoke the language Nahuatl and believed in many Gods. . Although they tried to settle down into one of the city-states of the time, they were consistently driven out by other more cultured Indians. For many years, the Aztecs wandered about looking for a place to settle through the guidance of their patron God Huitzilopochtli. Through a medium, Huitzilopochtli told the Aztecs to look for a sign—an eagle standing on a cactus with a snake in it's mouth. There, where they found the sign, they were to build their city-state.

In 1325, the Aztecs saw the sign in the Valley of Mexico and built their city-state on an island they called Tenochtitlan on lake Texcoco. "It covered an area of 2500 acres... and was geometrically laid out with a great criss-cross of canals" (McGregor Eddie, p.69) Three large causeways led to the center of the magnificent city. Immediately one could see a great pyramid with twin temples on top that were built in honor of the Aztec sun and war god, Huitzilopochtli, and to the rain god, Tlaloc. Many steps led up to the temples. King Moctezuma II's huge two story palace with room for 3000 servants could also be seen. In the center of the city existed an enormous marketplace offering a wide and extensive choice of almost anything. The market was so large that when the Spaniards saw it, they were in awe. Food, pottery clothes, artwork, slaves, tiger skins, and much more were for sale.

The bulk of the city was located off the western shore of Texcoco. Homes were built on man-made islands called chinampas in the lake. Most of the homes were one story high, except for those owned by the affluent that were two story. The homes had flat roofs and were built around courtyards with their windows facing the courtyard. Sacred pyramids dotted the landscape much like our current places of worship dot any city or town. Every town also had it's own market.

After some 200 years, the Aztec civilization flourished and expanded after having joined a triple alliance with it's neighbors Tlacopan, and Acolhuaca. The Aztecs established an agrarian society with complex political, religious, and social networks. Over time, the Aztecs became the most powerful members in the triple alliance. The population of Tenochtitlan is estimated to have been about 250,000. In addition, the Aztec's realm of influence extended to include 15 million people from "the deserts of the north to Oaxaca in—the south" (McGregor Eddie, p.74) Trade routes as far south as Guatemala, and as far east as the Gulf Coast were also established. So powerful were the Aztecs, that peoples from all other city-states feared, respected, and paid tribute to Tenochtitlan in the form of—food, works of art, human sacrifices, and slaves. Fast and efficient delivery of tributes, trading relations, and communication were made possible by the use of canoes and foot power to and from the Aztec's island location.

Way of Life

The Aztecs were small people. Women averaged about four feet eight inches, and men averaged about Five feet three inches. Their skin was a bronze like brown; their hair and eyes were black. Men and women wore

their hair long.

Aztec society is said to have been more morally strict than the Puritan settlers of New England. Drunkenness or adultery were often punishable by death. (Smith, p.153) Aztec society along with being morally rigid, was also very structured. An elite body made up of the king and a figure called the Snake Woman (Who was really a man) ruled the state. There was also a council of advisors who advised the King and the Snake Woman. One could rise to the ranks of the nobles if one was a soldier who proved himself to be brave at war. Below the advisory council were the lesser officials. Below them in status were the craftsmen, followed by the merchants, the ordinary people, the peasants, and finally the slaves. Interestingly, one could sell oneself or one's offspring into permanent or temporary slavery as punishment for committing a crime or to pay a debt.

Aztec society structure dictated a whole range of behaviors. So extreme were the social rules that they even applied to the way one could dress. People had to observe different dress codes that would readily identify them as belonging to a certain class of citizen. Punishment for trespassing outside one's class dress could also be punishable by death. Only the upper crust could wear lavish jewelry and regal outfits, the common man was relegated to wearing very plain clothing. Class distinctions also applied to the type of home one could own. Being a farmer meant that one could only live in a one story house. A noble could live in a two story house. The type of schooling one was given was also subject to one's family status.

Many historians have called the Aztecs religious fanatics. This is because the Aztecs practiced human sacrifice at a grand scale. They were known for having sacrificed thousands of soldiers in one day! They truly believed that their sun god needed the blood of human beings in order to guarantee it's existence, and the existence of all humanity. The Aztecs believed that the world had previously been destroyed four times. By making regular human sacrifices at preset times on their calendar, the Aztecs believed that they were preventing the fifth destruction of the world. Human sacrifices were routinely made available when the Aztecs went to war. Warriors did not kill their enemy on the battlefield, they brought them back to their priests. The priests ritually sacrificed the captives by cutting open their chest and pulling out their beating hearts. Later they threw the hearts into a fire lit receptacle. Various historical documents also depict the Aztecs as practicing cannibalism with the bodies of their sacrificed victims, but that point is still in dispute by various historians. The Aztecs also believed in countless deities who in many instances had to do with nature and survival. They worshipped rain Gods, sun Gods, the God of corn, the God of war etc... Generally speaking, the Aztecs viewed their Gods as entities that needed to be appeased. On the subject of a supreme being, one Aztec poet wrote:

He mocks us.
As he wishes, so he wills.
He places us in the palm of his hand,
He rolls us about;
Like pebbles we roll, we spin
We make him laugh,
He mocks us. (from McDonnell, 1980)

War for the Aztecs was a way of life. War was an act that kept neighbors subjugated, and supplied a way to act out their religious beliefs. When a male child was born, it was taken for granted that he would become engaged in some aspect of battle. Boys were trained for the military at a young age. The Aztecs had the reputation of being fierce soldiers, and the surrounding towns were very fearful of them. Being at war was a constant reality. When there was no reason to be at war, the Aztecs partook of what became known as “xochiyaoyotl” or Flowery war. Flowery wars were artificial battles that took captive innocent warriors from surrounding cities for human sacrifice to the Aztec gods. The Aztecs had the reputation of being fierce soldiers. Boys were trained for the military at a young age.

Aztec Food and Cooking

Diet

How much and what kinds of food were available for eating also had much to do with one’s place in the hierarchy of society. Everyone ate with their hands, but it was good manners to wash one’s hands and face before and after a meal.

The peasants lived mainly on maize and beans. Maize tortillas were grilled and dipped in tomato and hot pepper stew. Once in a while, peasants would get lucky and catch a duck or a crow for dinner. Large farm animals such as cows, which existed in much of the New World were unknown to the Aztecs. Instead, they domesticated the rabbit, turkey, and a hairless dog which today is extinct. The peasant would fatten up these small animals and eat them for special occasions. Last but not least on the peasant menu was the serving of tadpoles, algae, cactus worms, and fish from the lake. The nobles on the other hand ate a wider food selection. They ate turtle and crabs that were imported from the coast. It is said that King Montezuma had about one hundred different dishes to pick from on any given day. His menu sometimes included wild pig and pheasant. (MacDonald, p. 18)

Maize

Maize above all other crops was the staple food for all Aztecs. Aztec women made maize tortillas every day. First they ground the maize into flour. Then they mixed water into the flour and made the dough into flat pancakes which they cooked on a flat dry stone over an open fire. (MacDonald, p. 18) The Aztecs knew the importance that maize had to their existence, they felt respect for the maize plant “ a special tenderness reserved for the handling of maize. Women breathed softly on the maize kernels before they were dropped into the cooking pot . . . giving them courage for the fire” (Clendinnen, p.53)

Maize still continues to play a major role in the Mexican diet today. Interestingly, it was the early Indian settlers of central Mexico who are believed to be the first cultivators of maize. Archaeological evidence proves that in central Mexico “a type of corn was domesticated as early as 3000 to 4000 B.C.” (Smith, p.23)

One explanation for the discovery of domesticated maize is that during a period in Mexico when wild game was becoming scarce, the Mexican Indians accidentally encountered the largest wild maize plants. They ate the edible portions of the plant and discarded the rest of the plant. What they discarded is believed to have been mutant seeds which later proved to be domesticated corn. (Smith, p. 24) Accidental or not, if not for the astute observations of the Indians of central Mexico, the New World might never have maize in its diet.

The contribution of maize by the New World to the Old World can not be understated. Today maize is used in ways. It is used in making flour, oil, starch, corn syrup, to name a few. More importantly, maize has the

advantage of being a very versatile crop. Maize can be grown in soils that “receive too much or too little moisture for wheat or rice” (Weatherford, p.73)

Even though maize is a versatile crop, historically, maize was not a food of choice for the European. Yet, corn played a major role in increasing the nutritional standards and population of Europe by indirectly providing nutrition to the European. Instead of growing maize for human consumption, it was fed to a wide range of domesticated farm animals “The new animal food not only increased the supply of meat and lard, but also increased the supply of ... all the animal products that constitute 50 important a part of European diet” (Weatherford,p.73)

The effects of the introduction of maize to the New World can readily be seen one hundred years later. During the eighteenth century, “Corn and other American crops were being widely cultivated in southern Europe, the population of Italy grew from eleven million to eighteen million, and the population of Spain doubled” (Farb and Armelagos from Weatherford, p.73) Maize was fed to a wide range of domesticated farm animals. “The new animal food not only increased the supply of meat and lard, but also increased the supply of eggs, milk, butter, cheese, and all the animal products that constitute so important a part of European diet” (Weatherford, p.73)

Cacao

Another contribution the Aztec Indians made to the world was their role in helping to introduce the use and cultivation of the cacao bean. Cacao appears to have originated either in the Amazon or Orinoco basin about 4,000 years ago. Cocoa beans grow inside large pods which attach themselves to cocoa trees. The pods are cut down from the tree and sliced open to reveal a “central placenta and coated mucilage”. (Young, p.671) The process of extracting the beans is no easy job. The beans within the pods are very slippery and must be extracted with one’s hands and teeth. The beans are then left in the sun to dry. Then the beans are toasted in a very delicate manner. Finally the beans are ground up and ready for use. This preparation process took the Indians hundreds of years to learn. To “cultivate the plant but also to develop the appropriate technology for making the fruit into a very different type of product. By and large the Europeans borrowed this technology.” and are still using it to produce the chocolate that we buy in our neighborhood stores. (Weather ford, p.92)

The use of cacao was a well kept secret until Europeans like Christopher Columbus encountered the cacao bean on his fourth journey, but foolishly, he chose to ignore them. Twenty years later, Cortes saw the Aztec King Montezuma drinking many cups of “xocoatl- a liquid so prestigious that it was served in golden goblets that were thrown away after one use.” (Young, p.666)

Cacao for the Aztecs served a dual purpose. The first purpose was that of currency. In the days of the Aztec empire, one could virtually buy anything with cacao beans “about one hundred cacao beans could buy a slave”. Another use for cacao beans was for making the special drink xocoatl mentioned before. Cacao bean drinks appear to have been drunk during feasts and celebrations with sometimes bizarre after effects “at some banquets no wine was served, but only a chocolate drink ... In the chronicles of Diego Duran it is written that the people became highly excited and filled with joy; that they became more drunk than with liquor.” (Smith,p.154)

After tasting the Aztec cocoa drink, “Cortes sipped the bitter, spicy beverage, and when he returned to Spain in 1528, he took some of the wondrous beans back to his King.” The Spaniards took a liking to the Aztec drink, but modified it by adding cane sugar to the bitter drink. (Young, p.666) Cortes being a Entrepreneur type took cacao beans with him when he left the Aztecs, “seeding money plantations on Trinidad, Haiti, and West

Africa". Because of Cortes "entrepreneur spirit", Spain enjoyed a monopoly on chocolate for about 100 years.

Since those days, cocoa bean production occurs in many parts of the world. Cocoa grows mainly in Brazil and West Africa, but to a small degree in Mexico and Southeast Asia.(refer to slide set for cocoa lesson). Today, chocolate production is a multi-million dollar industry. (Young, p.667-668)

The Arts

Paradoxically, the Aztec's demonstrated a penchant for ritual human sacrifice, while also showing that they were quite capable of being very kind, artistic, and poetic. It was customary for soldiers to carry bouquets of flowers. Writing poetry about nature like the one poem below was not uncommon.

The gold and black butterfly
Is sipping the nectar.
The flower bursts into bloom:
Ah, my friends, it is my heart.
I send down a shower of white
frangipani flowers. (McDonnell, 1980)

The Aztecs were masterful artisans. They created both powerful and monumental art as well as small and delicate works of art. The type of art they produced, and the themes behind their renderings were influenced by their philosophy of life and religious beliefs.

The Aztecs viewed death as a more integral part of life than the European. A regularly occurring theme in Aztec art is death. If one is in agreement that art is a reflection of life, the regular occurrence of war and human sacrifice as a way of life for the Aztecs naturally manifested itself in their art. Examples of skulls adorned with jewels have been found by archaeologists. (Refer to slide set for further examples)

Religion as mentioned previously, had Aztec society in a stronghold. Nothing attests to this fact as well as their artwork. The majority of artifacts found by archaeologists depict the many gods the Aztecs worshipped. Stories about the different gods of the Aztecs read very much like Greek mythology. The statues made to honor the gods portray them as mythical beings who were part human and part animal or reptile. Honoring the Aztec gods required sacrifices, therefore, most of their images look very frightening.

In addition to religious influences in Aztec art, there also existed the influence of Toltec Indian art, whose work they emulated. In fact the word "Tolteca" for the Aztecs came to mean "craftworker." (Beck, p.34) The Toltecs built their capital at Tula in the year 980 A.D. At the time, the Toltecs were led by their benevolent priest-ruler Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl who established Tula with the intention of creating a peaceful and creative haven. Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl taught that "a single creative God force... created the earth, sun, and sky, man in his smaller way should create what he could" (Smith, p.122)

The Toltec artisans took the words of their ruler to heart and became known as “Artisans who could work in every form. No task was too difficult for them.” (Smith, p.122) Toltec pottery were superbly crafted and gained them recognition. Pottery took on the form of many kinds of animals, reptiles, gods, and people of various sizes. As soon as metal was introduced to them, the Toltec’s artistic mastery gained them fame in that area too. The Toltecs also built pyramids, temples, and monumental statues to their god Quetzalcoatl at Tula. (Smith, p.122)

The Aztecs produced work from a wide variety of materials. Their skill in painstakingly manipulating various materials was outstanding. Obsidian, turquoise, gold, emeralds, Quetzal feathers, and sometimes human remains were used. Art took the form of masks, statues, mosaics, shields, headdresses, sculpture of every size, and jewelry. Expert sculptors carved reliefs from huge stones. The color green had special significance for the Aztecs. Much to the surprise of the gold-digging Spanish conquistadors, nobles found the Quetzal feathers to be the most valuable material of all.

In various delicate sculptures, one can see the artisan’s labored attempt at making an animal, reptile, or plant figure as realistically as possible. One Aztec sculptor is said to have given this advice “What is carved should be like the original, and have life... take great care to penetrate what the animal you wish to imitate is like, and how its character and appearance can best be shown” (from Clendinnen, p. 226) Relations such as these, prove to me that the Aztecs were profound thinkers, rather than savages as the Spaniards would have had us think.

Aztec written communication was also an art in itself. The Aztecs painted pictures on bark from the Amate tree that conveyed messages with the help of glyphs. These images were called codices. With the use of Bodices, the Aztecs were able to record important events. An uninformed person might quickly dismiss the artwork of the codices as simple and primitive. Yet, the Aztecs purposely used the techniques of presenting figures in an abstract way “a chosen rejection of realism... heads are huge, torso and limbs short.” In a very sophisticated way, they purposely juxtaposed different images to cause the viewer to contemplate what it was that the artist was trying to communicate. The Bodices “could generate discourse, not merely record received information” (Clendinnen, pgs.230-231) Once again, we see that the Aztec Indians were very capable, intelligent people.

The Aztec rulers had occasion to use work made by the Artisan class. Once a year rulers would gather together valiant soldiers and bestow upon them gifts of adorned shields and other crafts. Aztec shields were decorated with featherwork. The process of making a shield was no simple task, which further demonstrates Aztec expertise. The procedure began with the drawing a draft of the selected design on paper. Then, the drawing was transformed into a stencil. Finally, a selection of cut up feathers of appropriate color were glued onto the base of the shield. (Lothrop, p.66)

Music

Aztec society was founded on a well developed oral tradition. The transmission of knowledge and information was mainly done through word of mouth. Therefore, there are no examples of notated music to tell us how Aztec music sounded. Even so, recorded eyewitness reports from the past tell us that “Early Spanish settlers were moved by the snatches of Aztec music they heard” (Blackwood, p.98)

The playing of music was a serious matter. Music for the most part served religious purposes which were an integral part of Aztec society. Musicians were professional elites who underwent rigorous training to learn “a very extensive repertory of music, based on a detailed and elaborate religious calendar”. Being a Musician

meant holding a privileged place in society, but it was not without its drawbacks. Musicians were under constant scrutiny during religious performances. Playing a musical piece incorrectly during a religious ceremony was enough to warrant their execution. (Blackwood, p.98)

Music also played a part during celebrations and feasts. Celebrations were religious and sometimes marked the initiation of an important life event such as marriage. Aztecs sang, danced, and played musical instruments during celebrations. The Aztecs marked the coming of a new month with a celebration of song and dance together with that of feast and sacrifice.

A glimpse can be had of what an Aztec celebration was like from the recorded recollections of surviving Aztec elders after the Spanish conquest by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun wrote:

Those who furnished the music for dancing were stationed within the house called Calpulco so that the dancers and the musicians could not see each other... All the people of the palace even the warriors, old and young, danced in other parts of the courtyard, holding each other by the hand, and winding in and out wriggling in snake fashion . . . among these warriors one could also see maidens dancing, very well painted, and their arms and legs adorned with red feathers. (from Smith, p.49)

Another glimpse of Aztec celebration can be had by looking at various Aztec codices. It appears that celebrations were quite elaborate. People dressed in animal skins and colorful attire. They danced in circular formation and played maracas. Musicians can be seen playing drum-like instruments. Interestingly, some images are those of foot jugglers performing together with musicians. (Smith, p.49)

Musical Instruments

The Aztecs are not known for having produced an extensive line of musical instruments. String instruments were absent from Aztec bands. This musical addition was introduced by the Spaniards. What they did make, I feel, attests to their human ingenuity. They used wind instruments such as flutes and whistles which they made out of pottery, and “tubular or shell-type trumpets”. (Blackwood, p.98)

Percussion instruments such as drums and rattles were also used. These instruments were made out of plant and animal products. Rattles were often made from pottery in the shape of humans, or made in a circular shape and then elaborately decorated. They made a drum called a Huehuetl. The Huehuetl is one of the first true drums that was used in Mexico. It was made by hollowing out a log and stretching animal skin across one end. The other end of the drum was cut out so the musician had the liberty of relaxing or stretching the skin of the drum with his arms or legs, thereby adjusting the pitch. A drum called a Teponaztli was also played. This drum was also made from a hollowed out tree trunk, but instead of being stood on one end, the drum lay flat. On the top of the drum were two tongues. The tongues were then struck by a rubber-tipped mallet that made them produce two different vibrating sounds. (Smith, p.49)

Lesson Plans

Lesson One: Aztec Civilization

This first lesson is one that should follow the lesson by the title “Explorers of the Past”. This lesson can be found in the Language Academy curriculum “Sharing Our Culture Through Language”.

Lesson Summary

Children will be introduced to the important aspects of Aztec civilization. They will compare what they learned

in this lesson to the information they hypothesized from the introductory lesson “Explorers of the Past”. They will write a comparative essay.

Student Objectives

To identify at least four slides and describe their meaning. To write a comparative essay that compares their hypothesis of the life led by the Aztecs to that of the actual facts.

Time: Two lessons

Before You Start

1. Read background section “The Aztecs” and the slide information.
2. Preview slide packet “Aztec Civilization”.

Materials

1. Slide set “Aztec Civilization”
2. Children’s archaeology charts from the lesson: Explorers of the past.
3. Writing paper.

Vocabulary	Vocabulario
Aztec Indian	Indio Azteca
Lifestyle	Estilo de vida
Pyramid	Pirámide
Lake	Lago
Warlike	Guerrero
Civilization	Civilización
Religious	Religioso

Input/Procedure

1. Display group charts from the lesson Explorers of the Past.
2. Explain that today they will get a chance to see how the Aztec Indians of Mexico truly lived. Afterwards they will be writing an essay that compares what their group predicted Aztec life was like to that of the true facts.
3. Present the slide show “The Aztec Civilization” and explain.
4. Allow for questions throughout presentation.

5. Afterwards, refer back to the information charts done by the children and question them on how their original predictions. Ask them what new information they learned that proved their predictions wrong.
6. Have children write their comparative essays.

Evaluation

1. What did the Aztec Indians look like?
2. Where did they live?
3. How did they live?
4. What did they eat?
5. Which people in the community were leaders?
6. Name two kinds of food eaten by the Aztec Indians.
7. Evaluate students comparative essay.

Additional Activities

1. Have children write an experience story entitled: My Day with the Aztec Indians.
2. Have children learn the contributions of the Aztec Indian to present day Mexican culture.
3. Read about the first encounters of the Aztecs with the Spanish in 1519. Have them discuss their opinions on whether they thought the Spaniards actions were justified.
4. Make a diorama of a scene in Aztec life.
5. Learn about the lifestyle of other Indians from the United States.
6. Read about Indians from remote areas of the world (the Amazon) who still live as they did hundreds of years ago. Have a debate. Role play a courtroom situation where some children role-play modern anthropologists who argue that the Indians lifestyle must be preserved. Have other students take on the role of Educators or Missionaries who want to intervene in the Indians life to modernize them.

Lesson Two: Aztec Arts—Tributes to Gods and Rulers

Lesson Summary

Children will learn about different types of Aztec art by viewing slides. They will learn the reasons Artisans selected certain styles of artwork, and for whom the Artisans were crafting their art. Finally, they will make “Aztec Style” shields of battle.

Student Objectives

To state that the Aztecs have left behind artifacts that show that they had a great artistic heritage. To state the reasons why Aztec Artisans chose to create certain artistic styles. To follow directions and make an “Aztec Battle Shield.”

Time Two lessons

Before You Start

1. Read background section “The Art of the Aztecs”
2. Collect materials for making “Aztec Battle Shield”

Materials

1. Slide projector
2. Slide set “The Arts of the Aztecs”
3. Instructions for making shield and examples of various Aztec design motifs.
4. Materials for making shield.
5. Sample of an “Aztec Shield”

Vocabulary Vocabulario

Artisan Artesano

Art Arte

Gods Dioses

Ruler Soberno

Statue Estatua

Shield Escudo

Jewelry Joyas

Input/Procedure

1. Based on the students recollection of the lesson “The Aztec way of Life”, brainstorm and record the answers to the question “What kind of artwork did the Aztecs make?”
2. Show slide of Aztec site dig.
3. Explain that Archaeologists have discovered many types of artwork that show that the Aztecs were very talented artists. The Aztecs had many talented artists who created art that reflected the experiences and ideas that they the artists and important rulers of the time felt were important to their culture.
4. Show slides of Aztec artwork. Name the different types of artwork i.e. statue, stamp, mural, feathered headdress, battle shield, jewelry.
5. Remind students of the fact that Aztec society was centered around the notion of religion, death, war, and rituals. Therefore, the art that was produced by Aztecs reflected that experience in a unique way.
6. Show slide of Aztec society social structure.
7. Point out the artisans in the slide and explain the importance Artisans had to Azteca society.
8. Show slide of Aztec ruler honoring his soldiers by bestowing gifts of art made by artisans to his soldiers once a year.
9. Review lesson by asking comprehension questions and reviewing slides.

Lesson Two (Part two) Making an Aztec Shield

1. Review information about past lesson.
2. Show Aztec battle shield artifact.
3. Ask students if they know what it is and how it might have been used by the Aztecs.
4. Show slide of Aztec ruler honoring his soldiers by bestowing gifts of art made by artisans to his soldiers once a year.
5. Tell students that they will now get an opportunity to make their own Aztec battle shield.
6. Show and verbally identify the materials that go into making the Aztec shield.
7. Give verbal step by step instructions while manually demonstrating how you to make an Aztec shield from the beginning.
8. Pass out materials for making shields to students.
9. Make another shield together with students, while prompting them to chorally identify the steps they are going through to make the shield.

10. When the shields are made, ask the students to describe and/or name any of the steps or identifying terms having to do with the shield.

Evaluation

1. Were Aztec Artisans important to Aztec society?
2. What role did the Artisan have in society?
3. Name some of the different types of artwork that the Artisans made.
4. What themes did Aztec art portray?
5. Why do you think these themes were portrayed?
6. How do we come to know about the art of the Aztecs?
7. Name some of the materials that the Aztec Artisan may have used.
8. Draw a picture of a work of art that you think an Aztec ruler may have found pleasing.
9. Name and/or explain how to make the artwork that everyone in class made.

Additional Activities

1. Make an Aztec decorated cloak.
2. Make "Aztec Codices" and share invented messages by showing and reading them to classmates.
3. Make a Aztec Cocoa jug out of clay and discuss the fact that folk-art also existed in Aztec society.

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* A copy of the slides, slide information, and craft instructions referred to in the lesson plans will be on file at the institute office.

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