

The First American Civilizations



First American Civilizations

- o Main Idea:



- o The invention of farming led to the rise of complex civilizations and societies in the America's.

First American Civilizations

- o Lecture Focus:



- o What would our lives be like if people had never learned how to farm?
Let's see how farming made life possible in Mexico, Central America and South America.

First American Civilizations

- The first Americans were hunters and gatherers, but as the Ice Age ended and the climate warmed, people in America made an amazing discovery.



- These early Americans learned that seeds held the key to building a strong society.

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- What did you have for breakfast today???

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- ...and what is they key ingredient in all of those items????

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- Have you even seen the bread isle at the grocery store?

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- So lets talk about grain and why it is so important to the human race.

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- Seeds could be planted and maintained over a period of time and people would have plenty of crops to use to feed a large number of individuals.



- This is the beginning of modern farming in North and South America.

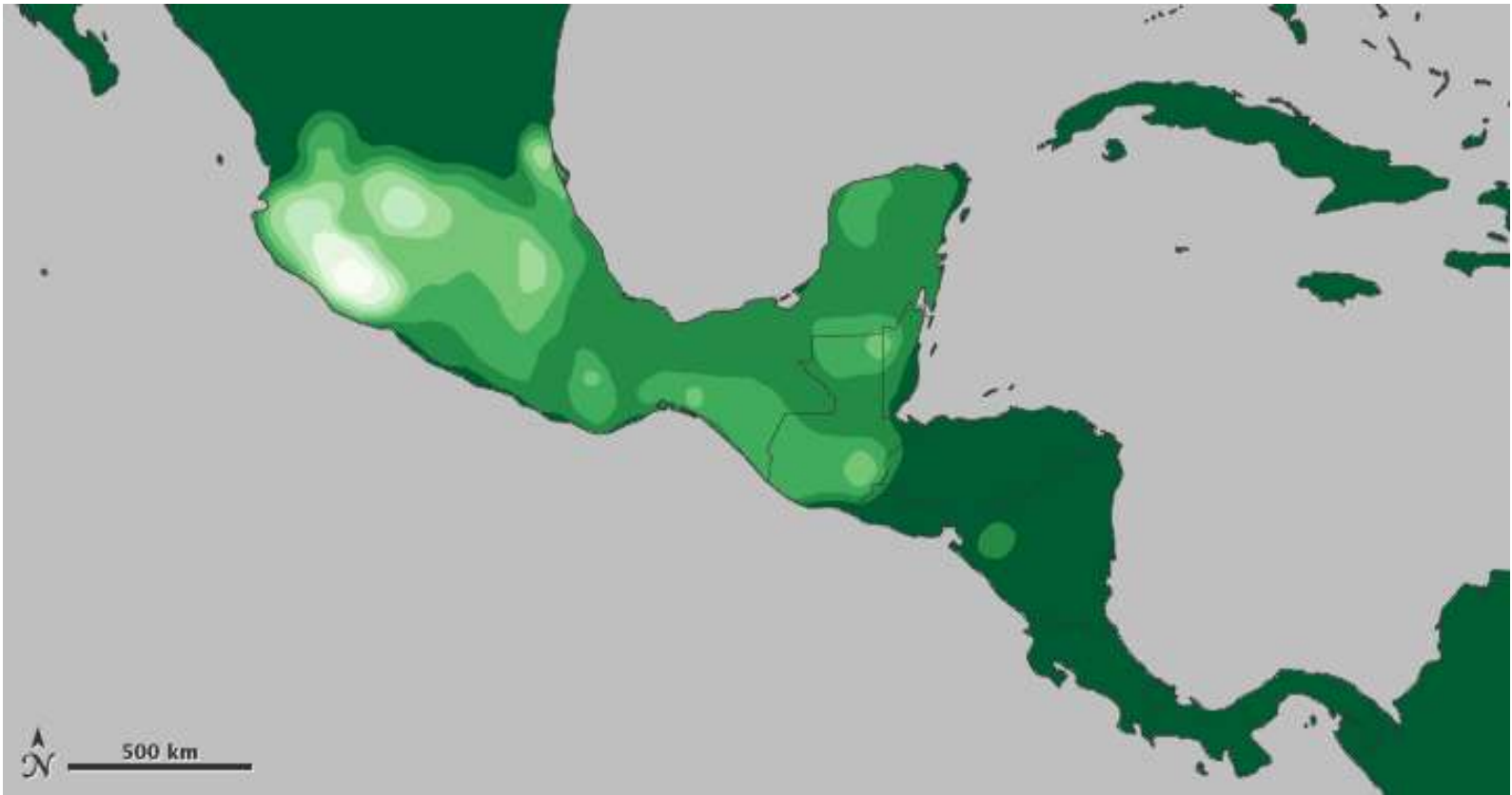
First American Civilizations

- Farming began in Mesoamerica about 9,000 – 10,000 years ago.



- **Meso** comes from the Greek word for “middle”... **Middle-America**

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- Today this region includes lands stretching from the Valley of Mexico to Costa Rica in Central America.

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- The region's geography was ideal for farming since much of the area had a rich volcanic soil and an extremely mild climate.

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- Plants need three essential nutrients to grow: nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous, which is present in most volcanic ash.

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- Rains fall in the Spring time, helping seeds to sprout and eventually ripen for the Fall harvest.



- Generally in Autumn, heavy rains return to this area, soaking the soil and creating an ideal environment for next years crop.

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- The first crops grown in the Americas included pumpkins, peppers, squash, gourds and beans.



- It took longer to develop corn, which started off as a wild type of grass.

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- Early corn plants produced a single, one inch cobb.



- After hundreds of years, the early Americans finally learned how to cross corn with other grasses to make bigger cobs, as well as more cobs per plant.

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- With this discovery, corn, also sometimes known as “maize,” became one of the most important foods in the Americas.

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◦ **Corn Today:**

- Fuel is derived from corn crops by breaking the starch of the corn down into simple sugars.
- Yeast is then added to these simple sugars and fermentation takes place, which produces ethanol, which is a type of alcohol.



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- When corn is used to produce ethanol as a fuel, the water in the liquid is removed and it becomes highly concentrated, rendering it undrinkable but suitable for use as a fuel because of its ability to burn.
- (To the right: Blender fuel pump selling the standard E10 ethanol blend together)



First American Civilizations

- **Questions:**

- 1) Where is Mesoamerica located?
- 2) What does Meso mean?
- 3) Why was this area so ideal for growing crops?
- 4) What crop became the most important food in the Americas?

First American Civilizations

- **Questions:**

- 1) Where is Mesoamerica located?

 - **Between Mexico and Costa Rica**

- 2) What does Meso mean?

 - **Greek term meaning “Middle”**

- 3) Why was this area so ideal for growing crops?

 - **Mesoamerica had rich volcanic soil**

- 4) What crop became the most important food in the Americas?

 - **Wheat and Corn**

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- Growing corn and other crops allowed the Mesoamericans to stop wandering in search of food and settle in certain areas.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- As a result of settling down, these early Americans were able to create, **Complex Societies** starting around 1500 B.C.E.



- **Complex Society** – a form of large scale society in which productive farming produced a surplus of food, allowing for more people to live together,

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- Prior to the advancements in farming and **Complex Societies** our ancestors relied heavily on foraging...but there are a few problems with that.



- **Foraging** – The act of searching for food or other provisions...hunting as well

Mesoamerica Civilizations

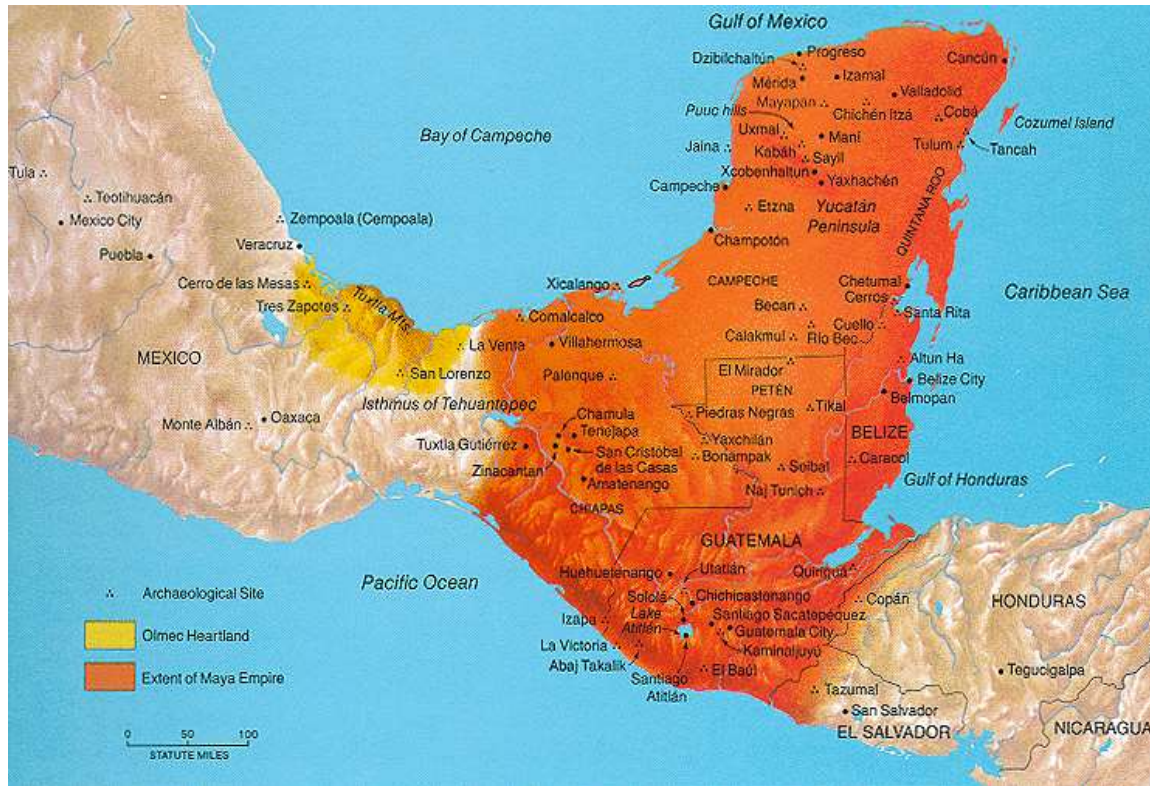
- The methods of foraging became too unpredictable to sustain large populations.



- It quickly became clear that the farming of crops provided a larger and more reliable food source than foraging.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The first large scale **Complex Societies** in Mesoamerica began near present day Vera Cruz, Mexico, with people called the **Olmec**.



- The Olmec built an extremely large trading empire that started around 1200 B.C.E. and lasted for about 800 years.

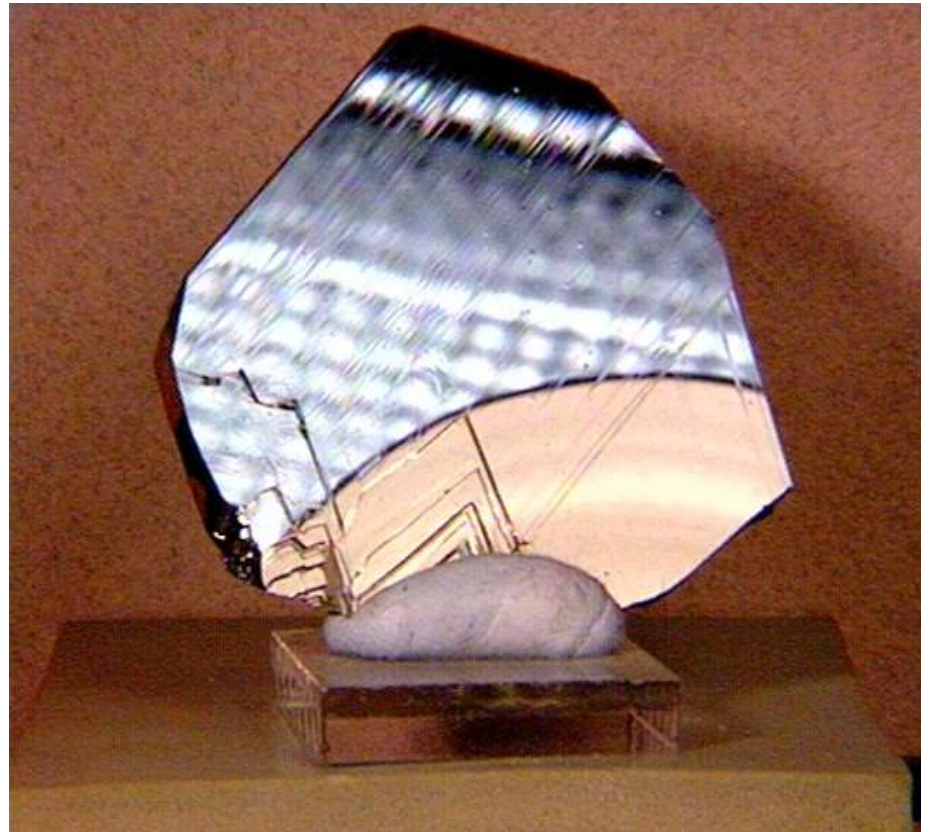
Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The Olmec enjoyed rich farming resources from their lands, however they lacked major raw materials.



- They traded salt and beans with inland peoples to get Jade for jewelry and Obsidian, or Volcanic Glass, to make sharpened knives.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- The Olmec's used other trade goods, such as Hematite, a shiny volcanic stone, to make polished mirrors and basalt for carving gigantic stone heads.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The Olmec were the first Mesoamerican civilization and created many of the foundations for the civilizations that followed.



- Among other "firsts", the Olmec appeared to practice **Ritual Bloodletting**

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- **Ritual Bloodletting** – Is cutting part of the body to release blood and is an ancient ritual used by many Mesoamerican societies.



- Bloodletting rituals established a way to communicate with the gods and royal ancestors.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- This practice was usually performed by nobles on various body parts, mainly, but not only, tongue and lips.



- Both men and women practiced these types of sacrifices.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The Olmec also created the first Mesoamerican **Ball Game**, an important aspect of their society.



- The Mesoamerican ball game is the oldest known sport in the Americas and it originated in southern Mexico approximately 3700 years ago. (The Aztec god Xiuhtecuhtli (Pronounced: Way-ue-TEE-ottle, and Shee-u-teh-COO-tleh) brings a rubber ball offering to a temple.)

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The game took place in specific I-shaped buildings called ballcourts.



- There are an estimated 1,300 known ballcourts in Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- Evidence suggests that different types of games, all played with a rubber ball, existed in ancient Mesoamerica, but the most widespread was the "hip game".



- This was played by two opposing teams, with an aim of the game being to put the ball into the opponent's goal without using hands or feet... but only hips could touch the ball.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



Mesoamerica Civilizations

- Ball games were violent and dangerous and players wore protective gear, usually made of leather, such as helmets, knee pads, arm and chest protectors and gloves.



- Archaeologists call the special protection constructed for the hips "yokes", for their resemblance to eggs yokes.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

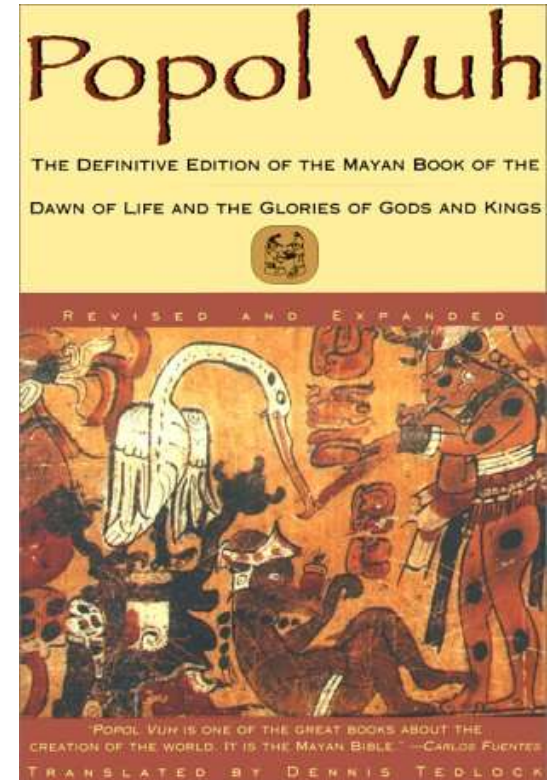
- A further violent aspect of the ball game involved human sacrifices, which were often an essential part of the activity.



- Decapitation was a frequent end for the losing team.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- It has also been suggested that the game was a way to resolve conflicts among rivals without warfare.



- The Classic Maya origin story told in the **Popol Vuh** describes the ballgame as a contest between humans and underworld Gods, with the ball court representing a portal to the underworld.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- Another incredible aspect of the Olmec's is their artwork, particularly the aptly named "colossal heads".

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The **Olmec colossal heads** were stone representations of human heads sculpted from large basalt boulders. **(17 in Total)**



- The heads date from at least 1500 – 1000 B.C.E. and are a distinctive feature of the Olmec civilization of ancient Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- All heads portray mature men with fleshy cheeks, flat noses, and slightly crossed eyes; their physical characteristics correspond to a type that is still common among the inhabitants of Tabasco and Veracruz.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The boulders were brought from the **Sierra de los Tuxtlas Mountains** of Veracruz.



- It is thought that the monuments represent portraits of powerful individual Olmec rulers.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- o **Matthew Stirling** in 1938 discovered the Colossal Heads and other artifacts from the Olmec Culture.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- The smallest weigh 6 tons, while the largest is variously estimated to weigh 40 to 50 tons, although it was abandoned and left unfinished close to the source of its stone.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- The Olmec used the region's many rivers as highways for trade, but eventually, the inland peoples seized control of the trade routes.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- One of the inland peoples built the first planned city in the Americas.



- It became known as **Teotihuacan**, or “Place of the Gods.”

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- **Teotihuacan** was a Mesoamerican city located in the Basin of Mexico, northeast of modern day Mexico City.



- Today this is known as the site of many of the most architecturally significant Mesoamerican pyramids built in the pre-Columbian Americas.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



- Apart from the pyramids, Teotihuacan had multi-family houses, the Avenue of the Dead (**Main axis of the City**), and well preserved paintings and art.

Mesoamerica Civilizations



Mesoamerica Civilizations



- Additionally, Teotihuacan produced a thin orange pottery style that spread through Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The city is thought to have been established around 100 B.C.E. and continued to be built until about 250 C.E. (350 years)
- Teotihuacan was the largest city in the pre-Columbian Americas, with a population of perhaps 175,000 or more, placing it among the largest cities of the world in this period.



Mesoamerica Civilizations



Mesoamerica Civilizations

- As Teotihuacan's power spread, a people called the **Maya** built another civilization in the steamy rain forest of the **Yucatan Peninsula**.



- They, too, created well planned trade routes throughout Mesoamerica.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- The Maya used their central location to branch out and reach into what is now southern Mexico and Central America.



- Mayan traders in sea going canoes paddled along the coast, perhaps reaching as far as the present day United States.

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- Questions:
- 1) What is a Complex Society?
- 2) What helped the people of Mesoamerica create Complex Societies?
- 3) What was the name of the Mesoamerican people who created the first trading empire?
- 4) What was the name of the first planned city of Mesoamerica?
- 5) How many people were said to have lived there at the height of its power?

Mesoamerica Civilizations

- Questions:
- 1) What is a Complex Society?
 - **A form of large scale society in which farming produced a surplus of food**
- 2) What helped the people of Mesoamerica create Complex Societies?
 - **A surplus of food**
- 3) What was the name of the Mesoamerican people who created the first trading empire?
 - **The Olmec**
- 4) What was the name of the first planned city of Mesoamerica?
 - **Teotihuacan**
- 5) How many people were said to have lived there at the height of its power?
 - **175,000 – 200,000**

What Happened to the Maya?

- Teotihuacan and Mayan cities hit their peaks in the 400's C.E.



- Then, around 600 C.E., Teotihuacan started to decline for a reason that is unknown.

What Happened to the Maya?

- Some historians say overpopulation drained the city of food and resources.



- Others blame a long drought, or period without rain on the decline of the city.

What Happened to the Maya?

- There are even some accounts of a rebellion by the poor people of Teotihuacan against the wealthy.



- Whatever the reason or combination of reasons, by 750 C.E., the city had been completely destroyed and abandoned.

What Happened to the Maya?

- The Mayan civilization lasted for about another 200 years after the fall of Teotihuacan.



- There is a mystery behind the fall of the Mayan civilization...by 900 C.E. they had abandoned their cities completely to be consumed by the jungles of Mesoamerica.

What Happened to the Maya?

- **Open Ended Question:**

- What were some reasons for why the Mayans abandoned their main city of Teotihuacan?

What Happened to the Maya?

- **Open Ended Question:**

- What were some reasons for why the Mayans abandoned their main city of Teotihuacan?
 - - Overpopulation, drought or rebellion

The Rise of the Aztec

- As the Maya left their cities, a people called the **Toltec** seized what is now part of Northern Mexico.



- These warrior nomads built the city Tula, which is northwest of present day Mexico City.

The Rise of the Aztec



- From Tula, the Toltec conquered lands all the way into the Yucatan Peninsula.

The Rise of the Aztec



The Rise of the Aztec



The Rise of the Aztec

- Toltec rulers tightly controlled trade.



- They held a monopoly, or the sole right to the trade in Obsidian.

The Rise of the Aztec

- As a result from this Monopoly, the Toltec kept other people from making weapons to challenge them.



- Around 1200 C.E., invaders from the north captured Tula.

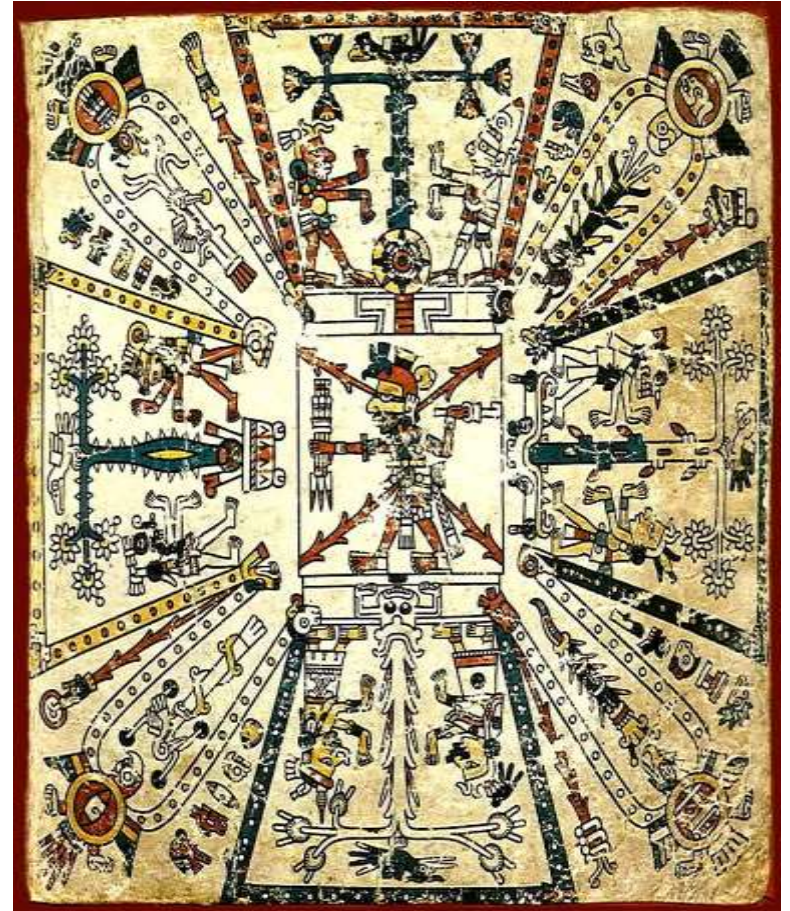
The Rise of the Aztec

- One group of invaders, who called themselves the **Aztec**, admired the Toltec culture and mimicked it the best they could.



- Aztec warriors then took control of the regions trade and built a massive empire.

The Rise of the Aztec



- When the Europeans arrived in 1500 C.E., the Aztec had an empire with about 5 million people living under them.

The Rise of the Aztec

- **Questions:**

- 1) What group of people seized control of Northern Mexico after the Mayans fell?
- 2) What did they have a monopoly over?
- 3) What was the name of the Toltec's major city?
- 4) What group of people overthrew the Toltec's?

The Rise of the Aztec

- **Questions:**

- 1) What group of people seized control of Northern Mexico after the Mayans fell?

- **The Toltec**

- 2) What did they have a monopoly over?

- **Obsidian**

- 3) What was the name of the Toltec's major city?

- **Tula**

- 4) What group of people overthrew the Toltec's?

- **The Aztec**

The Moche and Inca

- South of Mesoamerica, a number of other civilizations developed along the west coast of South America.



- The **Moche** people located in the dry coastal desert of what is now Peru.

The Moche and Inca

- The Moche ruled from about 100 C.E. to around 700 C.E.



- They dug canals that carried water from rivers in the Andes mountain ranges to their desert homeland...because of this irrigation, the desert bloomed with crops.

The Moche and Inca



The Moche and Inca

- The Moche suffered no shortage of food.



- They ate corn, squash, beans and peanuts...hunted llamas, guinea pigs and fished in the nearby Pacific Ocean.

The Moche and Inca

- This wealth of food freed the Moche to do other things.



- Moche engineers designed huge pyramids, such as the **Temple of the Sun**.

The Moche and Inca



The Moche and Inca

- Moche traders exchanged goods with people as far as the rain forest of the Amazon River Valley.



- These goods included pottery, cloth and jewelry.

The Moche and Inca

- The Moche did not have a written language.



- Instead, their culture's story is told through artwork, with pottery often showing important animals to the Moche, such as the llama.

The Moche and Inca

- The Llama served as a pack animal, carrying goods over long distances.



- Llama's also provided meat for food and wool for weaving.

The Moche and Inca

- For all their achievements, however, the Moche never expanded much beyond their homeland.



- The work of empire building belonged to another group of people called the **Inca**.

The Moche and Inca

- The Incan homeland lay in the Andes mountain ranges, again in present day Peru.



- They chose to live in high river valleys, often above 10,000 feet.

The Moche and Inca

- Over time, the Inca built the largest empire in the ancient America's.



- It centered around their capital city of **Cuzco**, which was founded in 1100 C.E.

The Moche and Inca

- **Cusco** today has changed into a modern city in southeastern Peru, near the Urubamba Valley of the Andes mountain range.
- In 2007, the city had a population of 358,935.



The Moche and Inca

- Cusco was the site of the historic capital of the Inca Empire and was declared a World Heritage Site in 1983 by UNESCO.



- It is a major tourist destination and receives almost 2 million visitors a year.

The Moche and Inca



- It is designated as the Historical Capital of Peru by the Constitution of Peru.

The Moche and Inca

- Questions:
- What kind of food did the Moche hunt and gather?
- How did the Moche tell stories without a written language?
- What group of people built a large empire in what is now Peru?
- What was the name of their capital city?

The Moche and Inca

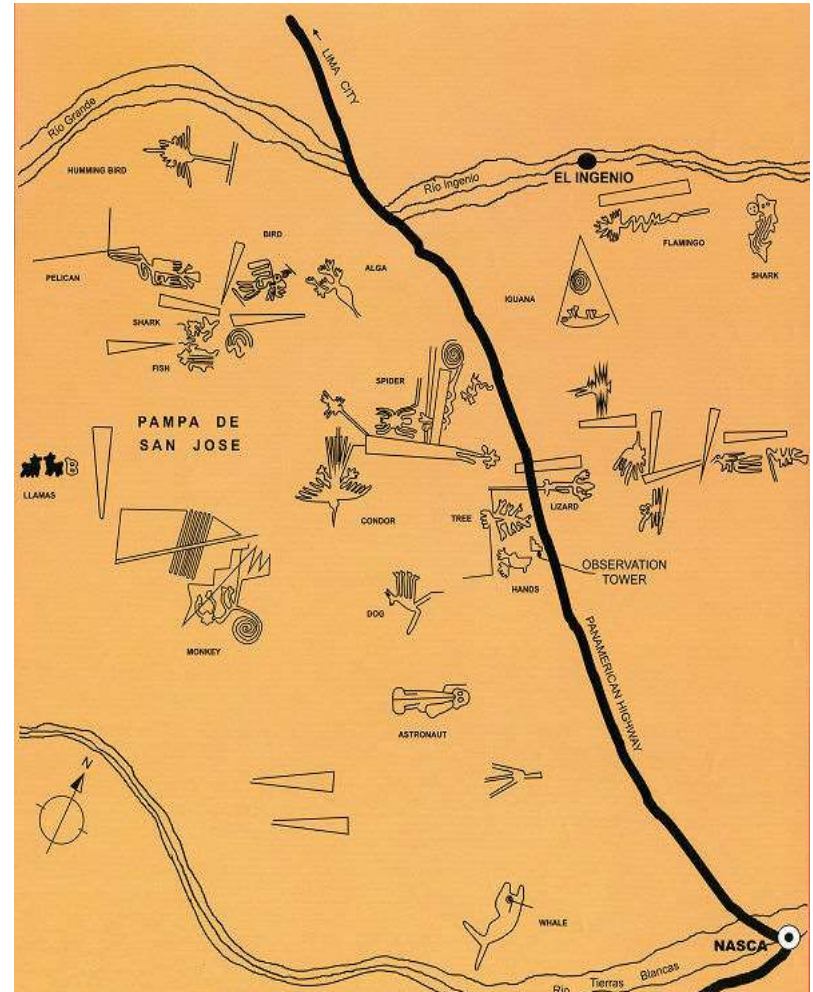
- Questions:
- What kind of food did the Moche hunt and gather?
 - **Corn, beans, peanuts and hunted Llamas and guinea pigs**
- How did the Moche tell stories without a written language?
 - **Through artwork on pottery**
- What group of people built a large empire in what is now Peru?
 - **The Inca**
- What was the name of their capital city?
 - **Cuzco**

History Mystery Time!!!



History Mystery Time!!!

- How do we know about the people in ancient Peru?
- Two thousand years ago, the Nazca people of southern Peru etched into the ground more than 70 figures that can be clearly seen only from the air.



History Mystery Time!!!

- Altogether covering 190 square miles, the figures included trees, flowers, geometric shapes, animals and birds.



History Mystery Time!!!



- The lines may have been an outdoor temple, sacred walkways or constellations, however, their purpose remains a History Mystery!

History Mystery Time!!!



History Mystery Time!!!



History Mystery Time!!!



Time Traveler!!!!



Time Traveler!!!!

- Jade was more valuable than gold or silver to the Maya.



- However, neither flint nor obsidian could engrave its hard surface.

Time Traveler!!!!

- Instead, artists slowly sawed the stone with tight cords drawn back and forth, forming a groove.
- Bone drills cut decorative incisions and abrasive plants such as cane polished the finished work.



Time Traveler!!!!



- Possession of high quality Jade signaled a person's high rank in Mayan society.

First American Civilizations

- Summarize:

Answer the following open ended questions in a well organized paragraph.

How and when did the first people come to the Americas and how did they live once they were here?

First American Civilizations

- Expository Writing:
- Answer the following essay question in a well organized three paragraph response.
- Write a short essay comparing the civilizations that developed in Mesoamerica to those that developed in South America.