

## Assignment Discovery Lesson Plan Conquistadors: Hernán Cortés

### Curriculum Focus

World History

### Grade level

9-12

### Duration:

Two or three class periods

### Objectives

Students will

- research the accomplishments of Hernán Cortés and the characteristics of effective leaders; and
- conduct a debate about Cortés' leadership skills.

### Materials:

- Computer with Internet access
- Paper, pens, pencils
- Newsprint and markers

### Procedure

1. In a class discussion, encourage students to think about and discuss Hernán Cortés's personal qualities and his motivations as a conquistador.
2. Then ask students to take a more general view and brainstorm some of the often universal qualities of an effective leader. Write students' ideas on a sheet of newsprint. To spur suggestions and discussion, suggest the following leadership qualities:
  - having a vision and a plan for making that vision a reality
  - being knowledgeable, having direction, and believing in what you are doing
  - being charismatic, or having a dynamic personality that attracts others (Leaders usually have a loyal following.)
  - having the ability to make decisions and take action
3. Tell students that they are going to hold a debate on whether Cortés's leadership skills ultimately let him conquer the Aztecs in Mexico.
4. Divide students into two groups. Have one group take the position that Cortés's personal qualities and leadership skills helped him conquer the Aztecs in Mexico. Have the second group take the position that his leadership skills did *not* help him conquer the Aztecs.

5. Tell students to use both library resources and the Internet in their research and to take notes for use in the debate.
6. Suggest that students look at these Web sites for information about Cortés:
  - <http://www.tcr.org/mexico.html>
  - [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/PRESCOTT/bk02\\_ch03.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/PRESCOTT/bk02_ch03.html)
  - [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/PRESCOTT/bk02\\_ch08.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/PRESCOTT/bk02_ch08.html)
  - <http://www.millersv.edu/~columbus/papers/richart.html>
7. Suggest that they also look at these Web sites, which describe qualities of a leader:
  - [http://www.eaglesflight.com/leadership/10\\_qualities.html](http://www.eaglesflight.com/leadership/10_qualities.html)
  - <http://www.lisn.org/leadership.htm>
  - [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/TM/WS\\_leadership\\_qualities.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/TM/WS_leadership_qualities.shtml)
8. When the two groups have completed their research, conduct the debate. Give each side a chance to present an opening argument, followed by a rebuttal. Continue the debate for as long as students have information to add.
9. Conclude the lesson by bringing the class back together and discussing the debate. Which side does the class think made stronger arguments? What is the class consensus? Do the majority of students think that Cortés's leadership skills resulted in his conquest of Mexico? What other factors, such as superior military strength, do students think helped seal Cortés's victory and the Aztecs' fate?

### Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

**3 points:** Students contributed enthusiastically to class discussions; actively and competently contributed to their group's research; helped present a strong argument at the outset of the debate; spoke clearly and forcefully during the debate.

**2 points:** Students contributed somewhat to class discussions; contributed to their group's research; helped present a reasonably strong argument at the outset of the debate; spoke somewhat clearly and forcefully during the debate.

**1 point:** Students did not contribute to class discussions; did not contribute meaningfully to their group's research; participated only minimally in the presentation of an argument at the outset of the debate; spoke little, if at all, during the debate.

### Vocabulary

#### Aztecs

**Definition:** A Native American people who built an empire in Mexico that thrived during the 1400s and early 1500s

**Context:** Moctezuma was the Aztec emperor in power when Hernán Cortés landed in Mexico.

#### charisma

**Definition:** A magnetic charm that inspires exceptional loyalty and enthusiasm

**Context:** Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy are two American presidents considered by many to have had a great deal of charisma.

### **conquistador**

**Definition:** The Spanish word for conqueror. It generally refers to the first Europeans to enter a region in the New World for the purpose of conquering the native peoples and settling in the area.

**Context:** Hernán Cortés is considered one of the great conquistadors of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Hernán Cortés**

**Definition:** A Spanish conquistador who defeated the Aztecs in 1521

**Context:** Through a combination of skill and luck, Hernán Cortés defeated the Aztecs in 1521, two years after he arrived in Mexico.

### **Moctezuma**

**Definition:** The emperor of the Aztec empire from 1502 to 1519

**Context:** While Moctezuma had a reputation as a valiant soldier, he was unable to unite his vast empire during his 17-year rule.

### **Academic Standards**

*The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of the NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>.*

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance

### **Credit**

Marilyn Fenichel, education writer and editor