Program Description

Travel back in time to Mexico and Peru to meet the Aztecs and the Inca. This video focuses on the motivation of Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, two Spanish conquistadors. Students learn about the rise and fall of the Aztecs and the Inca in their struggle against European explorers. The Aztecs — It was an empire built on religion and gold, spanning 200,000 miles of Central America. But with a combination of luck, disease, and fortitude, one Spanish conqueror brought down the Aztec Empire. Learn how Hernán Cortés spent three months destroying what it took the Aztecs years to create. Cortés and the Quest for Glory — Discover how one man's ruthless pursuit of fame and fortune led to the collapse of a powerful empire. Watch as Cortés makes his motto, "Conquer or die," the only law of the land. Pizarro in the Empire of Gold — How did the greatest civilization on Earth fall to ruin? Behind the sophisticated roads, the thriving economy, and the system of communication, the Inca were suffering from civil war. Their political upheaval opened the gate for Francisco Pizarro, an illiterate Spanish soldier, and his minuscule army to conquer the Inca Empire.

Video Comprehension Questions

Segment 1, The Aztecs

- Why didn’t Montezuma stop Hernán Cortés and his men from entering his Aztec kingdom? (At first, Montezuma believed Cortés was an ancient Aztec god.)
- What did the Spaniards do that killed more than half the Aztec population? (They brought with them smallpox, a deadly disease.)
- What city did Cortés build on top of Tenochtitlan after destroying the capital? (Cortés built Mexico City, the capital of Spain’s new empire in the Americas.)

Segment 2, Cortés and the Quest for Glory

- What famous expedition inspired Hernán Cortés to explore the Americas? What was Cortés seeking in the New World? (Christopher Columbus had inspired Cortés. Cortés was seeking fortunes in the New World.)
- What weapons made the army of Cortés so strong, despite their small size? (They had new weapons not seen in the America, such as guns, armor, and horses.)
Conquest of the Americas: Teacher’s Guide

Segment 3, Pizarro in the Empire of Gold

- What was the personal motto of Hernán Cortez? (His personal motto was “Conquer or die.”)

The Inca Empire stretched 3,000 miles along the Andes Mountains in South America.

- What two things were weakening the Inca empire about the same time that Pizarro arrived? (The Inca emperor died and a power struggle had sparked a civil war. Also, smallpox brought by the Spaniards was spreading across South America.)

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the Aztecs and Inca.
- Create a picture book showing the conquest of one of these two empires.
- Discuss the similarities and differences of the Aztecs and Inca and how the Spaniards defeated both groups.

Materials

- Conquest of the Americas video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Paper and pencils
- Colored pencils or makers
- Computer with Internet access

Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by reviewing the stories of the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru. Have students recall what they learned in the video Conquest of the Americas.

2. Based on the content of the video, ask students to name the conquerors of each empire. (Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztecs and Francisco Pizarro conquered the Incas.) Make a class list of factors that contributed to each conqueror's success. Help students conclude the following:

   - Cortés united dissatisfied groups under Aztec rule to help the Spaniards defeat the Aztecs.
   - Both Cortés and Pizarro's cavalries were superior to the battle techniques of the Aztecs and Inca.
   - Smallpox and other European diseases contributed to diminishing the populations of the Aztec and Inca Empires.
   - Much division within the Inca Empire worked to Pizarro's advantage.
3. After students have become familiar with the key elements of each story, divide them into pairs. Have each pair choose to focus on the Aztecs or Inca. Try to have an equal number of students working on each story. Tell the pairs to develop picture books explaining how their group was conquered. The pairs should be sure to cover the following points:

- Strengths of the Aztecs or Inca
- Weaknesses of the Aztecs or Inca
- Reasons for Spanish victories

4. Give students time in class to research their topics and complete their picture books. Then have each pair present their books to the class. Additional information is found at the Web sites below.

- Hernán Cortés
  http://www.umich.edu/~proflame/texts/mirror/conflict.html
  http://www.mexconnect.com/mex/history/jtuck/jtcortes.html
  http://www.virtualology.com/virtualmuseumofhistory/hallofexplorers/HERNANDOCORTES.COM/

- Francisco Pizarro
  http://www.bruce.ruiz.net/PanamaHistory/francisco_pizarro.htm
  http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/eurvoya/inca.html
  http://www.geocities.com/Athens/7012/bios/explorers/pizarro.htm
  http://www.carpenoctem.tv/military/pizarro.html

5. Conclude the lesson by discussing differences and similarities between the Spaniards’ treatment of the Aztecs and Inca. In what ways were they similar? Which conquistador showed more compassion? How did events beyond the Spaniards’ control lead to their success?

6. Help students conclude that while Cortés showed somewhat more compassion for the Aztecs than Pizarro did for the Inca, both greedy conquistadors were fighting to expand the Spanish Empire. Their superior cavalries contributed to their success. The native groups were also defeated by a smallpox epidemic, which killed thousands of people.

Assessment

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

- 3 points: Students participate actively in class discussions; created highly attractive and informative picture books based on research; and drew insightful conclusions based on the lesson.

- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; created attractive and somewhat informative picture books based on some research, and drew some conclusions based on the lesson.

- 1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions; did not complete their picture books; and had difficulty drawing conclusions based on the lesson.

Vocabulary
**Aztecs**

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

*Context:* Famine and disease contributed to the defeat of the Aztecs at the hands of the Spaniards.

**conquistador**

*Definition:* The Spanish word for conqueror; the term refers to the first Europeans who entered a region for the purpose of forcing the native peoples out and settling in the area.

*Context:* The conquistadors of Spain were famous for conquering New World empires and for taking as much gold as they could.

**Hernán Cortés**

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

*Context:* Hernán Cortés forged an alliance among some Indian groups under Aztec control, which helped him defeat this mighty empire.

**Inca**

*Definition:* A South American Indian people that established one of the largest and wealthiest empires in the Americas. At its height, the empire extended more than 2,500 miles along the western coast of South America.

*Context:* A key similarity between the Aztecs and Inca was a lack of unity among different Indian groups that made up each empire.

**Moctezuma**

*Definition:* The Aztec emperor from 1502 to 1519

*Context:* Moctezuma’s mistakes dealing with Cortés contributed to his death and the fall of the Aztec Empire.

**Francisco Pizarro**

*Definition:* The Spanish conquistador who vanquished the Inca Empire in 1534

*Context:* Francisco Pizarro was a fierce and ruthless leader, determined to defeat the Inca and take over their empire.

**Academic Standards**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to [http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/).

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

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

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

• [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)