

## [Indigenous American Empires and the Spanish Conquest]

<b>SUBJECT</b> [American History]	<b>TEACHER</b> [?]	<b>GRADE</b> [Elementary School]	<b>DATE</b> [November 11, 2020]
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### OVERVIEW

When the Spanish arrived in the Americas, they didn't know the vast land they had reached. Nor did they have any clue of the sprawling empires that consumed the landscape. The culture and history of the Indigenous Americans was as old and as diverse as the rest of humanity, but it had developed in relative isolation, compared to the rest of humankind. Similar in religion and language, Meso and South American nations were ethnically diverse. They fought one another for position, and when the Spaniards came, their responses varied greatly. Some fought with the Spanish, others fought against them. But, most importantly, their decisions affected the outcome of events just as much as those of the Spaniards.

### Unit Goals

- Students will be introduced to various Indigenous American groups. They will begin to understand their culture and achievements, within their proper context.
- Students should come to understand the reasons behind certain groups allying themselves with the Spanish, against other indigenous groups. Tlaxcala, for example, fought with the Spanish against the Aztec, because it suited them to see the end of their hated foes.
- Students will take into account the limitations enforced by geography, culture clash, language, distance, and time, upon the participants, and how these drove their decision-making processes.
- Lastly, students will come to see that the Spanish were not all conquering, nor were the Indigenous helpless to stand against them.

### Schedule:

- **Monday:** Overview of Mesoamerica (Units: Mesoamerica, Maya) – It's people, history, geography, and cultures. How did Mesoamerican states make war; the rise and fall of the Maya – their culture; setting the stage for the arrival of the Spanish, in the sixteenth century.
- **Tuesday:** The Aztec of Tenochtitlan (Units: The Aztec, Tenochtitlan– The origins of the Mexica (Aztec), their rise to power in the valley of Mexico. Their capital and empire; how did it work, and what were their achievements?
- **Wednesday:** Fall of the Aztec (Units: Montezuma Xocoyotsin, Hernan Cortes, Tlaxcala) - The Emperor of Tenochtitlan was a complex and capable man. Understand his reign, to contextualize the empire's position on the eve of Cortes's arrival. Reforms and military expansion; his wars against the Tlascalans; and his actions upon meeting the Spaniards. Cortes's arrival: alliance with Tlaxcala. Who they were, and why they fought with the Spaniards. Meeting of Montezuma and Cortes. Why did Cortes succeed, and Montezuma fail?
- **Thursday:** The Rise and Fall of the Inca (Units: The Inca, Francisco Pizarro) – The powerhouse of South America. Who were they, and how did they come to power? Describe their government, significant cultural aspects, and the achievement of their builders. What events led to their weakening, just as the Spanish showed up? Who was Pizarro? What led him to the Inca, and why did he succeed against so great an Empire?
- **Friday:** Spain meets the Mapuche (Units: The Mapuche, Diego de Almagro) – Natives of Chile, the Mapuche were never united, but with the arrival of the Spanish, they formed a

Confederation to oppose them. Look to their culture, geography, and the overextended nature of the Spanish. How, and why, did the Mapuche succeed, where so many others didn't? Who was Almagro? Why did he venture down into Chile, and what happened while he was there? How did he meet his end?

### **Resources**

- Unit summaries on [www.huntthepast.com](http://www.huntthepast.com). These units to be utilized at teacher's discretion: Mesoamerica, Maya, The Aztec, Tenochtitlan, Montezuma Xocoyotzin, Tlaxcala, The Inca, and The Mapuche, Hernan Cortes, Francisco Pizarro, Diego de Almagro.
- Books, particularly primary sources, provided in footnotes.
- Videos, books, images, activities, and maps provided by [www.huntthepast.com](http://www.huntthepast.com), as well as any the instructor may deem appropriate, are to be utilized as teaching aids.

### **Essential Skills**

- Students will have a basic understanding of Mesoamerica and its people.
- They will be able to identify certain differences between various Amerindian groups, like the Inca, Aztec and Maya, and Mapuche.
- Students will see that Spanish success wasn't inevitable; that they had considerable help along the way with allied states; and that they did meet defeat.
- Students will come to understand the motivations and actions of men like Hernan Cortes, Francisco Pizarro, and Diego de Almagro, within their proper context. These were men embarking upon extraordinary campaigns, and they will be understood as such.