Prepare to Read

**Build Background Knowledge**

Ask students to recall the rise of civilizations they have studied so far. Based on their previous reading, ask them to predict how ancient civilizations would develop in the Americas.

**Set a Purpose**

- **WITNESS HISTORY** Read the selection aloud or play the audio.

  "Witness History Audio CD, Elite Warriors Uphold an Empire"

  Ask What was the role of warfare in Aztec society? (Warfare served to defend the empire and to capture humans for ritual sacrifice to the gods.) What do the artifacts suggest about Aztec beliefs? (They honored predatory animals and valued warfare.) Tell students that they will learn more about the Aztecs.

- **Focus** Point out the Section Focus Question and write it on the board. Tell students to refer to this question as they read. (Answer appears with Section 1 Assessment answers.)

- **Preview** Have students preview the Section Objectives and the list of Terms, People, and Places.

- **Reading Skill** Have students use the Reading Strategy: Recognize Sequences worksheet.

**Note Taking**

Reading Skill: Compare and Contrast Use a chart like the one below to take notes on similarities and differences in how early people adapted to climate and geography in different parts of the Americas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptation to the Americas</th>
<th>Climate</th>
<th>Geography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objectives**

As you teach this section, keep students focused on the following objectives to help them answer the Section Focus Question and master core content.

- **Describe when and where people first settled the Americas.**
- **Analyze the main characteristics of the Olmec and Maya civilizations.**
- **Outline how the Aztec empire and Aztec society took shape.**

**Civilizations of Mesoamerica**

The Americas include two continents, North America and South America. Within these two geographic regions lies a cultural region called Mesoamerica, which is made up of Mexico and Central America. Some of the earliest civilizations in the Americas developed in Mesoamerica.

**People Settle in the Americas**

Sometimes between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago, most scholars believe, people first arrived in the Americas. Scholars are still trying to understand the details of how this great migration occurred. Originally, it was believed that people came from Asia and entered through Alaska. This migration is thought to have taken place near the end of the last Ice Age, which lasted from about 100,000 years ago to about 10,000 years ago. During the ice age, so much water froze into thick ice sheets that the sea level dropped, exposing a land bridge between Siberia and Alaska in the area that is now the Bering Strait. About 10,000 B.C., Earth’s climate warmed and the ice melted. As a result, water levels rose and covered the Bering land bridge.

The earliest evidence supported the theory that hunters followed herds of bison and mammoths across the land bridge and then south through North America, Central America, and South America. Recent data suggest something different—that people migrated to parts of the Americas much earlier and along coastal routes, perhaps paddling small boats. Although neither theory has been proved, researchers now base the dates of migration into the Americas mostly on evidence found at prehistoric sites.
Adapting to New Environments  

The first Americans faced a variety of environments in which they could settle. For example, great mountain chains—the Rockies, the eastern and western Sierra Madre, and the Andes—dominate the western Americas. In addition, through the continents flow two of the world’s four longest rivers, the Amazon of South America and the Mississippi of North America. Far to the north and south of the continents, people learned to survive in icy tundras or dense vegetation of the Amazon rain forest. Elsewhere, hunters adapted to deserts like the Atacama of Chile, woodlands like those in eastern North America, and the fertile plains of both continents.

People Begin to Farm and Build Villages  

In the Americas, no earlier than 6500 B.C. and 2000 B.C., the present-day inhabitants of the Americas had settled in villages. Populations then expanded, and some villages would have needed many years to reach Monte Verde, so must have begun migrating much earlier than previously thought. More recently, scientists at Monte Verde have explored a second site that may indicate even older human activity.

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History Background  

Settlement Clues  

Excavations at Monte Verde, Chile, have contributed dramatic evidence to the debate over just how long ago the first migrations to the Americas occurred. In 1997, a team of scientists concluded that artifacts uncovered at Monte Verde were at least 12,500 years old. This was over 1,000 years older than previous discoveries had indicated. In addition, Monte Verde is about 10,000 miles south of the Bering Straits, while the earlier accepted “oldest” artifacts in New Mexico are much farther north. People would have needed many years to reach Monte Verde, so must have begun migrating much earlier than previously thought. More recently, scientists at Monte Verde have explored a second site that may indicate even older human activity.

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Civilization Arises With the Olmecs

Instruct
■ Introduce Ask students to describe how the earliest peoples of Mesoamerica lived. What foods did they eat? Where were their homes? Then ask students to predict how these earliest communities might have changed as they grew larger. Urge students to read to confirm or revise their ideas.
■ Teach Write Olmecs on the board. Ask students for key information about the Olmecs. List their ideas under the heading on the board. (Chart should include: little known about; peaceful class of priests and nobles; ingenious builders able to create and transport colossal stone statues; trade important; culture spread through trade; “mother culture” of Mesoamerica)
■ Quick Activity Have students begin to make a timeline of early Mesoamerican cultures.

Independent Practice
■ Note Taking Have students fill in the Venn Diagram listing information about the Olmecs. Have students add to their Outline Maps, locating the Olmecs.

Monitor Progress
■ As students fill in their Venn diagrams, circulate to make sure that they correctly identify key features of Olmec culture. Refer them to the chart on the board for guidance. For a completed version of the Venn diagram, see Note Taking Transparencies, 728
■ Circulate to make sure that students have correctly located the Olmec civilization on their Outline Maps.

Answer

Connections to Today
Maize, or corn, was extremely important in early Mesoamerican cultures. It was the main crop for the Olmecs. Because this early culture strongly influenced later cultures, they too relied heavily on corn. Ordinary Aztecs, for example, had a diet largely of corn and beans. They prepared corn by mixing ground kernels with water and scooping up food. Aztec diners also used it as a wrapper to fold around a mixture of meat and vegetables. Today, we know this item of Aztec cuisine as the tortilla. Both tortillas and tacos remain central elements in the modern Mexican diet.
power, warfare, and trade a constant theme of life among them. Cities such as Palenque, Copan, and Piedras Negras all carried great influence in their time, but the largest and most supreme power resided in the rulers of Tikal and Calakmul.

While the Maya were not united politically, city-states maintained regular contact through a system of economic exchange, which generated much wealth. Traders carried valuable cargoes long distances by sea and along trade routes of packed earth. Trade goods included items of daily use—such as honey, salt, and cotton—and nonessential but prized items such as feathers, jade, and jaguar pelts. These goods might have been used in ceremonies or to show status.

Structuring Society
Each Maya city had its own ruler, who was usually male. Maya records and carvings show that women occasionally governed on their own or in the name of young sons. Nobles served many functions in support of the ruler. Some were military leaders, while others managed public works, collected taxes, and enforced laws. Scribes, painters, and sculptors were also very highly respected. Merchants may have formed a middle class in society though the wealthiest and most powerful merchants were certainly nobles.

The majority of the Maya were farmers. They grew maize, beans, and squash—the basic food crops of Mesoamerica—as well as fruit trees, cacao, and brilliant tropical flowers. To support the cities, farmers paid taxes and traded for the Maya.

Many Maya cities were hidden beneath tropical overgrowth. The archaeologists who uncovered them have learned that numerous powerful governments once ruled the area.

1. Locate (a) Tikal (b) Calakmul (c) Copan (d) Palenque (e) Piedras Negras

2. Region How did the geography of the Maya region differ from north to south?

3. Make Generalizations Some Maya cities existed only in the earlier era shown on the map; some only in the later era, and some in both. Why might the kinship of a Maya city have varied?

The Maya Build Widespread Civilization

Instruct
- Introduce Ask students to recall the effects of Olmec trade on later cultures in Mesoamerica. What are some key features they would expect to find in the Maya culture?
- Teach Create three columns on the board, labeled Agro-Cultural Life of the Maya, City-States, and Society. Have students list details from the text about each topic. Ask them to summarize the importance of trade for the Maya.
- Quick Activity Have students access Web Code nap-0612 to take the Geography Interactive Audio Guided Tour and then answer the map skills questions in the text.

Independent Practice
- Primary Source Have students read John Lloyd Stephens’s writings describing his experiences at a Maya site and answer the questions on the worksheet.

Monitor Progress
Check answers to map skills questions.

Answers

Map Skills
1. Review locations with students.
2. The southern region had more rivers and was more mountainous.
3. Sample: People moved from place to place, perhaps because they exhausted the soil.

Instead of a centrally ruled empire, the Maya grew into city-states, each of which had its own region of influence.
Cultural Life of the Maya

Instruct

■ Introduce Recall with students some of the important segments of Mayan society (nobles, scribes, farmers, sculptors, priests). Ask students to predict the role each of these groups might play in the cultural life of the Maya.

■ Teach Draw a concept web on the board with Maya Cultural Life in the center. Ask students to list headings for the outer cells (Sculpture, Writing System, Astronomy/Mathematics) and then to provide details to describe each aspect of Maya cultural life. Ask students why Maya civilization declined. (Possible answer: Perhaps due to frequent warfare or soil exhaustion.)

■ Quick Activity Display Color Transparency 33: Maya Hieroglyphs. Use the lesson suggested in the transparency book to guide a discussion on Maya glyphs. Explain that a glyph can represent a syllable in a word or the entire word. Clarify that numbers can be indicated simply with lines and dots or in a more elaborate manner by showing people or gods that represent a number.

Answer

■ that their religion was elaborate and central to their culture; that their history was well documented

Cultural Life of the Maya

The cultural life of the Maya included impressive advances in learning and the arts. In addition, the Maya developed a complex polytheistic religion that influenced their cultural life as well as their spiritual beliefs. Many Mayas today maintain elements of the traditional religion established by the ancient Maya, such as the belief that each person's spirit is associated with a particular animal.

Sculptors Leave a Legacy in Stone

The cities of the Maya are known today for their towering temples and palaces built from stone. Temples rested on pyramid-shaped platforms that were often quite large. Atop the temples, priests performed rites and sacrifices, while the people watched from the plazas below. Some temples also served as burial places for rulers, nobles, and priests. Palaces may have been used as royal residences as well as locations for meetings, courts, and other governmental activities.

The Maya placed elaborately carved sculptures on many of their buildings. They also sculpted tall stone monuments, each of which is called a stele. These carvings preserve striking images of noble, warrior, and plumed headdressed, and powerful rulers. They also represent the Maya gods, including the creator god Itzamna (et sahm nah), the rain god Chac (chakh), and the sun god K'inich Ajaw (keen EECH ah HOW).

Scribes Record Historical Events

The Maya also developed a hieroglyphic writing system, which scholars did not decipher until recent decades. Maya scribes carved inscriptions on stelae that include names of rulers, mentions of neighboring city-states, and dates and descriptions of events. They also wrote about astronomy, rituals, and other religious matters in books made of bark paper. Spanish conquerors later burned most of these books, considering any works that were written by non-Christians to be unacceptable. Three books, however, were taken to Europe and have survived into the present.

Priests Develop Astronomy and Mathematics

Maya priests needed to measure time accurately in order to hold ceremonies at the correct moment. As a result, many priests became expert mathematicians and astronomers. They developed an accurate 365-day solar calendar as well as a 260-day ritual calendar. Maya priests also invented a numbering system that included place values and the concept of zero.

Maya Civilization Declines

About A.D. 900, the Maya abandoned many of their cities. In the Yucatan Peninsula, cities flourished for a few more centuries, but there, too, the Maya eventually stopped building temples. By the time the Spanish arrived in the 1500s, the Maya mostly lived in farming villages. Archaeologists do not know for sure why Maya civilization declined, although theories abound. For example, frequent warfare may have taken its toll on society, or overpopulation could have led to over-farming and exhaustion of the soil.

Throughout the region, however, the remoteness of their jungle and mountain locations allowed many Mayas to survive the encounter with the Spaniards. Today, more than two million Maya people live in Guatemala and southern Mexico.

Checkpoint What do Maya arts and writing tell us about their religion and history?

Photographs From the Past

British archaeologist Alfred Maudslay won fame in the late 1800s for his sharp photographs from the point of view of a modern traveler but may include details about what the location may have been like in the past. Students may wish to do outside research to supplement information from the text. Tape record students’ travelogues and share them with the class.
Have students, working in groups, examine the Infographic on common elements of culture in Mesoamerica. Ask students to first identify the three elements of culture shown: writing, pyramid-building, and ball-playing. Then have groups discuss the following questions: How were writing and pyramids similar and different across Mesoamerican cultures? How do they compare to similar elements in other early cultures students have read about?

Monitor Progress
- Circulate to make sure that students have correctly listed information about Maya culture in their Venn Diagrams.
- Check answers to Infographic questions.

Thinking Critically
1. Draw Inferences: In what ways do you think these societies passed elements of culture to one another?
2. Determine Relevance: How might learning about the shared elements of culture help scholars understand each Mesoamerican society?

Answers

Thinking Critically
1. through trade, travel, and conquest
2. If they know about the culture of one society, they can more easily make hypotheses about another.

Connections to Today: A Maya legend tells of a battle between two brothers and the death gods. The battle takes place on a ball court in the form of a ritual game. After many games, deaths, and journeys, descendants of the original brothers defeat the gods and become the sun and moon.

Perhaps this legend explains why ball courts and ball games were a key feature of Maya cities. Maya spectators watched as two teams competed to drive a solid rubber ball through a stone ring that hung from a wall. Opposing players moved the ball across the court using their bodies, but not their hands or feet. These early games were similar to modern-day basketball and soccer, in which players try to move a ball from one end of a court (or field) to the other to reach a goal.

In addition to the societies you are reading about in this section, numerous others arose in Mesoamerica between the time of the Olmecs and the arrival of Spanish explorers in the 1500s. While each developed individual traits that set it apart from the other groups, they all shared various cultural elements. For example, both the Maya and the Aztecs used the complicated “calendar round,” which combined days from a 260-ritual calendar and a 365-solar calendar to form 52-year cycles similar in cultural importance to our centuries.

Architecture: Throughout the region, architecture varied in style and construction, but the stepped pyramid prevailed as a basic shape of buildings in all cultures, from the small temple at the Toltec capital at Tula (above) to the enormous structure (right) at the Maya city of Tikal.

Sport and Ritual: Although rules varied in the famous Mesoamerican ballgame, the basic format stayed the same. Players competed on an I-shaped court (left) with sloped walls, like the Zapotec court below. They wore thick padding (as on the Maya ballplayer figurine above) to avoid injury as they tried to knock a solid rubber ball down the court and through a small hoop. The challenging game carried great ritual importance, representing the movements of the moon and sun. Sometimes, the losing team would be sacrificed to keep these heavenly bodies in motion (as shown at right).

Connect to Our World

Independent Practice

Monitor Progress

Connections to Today

Answers

Thinking Critically

1. through trade, travel, and conquest
2. If they know about the culture of one society, they can more easily make hypotheses about another.
The Aztec Empire Forms in Mexico

**Instruct**

- **Introduce:** Key Terms: Have students find the key term “chinampas” and explain its meaning. Direct them to the illustration in their text, which shows a chinampa. Using the Idea Wave strategy (TE, p. T22), ask students what the chinampas show about Aztec society. (that Aztec society was creative in the ways it adapted to the environment; that it was well-organized enough to undertake large projects) Have them read to confirm their ideas.

- **Teach** Trace Aztec settlement in the Valley of Mexico. Ask Why did the Aztecs build their city on an island in Lake Texcoco? (They saw a prophesied sign, according to legend.) What challenges did the city’s location present? (The land was swampy, so the Aztecs had to create floating gardens to grow crops on. They also had to build causeways to reach the mainland.)

- **Quick Activity** Display Color Transparency 34: Codex to show an example of the hieroglyphs and books Mesoamerican people were creating before the Spanish arrived.

**Independent Practice**

- **Have students add to their timelines.**
- **Link to Literature** To expand students’ understanding of Aztec culture, have them read the selection of Nahuatl poetry and song. (TE, p. 111)
- **Teaching Resources, Unit 1, p. 111**

**Monitor Progress**

Have students rewrite the black subheadings as questions and then write a sentence to answer those questions.

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**Answer**

**Caption** filling in swampland, building causeways, and erecting buildings.

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The Empire Expands. In the 1400s, the Aztecs greatly expanded their territory. Through a combination of fierce conquests and shrewd alliances, they spread their rule across most of Mexico, from the Gulf of Mexico in the east to the Pacific Ocean in the west. By 1517, the Aztec empire numbered an estimated five to six million people.

**Checkpoint:** What are some advantages and disadvantages of building a city on an island in a lake?

### Aztec Society Takes Shape

War brought immense wealth as well as power to the Aztec empire. **Tribute**, or payment from conquered peoples, helped the Aztecs turn their capital into a magnificent city. From its temples and royal palaces to its motes and floating gardens, Tenochtitlán seemed a city of wonders. It was also the center of a complex, well-ordered empire.

**Structuring Government and Society** Unlike the Maya city-states, each of which had its own king, the Aztec empire had a single ruler. A council of nobles, priests, and military leaders elected the emperor, whose primary function was to lead in war. Below him, nobles served as officials, judges, and governors of conquered provinces. Next came the warriors, who could rise to noble status by performing well on the battlefield. The priests were a class apart. They performed rituals to please the gods and prevent droughts or other disasters.

A powerful middle class included long-distance traders, who ferried goods across the empire and beyond. With goods from the highlands such as weapons, tools, and ropes, they bartered for tropical products such as jaguar skins and cacao beans.

The majority of people were共同体s who formed the land. At the bottom of society were serfs and slaves, who were mostly prisoners of war or debtors. Despite their low status, slaves’ rights were clearly established by law. For example, slaves could own land and buy their freedom.

**Religion and Mythology** Influence Culture The Aztecs believed in many gods, including Tlaloc (TLAH lohk), the rain god. After Teotihuacán fell, possibly to invaders, the enormous Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon rose majestically toward the sky. Teotihuacán had dominated life in the Valley of Mexico from about A.D. 200 to A.D. 750. The city was well planned, with wide roads, massive temples, and large apartment buildings to house its population of perhaps 200,000. Along the main avenue, the enormous Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon rose majestically toward the sky.

Citizens of Teotihuacán worshiped gods such as Quetzalcoatl and Tlaloc (TLAH lohk), the rain god. After Teotihuacán fell, possibly to invaders, its culture survived and greatly influenced later peoples of Mesoamerica. The Aztecs, for example, believed that the gods had created the world multiple times. In their mythology, it was in Teotihuacán that the gods created the world in which the Aztecs lived.

**Aztec Musicians** Aztec musicians played a variety of musical instruments, with drums, flutes, and rattles the most important. Other instruments included trumpets, rasps, tambourines, and whistles. Music played an important role in religious rituals as it was often created to glorify gods. As a result, Aztec musicians enjoyed many rewards and privileges. They were exempt from paying certain taxes and tributes. In addition, musicians had the sacred task of calling the people to prayer at specific hours each day.

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### Aztec Society Takes Shape

**Instruct**

- **Introduce** Have a volunteer read the Primary Source quotation on the next page. Explain that the Aztecs believed that gods often sacrificed themselves for the good of the people. Tell students that Aztec religion and mythology strongly influenced the culture, and ask them to read to learn how.

- **Teach** Review the structure of Aztec society. Discuss how order permeated the culture and ask students to identify the effects of this in government, socioeconomic classes, city planning, and expanding scientific knowledge.

**Independent Practice**

- **Biography** To help students learn more about Aztec political structure, have them read the biography *Mexico*, about the Aztec poet-king, and complete the worksheet.

- **Teaching Resources**, Unit 1, p. 110

- **Note Taking** Have students complete the third circle in their Venn Diagrams with information about Aztec society. Ask them to use their completed Venn Diagrams to identify other ways the Olmecs, Maya, and Aztecs were alike or different.

**Monitor Progress**

Check Reading and Note Taking Study Guide entries for student understanding.

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**Link to Music**

**Aztec Musicians** Aztec society centered around war and religion. Music thus also focused on these aspects of society. Aztec musicians played a variety of musical instruments, with drums, flutes, and rattles the most important. Other instruments included trumpets, rasps, tambourines, and whistles. Music played an important role in religious rituals as it was often created to glorify gods. As a result, Aztec musicians enjoyed many rewards and privileges. They were exempt from paying certain taxes and tributes. In addition, musicians had the sacred task of calling the people to prayer at specific hours each day.

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**Chapter 6 Section 1 193**
Answer

Aztec society was structured as a pyramid, with a single emperor at the top, layers of nobles and other officials, a layer of priests, a middle class of merchants, a majority class of farmers, and a lowest class of slaves.

Looking Ahead

The Aztecs developed a sophisticated and complex culture. But among many of the peoples they conquered, discontent festered and rebellion often flared up. At the height of Aztec power, word reached Tenochtitlan that pale-skinned, bearded men had landed on the east coast. When the newcomers from Spain arrived, they found ready allies among people who were ruled by the Aztec empire. In a later chapter, you will read about the results of the encounter between the Aztecs and the newcomers from far-off Spain.

### Review and Assess

#### Section 1 Assessment

1. Sentences should reflect an understanding of each term, person, or place listed at the beginning of the section. Write a sentence explaining its significance.

2. Reading Skill: Compare and Contrast

   Use your completed chart and Venn diagram to compare and contrast the Aztecs and Maya civilizations, on later people? the influence of earlier civilizations, on later people? a therapy still in use today. a therapy still in use today.

3. Recognize Sufficient Evidence

   What types of evidence do you think archaeologists use in order to learn about the cultures of the Aztecs and Maya civilizations? What characteristics do they share the most? In what ways do they differ the most?

4. Sample: If archaeologists find elements of one culture in a later culture's public buildings, monuments, and artwork, this suggests influence of the earlier culture on the later culture.

5. Sample: The Aztecs and Maya both had agricultural and highly structured societies. Both valued priests and religious rituals and scientific knowledge. Aztecs, however, had a single empire while the Maya had many separate city-states.

### Assess and Reteach

#### Assess Progress

- Have students complete the Section Assessment.
- Administer the Section Quiz.

#### Reteach

- If students need more instruction, have them read the section summary.

#### Extend Online

See this chapter's Professional Development pages for the Extend Online activity on the mystery of the Maya.