

# The Amazing Aztecs

**Grades 4-6**

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## Reference Card 1

### The Aztecs



The Aztecs were a small tribe of hunters and farmers who had wandered from the north of Mexico in search of land. They arrived on the shores of Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico in AD 1345.

They were poor and despised and they were allowed to take refuge on some uninhabited marshy islands in the lake. They worked extremely hard and enlarged the islands and transformed their reed huts into stone houses.

Stories say that the Aztecs began their cities by building rafts. Upon the rafts they piled mud from the swamps.

In a few years the roots of the plants grew long enough to reach the bottom of the swamp. There the roots anchored the rafts. With many rafts anchored together there was solid ground for building homes and temples.

The Aztecs soon became a powerful tribe. They were skillful in war and had the ability to learn from the people around them. The city that they had built in the lake was called Tenochtitlan, the Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus. Mexico City stands on the same site today.



## Reference Card 2

### The Warrior People



The Aztecs people were short and stockily built. They had brown skin, almond shaped eyes and jet-black hair. The men wore their hair with a fringe across their forehead. The women wore their hair loose or braided around their heads, or in two loops above their foreheads.

They were a strong, hard-working people. They worked long hours in their fields, ran messages long distances and carried very heavy loads. The temples they helped build were huge structures.

The Aztecs showed a strong sense of duty. Children were obedient and the people obeyed their leaders who controlled their way of life. Everyone obeyed the priests. Their laws were severe and there was little crime. The Aztecs did not have doors with locks or bolts on their homes, just curtains made from reeds.

Although they were obedient and law abiding, they were frequently at war with their neighbors and were not afraid of death. Warriors were given many gifts and riches for their bravery.

The Aztecs were governed by three ruling classes. They were the Emperor, the nobles and the priests.

## Reference Card 3

### Aztec Government

#### Emperor:

The ruler of the Aztecs was called the Emperor. The high priests and the nobles were the only ones who saw or spoke to the Emperor. They dressed plainly and went barefoot. They always kept their eyes down in his presence.

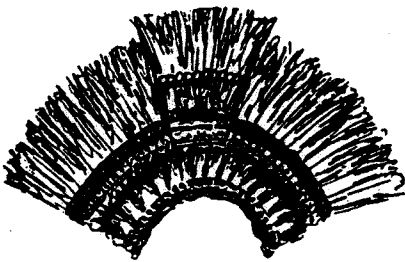
When the Emperor did leave his palace, he was carried in a litter on a throne covered with a beautiful canopy. He wore a jeweled crown topped with a feathery plume, a cloak made of brilliant colored feathers and his clothes were studded with precious stones. The sandals that he wore were covered with pure gold.

#### Nobles:

A ruling class of nobles acted as judges, generals and rulers of the conquered cities. These nobles lived in beautiful houses and owned large estates. They paid no taxes but could not pass on all their wealth to their sons. When a noble died his possessions went back to the Emperor who gave them to another general or judge.

#### Priests:

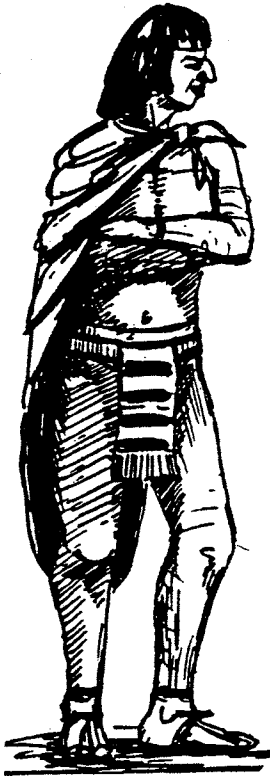
There were thousands of Aztecs who were priests. They lived like monks. They fasted and beat themselves with thorns to draw blood as a penance constantly.



Their bodies were painted black and they dressed in black or dark-green robes embroidered with skulls. They presented a frightening appearance as they went about the city and temple courts dressed in this fashion with their long hair never combed and matted with blood from countless sacrifices.

## Reference Card 4

### The People



The people who were not nobles or priests were called "free commoners". Every free citizen belonged to one of about twenty clans or family groups in Tenochtitlan and each of these clans had its own district in the city and its own farmlands which were shared among the members.

Each clan had its own temple and school and was divided up into groups of twenty families. A clan leader was elected and acted as the local mayor. His job was to see that his people obeyed the law, paid taxes and did their work.

Most of the people worked cultivating the land and growing food. Some worked as stonemasons, carpenters, smiths, potters, feather and mosaic workers. Others were merchants.

Outside of the clan system were two lower classes. They were the "mayerques" and the slaves. "Mayerques" were newcomers, members of a conquered tribe or the sons and daughters of slaves. They had no share in the farmlands and carried out lowly work, such as street-cleaning and porters.

Slaves were usually captured in battles or some had been sentenced to slavery for crime or debt. They could be put to any type of work but were generally well treated and could rise in the world to become estate-managers and could even employ their own slaves.

