

# *The Fall of the Aztecs and Incas*

## Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 3-5

**Curriculum Focus:** World History

**Lesson Duration:** Two class periods

### ***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***

- Video on *unitedstreaming: Conquest of the Americas*  
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- The Aztecs
  - Cortés and the Quest for Glory
  - Pizarro in the Empire of Gold
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- Paper and pencils
  - Colored pencils or markers
  - 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.bruce.ruiz.net/PanamaHistory/francisco_pizarro.htm)  
[http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied\\_history/tutor/eurvoya/inca.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/eurvoya/inca.html)  
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/7012/bios/explorers/pizarro.htm>  
<http://www.carpenoetm.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.