

Summary: Ancient Latin America

The Maya

The Maya built one of ancient Latin America's most important civilizations in the jungles of Mexico and Central America. The Maya were among the first civilizations to understand the mathematical concept of zero. They developed a 365-day calendar based on the sun's movement and a 260-day calendar of sacred days. They created a system of writing using hieroglyphs.

The Aztec

The Aztec controlled Mexico from the 1200s until the early 1500s. The capital of the Aztec Empire was an island city called Tenochtitlán. It sat in Lake Texcoco. The island location of the Aztec capital protected it from attack. However, much of the island was marsh. This made it difficult to farm. The Aztec raised crops on floating gardens called *chinampas*.

The Inca

The Inca of South America lived high in the Andes Mountains. They built stone terraces that allowed them to farm on steep mountainsides. In desert lands they built irrigation canals to water their crops. The Inca also built a huge system of stone roads. Relay teams carried verbal messages as far as 150 miles a day. This communication system was important because the Inca Empire covered thousands of miles, and the Inca had no written language and no knowledge of the wheel.

In the 1500s Cortés claimed the Aztec Empire for Spain. Latin America and Spain influenced each other's culture in an exchange of goods and ideas called the Columbian Exchange.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

hieroglyph *noun*, a symbol representing a word or syllable in the Maya language

chinampa *noun*, an Aztec floating garden

Columbian Exchange *noun*, the exchange of goods and ideas between European countries and their colonies in North and South America



After You Read

REVIEW What advances in math and astronomy did the Maya make? Circle the words that tell about the advances that the Maya made in math and astronomy.

REVIEW How did the Aztecs use Lake Texcoco to their advantage? Highlight the sentences that describe how the Aztecs used their island.

REVIEW How did building stone roads improve the ability of the Inca rulers to control a large region? Draw a box around the sentence that explains the importance of the stone roads.