

Religion Student Page

Introduction:

In many cultures, the practice of religion has civic importance. In other words, people do worship not only to express their personal faith; but also to please the gods and win the gods' blessing and protection. They may also worship to ensure that the cycle of life continues: that the sun rises in the morning and the rain falls upon the earth. In this lesson you will study several different sources: a passage from the Mayan *Popul-Vuh* (a creation myth), images from an Aztec ritual, and a historic text on the Incan solstice ritual *Raymi*. In these sources, you will see what or whom these ancient Americans considered sacred. You will also learn about specific practices used to worship the gods.

Note: All sites in this lesson can be found at <http://www.socialstudies.com/ancientlinks.html>.

Directions:

Popul Vuh—The Creation of True Humans

Go to <http://www.mythome.org/popul4.html>

Read the text, then answer the following questions:

1. What is the "Bearer, Begetter, Makers, and Modelers" called?
2. What "time of day" is it for humans?
3. What animals helped create humans?
4. What "staple foods" were used to make human flesh and blood? How was human fat made?

5. Based on your reading of this passage, form a hypothesis about the significance of corn (maize) to the Maya. Explain your reasoning.

Aztec Sacrifice

Go to <http://www.rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/aztecs6.htm>

Study the images, then answer the following questions:

6. What is happening to the people on the steps?

7. What is being held up to the sky, toward the sun?

8. Where do these events seem to be taking place (at what kind of building)?

Go to <http://archaeology.la.asu.edu/tm/Media/fig20z.jpg>

Study the image of the *Tzompantli*, or altar of skulls from the Aztec Templo Mayor.

9. Why might the Aztecs have placed this skull rack outside a temple?

Hernan Cortés: from Second Letter to Charles V, 1520

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1520cortes.html>

10. Scroll down to the paragraph that begins "Three halls are in this grand temple..." What did the Aztecs believe would happen if their gods were "ill-treated"?

11. Scroll down to the paragraph that begins "The figures of the idols..." Describe how the Aztecs made their idols. For what purposes did they make the idols?

12. Despite the images and text you have studied in this lesson, some critics argue that Aztec human sacrifice is a myth because no Spaniards actually witnessed it. If this is true, why might Spanish Conquistadors have perpetuated the myth that the Aztecs engaged in brutal human sacrifice? Explain your thinking.

The Festival of the Sun

Go to <http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/inca/inca03.htm>

13. When did the Inca celebrate *Raymi*? What god did they celebrate at this time?

14. How did the *Curacas* (government officials) dress for the ceremony?

15. What special foods did women prepare?

16. Scroll down to the paragraph that begins "Presently the King rose to his feet..." Describe the cup the King held, and what he did with the beverage. In what way did the Incas ritually offer the drink to the Sun?

17. Based on your reading of this text, what can you conclude about the importance of the sun to the Inca? Explain your reasoning.

18. Based on your work on this lesson, write a paragraph in which you identify similarities or differences in religious ideas or ritual practices among the Maya, Aztec, and Inca.