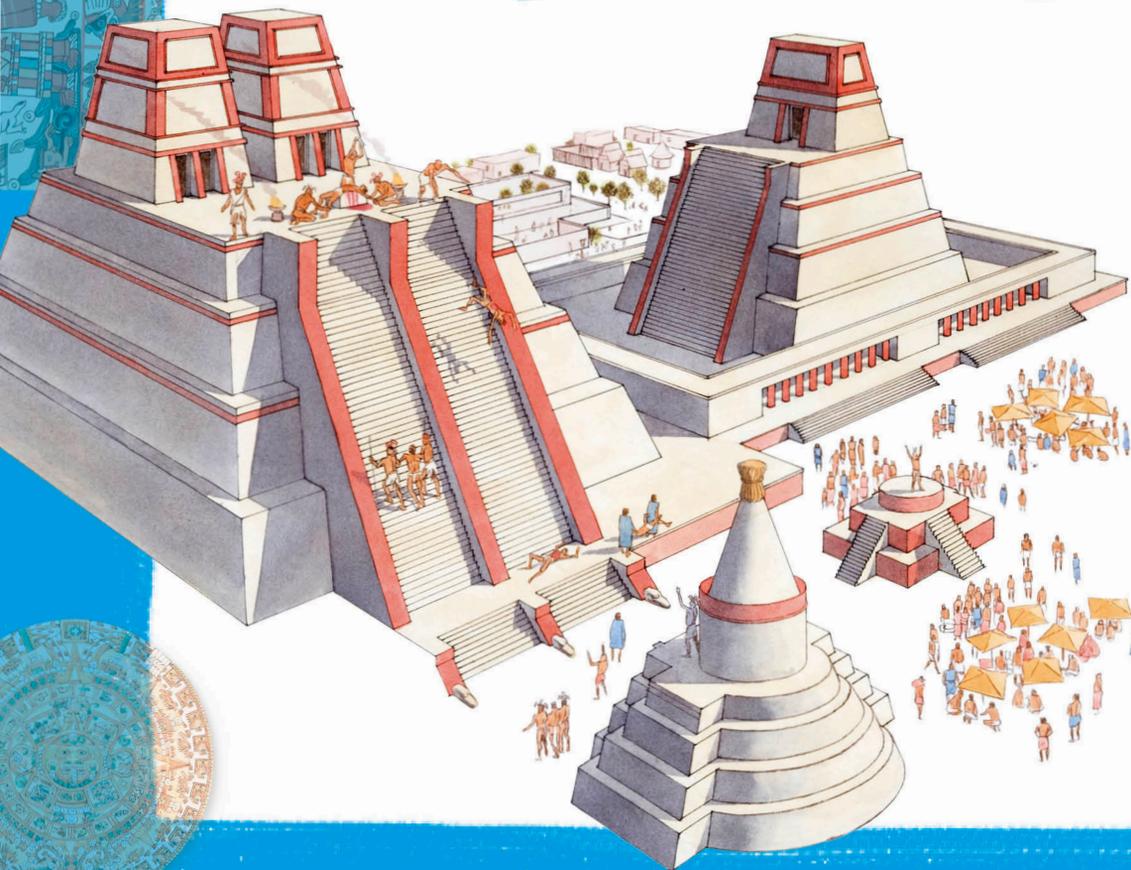




Great American civilizations: The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs



BUILD UP YOUR KNOWLEDGE



For linked activities in Purple Mash go to:

The Maya



The Aztecs



Three civilizations

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs were great civilizations of the American continents. A civilization is a society that shares the same way of life. You can still visit the remains of their cities today, deep in jungles and high on mountains.

Aztecs

The Aztecs were powerful people who lived in Mexico from around 1300–1500s CE. The Aztecs believed that gods controlled the world. They sacrificed humans to feed the gods, giving them energy.



Sun stone showing the Aztec Sun god, Tonatiuh, in the centre

! WOW!

The **Incas** ruled an empire of more than **6 million** people.



These three civilizations stretched from southern North America to South America.

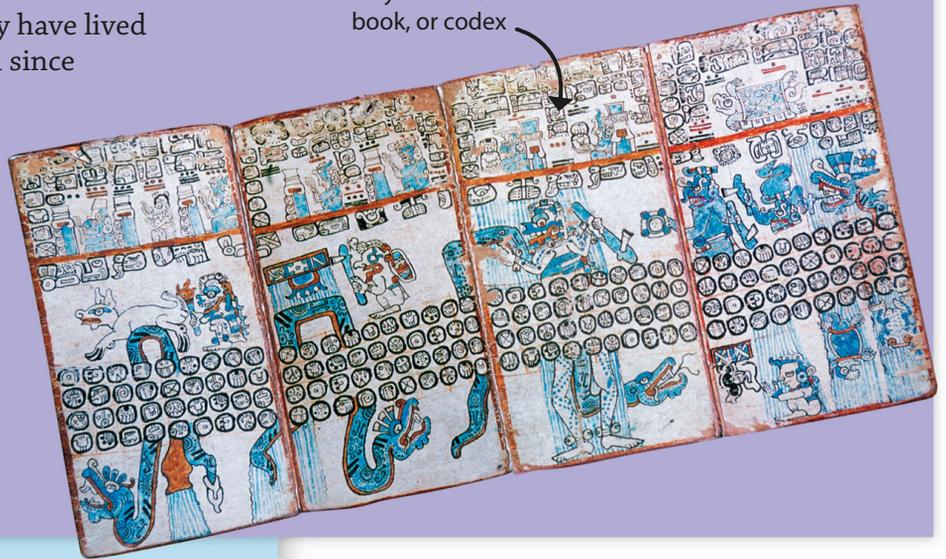
KEY

-  Aztecs
-  Maya
-  Incas

Maya

The Maya people are still around today. They have lived in Central America since around 2000BCE. They built jungle cities and created early systems of maths, science, and writing.

Maya fold-out book, or codex



South America

Incas

The Incas had an empire in South America. This means they ruled neighbouring lands. The empire began in around 1200CE and lasted until the early 1500s CE. They built cities in the Andes mountains in Peru.



The Incas mined gold to make objects such as this figure, which was left inside a tomb.

Maya

We've stepped back in time to Yucatán, Mexico, in 1500CE. This is the land of the star-gazing, pyramid-building Maya. Let's ask a couple of them about Maya life, which stretches all the way back to around 2000BCE.

Q: Is there a king of the Maya?

A: No, the Maya civilization is divided into cities, and each city has its own king. Sometimes the kings battle with each other.

Q: Can you tell us about your pyramids?

A: We hand-cut stones into blocks and slot them together. We build temples on top of the pyramids for our gods.

Q: Why do you worship gods?

A: Our gods control what goes on in the world, such as the weather. If they are upset, they might make bad things happen.





Q: How do you keep the gods happy?

A: We have festivals and make human sacrifices to different gods. To bring rain, we make sacrifices to the rain god.



REALLY?

After a battle between Maya cities, the winning king might sacrifice the losing king.

Q: How do you keep track of your history?

A: We record the days and times of battles, kings' deaths, and other events. We write the information on paper, and carve it on stone columns.

Q: Can you tell us more about your writing?

A: Our writing system is made up of glyphs, which are small pictures representing words.

Q: What are you wearing on your heads?

A: We are wearing huge headdresses. We often make them look like animals or birds.

Incas

We've time-travelled all the way back to the Inca Empire, South America, in 1500CE. At this time, the Incas have been around for about 300 years. Let's ask a couple of Incas about their world of gods, mountain-top cities, and llamas.

Q. What is an empire and how big is yours?

A: An empire is a group of lands ruled by the same leader. Our people have conquered many lands in western South America.

Q. Who is your leader?

A: Our leader is the Sapa Inca. He is sacred and has many wives, including the Mama Coya. Her son will be the next Sapa Inca.

Q. How do you build mountain-top cities?

A: We cut stone into blocks and fit them together. All ordinary Incas have to spend some time helping to build Inca roads or cities.

A: This is a spindle whorl for spinning llama fur into wool.

Q. What's that you're holding?





A: His body will be made into a mummy, or preserved. The mummy will be kept in a special store, and brought out for ceremonies.

Q. What will happen when your leader dies?

A: This set of strings is a *quipu*. It has knots to record numbers and other information.

Q. Can you tell us what you're holding?

Q. What is your most important animal?

A: We have millions of llamas for meat, milk, and wool. Llamas can also carry packs on their backs up hills.

Q. Do you mix with people from other lands?

A: We trade, or swap, goods such as cloth with other people. Some of our neighbours hate us and we sometimes go to war with them.

Aztecs

The final stop in our time-travelling adventure is the Aztec Empire, in Mexico. The year is 1518CE. The Aztecs had started out, in the 1000s CE, as a people who wandered from place to place. But they now live in bustling, built-up cities. Let's ask a warrior and a teacher about their lives.

Q: What is the Aztec Empire?

A: An empire is made up of multiple lands with the same ruler. Our ruler lives in the city of Tenochtitlan.

Q: Who is the Aztec leader?

A: Our current leader is the mighty emperor Moctezuma II. No ordinary person dares look at his face.

Q: What's it like being an Aztec warrior?

A: We fear no one in battle, and we have good weapons. If we capture enemies, we sacrifice them to the gods.



REALLY?



Aztec warriors dressed as eagles and jaguars – to look like gods and terrify enemies.

Q: Do you follow a religion?

A: We believe in many gods, who control the world. Priests keep the gods happy through human sacrifice.

Q: What kind of jobs do your people do?

A: Warriors and priests do important jobs. Local leaders run schools, food stores, and temples. Many women run their homes.

Q: How do you record Aztec history?

A: We tell stories and write them down in books. We also paint pictures and carve images in stone.

Q: Are your books like ours?

A: Not really. Our type of book is called a codex, with pages folded like a fan. We make paper from bark, and every page is handwritten.



Society

The Maya, Incas, and Aztecs were all well-organized societies, divided into different levels, or classes. While the Incas and Aztecs each had an emperor at the head, Maya society was divided into cities with their own rulers, and had no single leader.

Inca society

Inca society was shaped like a pyramid. There was the emperor and family at the top. Then came the priests and nobles. Most people were at the bottom.



Sapa Inca

Wives

The emperor had many wives and children. Wives were chosen from noble families.



High priest

The high priest, or Willac Umu, was a nobleman, and was often related to the emperor.



Willac Umu

Clan groups

Other relatives of the Sapa Inca were called *panacas*. They wore gold plugs in their ears as a mark of bravery in battle.



Panacas



Farmers

Emperor

The emperor was called the Sapa Inca, or great Inca. He had supreme power over land and people. The Incas believed he was a descendant of the Sun god, Inti.

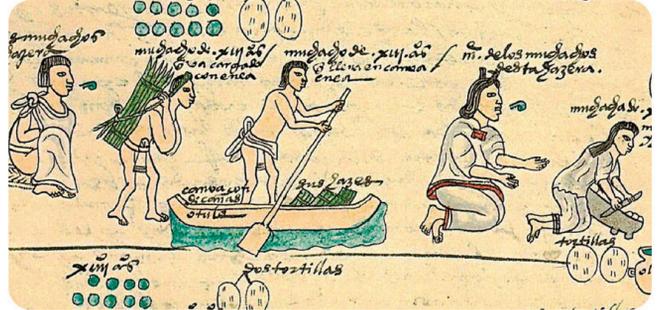
Chief wife

The Sapa Inca's chief wife was often his sister. She was called the Mama Coya. Only one of her sons could be the next Sapa Inca.



Aztec men and women

Men ruled in Aztec society, but women had rights, too. A woman could inherit property after her husband died, and ask for a divorce if her marriage was unhappy. Both boys and girls went to school.



A page from a codex (book) showing Aztec parents teaching skills to their children

Priests

Men and women could be priests. The women that were chosen were called *mamakuna*. They were picked as children, and trained as temple priestesses.



Mamakuna

Lords

Local lords, or *curacas*, helped run the empire, along with officials such as accountants and tax collectors.



Curacas

Ordinary people

Ordinary people included craftspeople, farmers, soldiers, and servants. Slaves, usually prisoners of war, were right at the bottom.



Soldiers

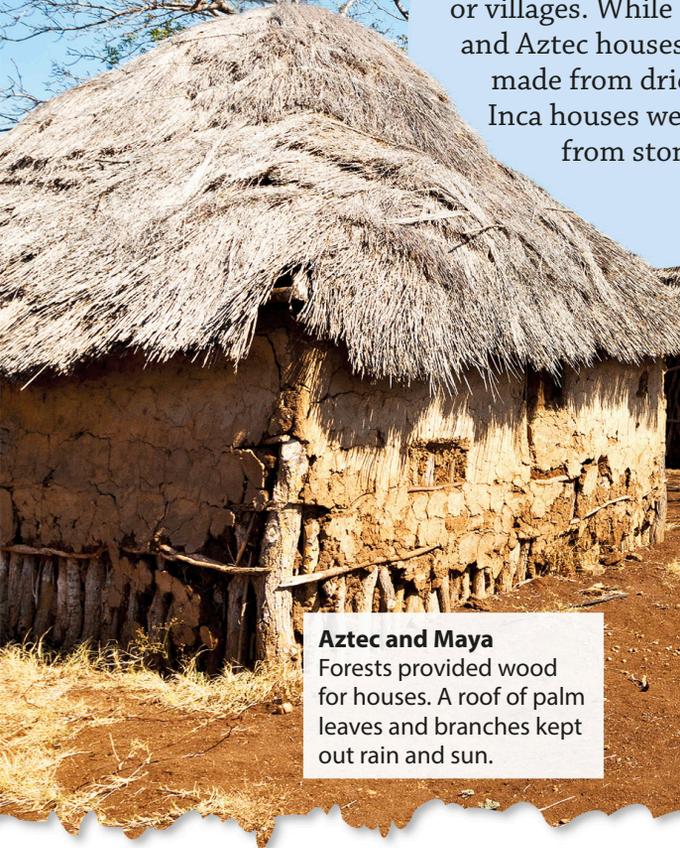


Servants



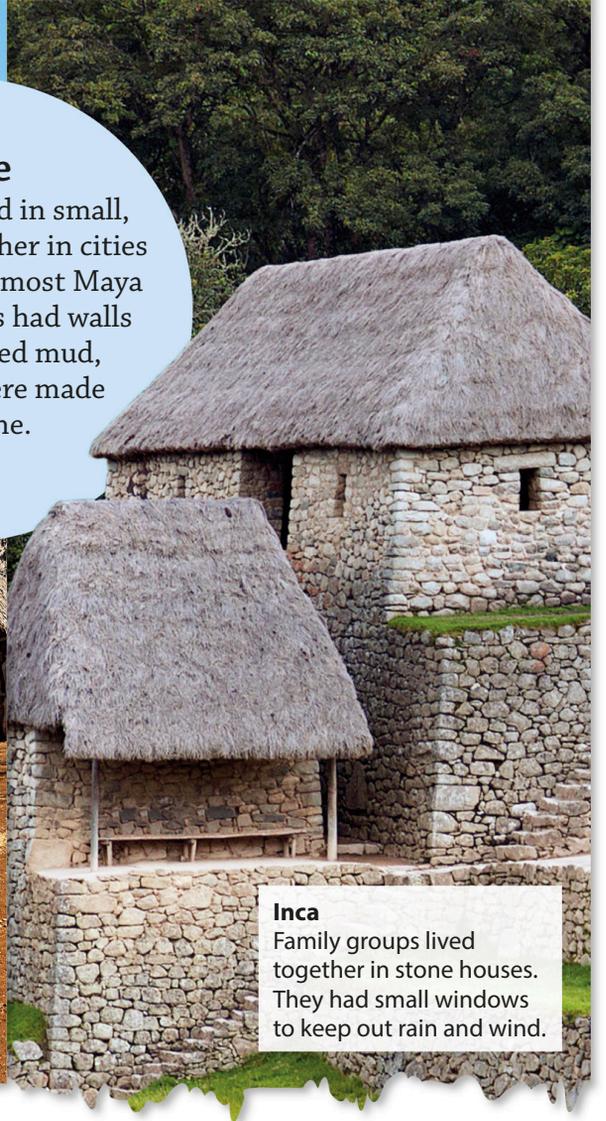
Home

Most people lived in small, simple houses, either in cities or villages. While most Maya and Aztec houses had walls made from dried mud, Inca houses were made from stone.



Aztec and Maya

Forests provided wood for houses. A roof of palm leaves and branches kept out rain and sun.



Inca

Family groups lived together in stone houses. They had small windows to keep out rain and wind.

Daily life

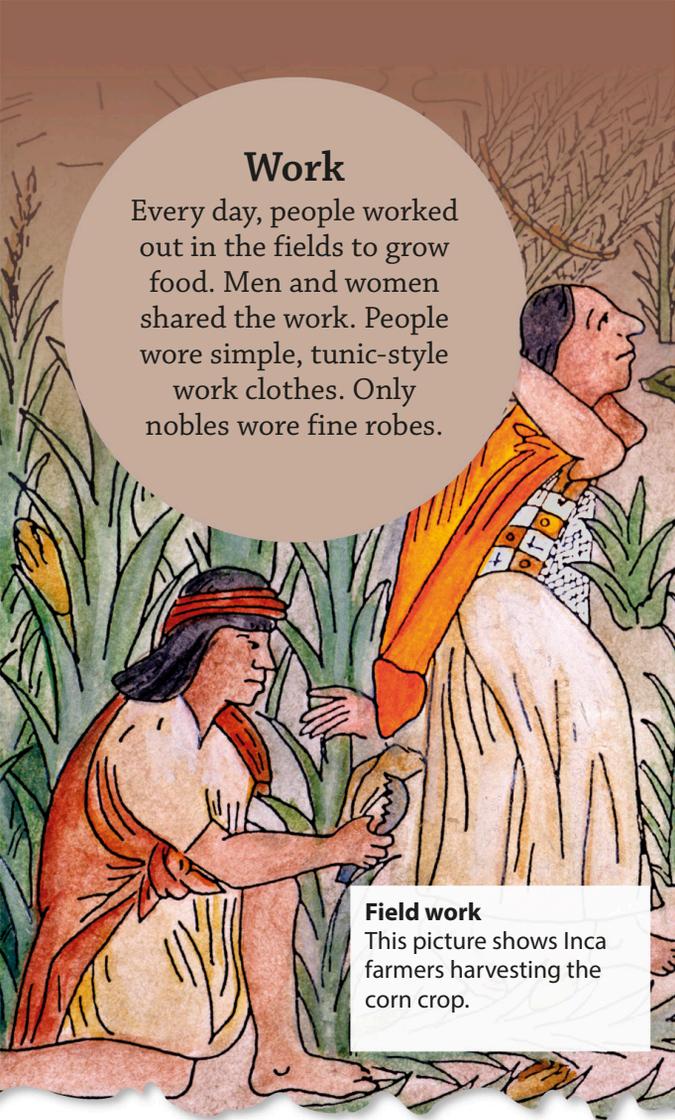
For most people, whether Maya, Aztec, or Inca, daily life meant hard work and obeying the rules. Everyone knew their duties and their place in society – men and women, rich and poor, young and old. If the gods were kind, families had a home, clothes, and enough food to live on.

! WOW!

Inca houses were specially built so that they did not collapse in earthquakes.

Work

Every day, people worked out in the fields to grow food. Men and women shared the work. People wore simple, tunic-style work clothes. Only nobles wore fine robes.

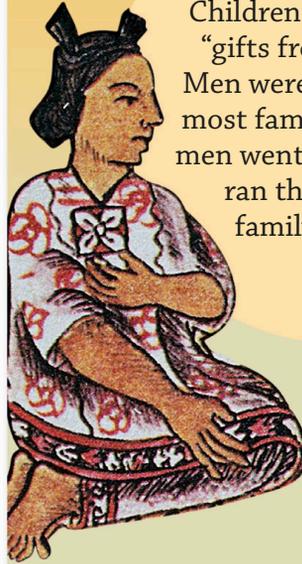


Field work

This picture shows Inca farmers harvesting the corn crop.

Families

Children were welcome “gifts from the gods”. Men were at the head of most families. But when men went to war, women ran the home and family business.



Family scene

This picture is from a 1500s CE codex (book) about Aztec life.



Slavery

The Aztecs and Maya owned slaves. Many Aztec slaves were captured during wars. Some very poor Aztecs chose to become slaves, and others were made slaves as punishment. Generally, slaves were not treated badly. Aztec slaves could marry. They could also buy their freedom and even own other slaves.

Aztec slaves

Acknowledgements

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