

# Artifacts of the Americas

Early Civilizations of the Americas: Summarize the rise, decline, and cultural achievements of ancient civilizations in Mesoamerica and South America; describe their beliefs and the development of their political, social, and economic systems; and analyze the voyages of discovery and conquest that changed the Americas.

**Learning target:** I can compare the Maya, Aztec, and Inca and explain how geography shaped their achievements.

**Success looks like:** Students use the vocabulary correctly, complete the gallery walk, and score 80% or higher on the evidence-based exit ticket.

**Materials:** Student devices, the printed lesson worksheet (one per student), projector for the mini-lesson presenter.

## LESSON AT A GLANCE

60 minutes

| Time      | Part         | Teacher does                                                                                | Students do                                                                      |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0:00-0:08 | Warm-up      | Project the warm-up. Circulate, then call on 2-3 students. Save question 3 for the debrief. | Answer Part 2 of the lesson worksheet; share with a partner.                     |
| 0:08-0:20 | Mini-lesson  | Teach with the 4-step presenter. Run each quick check with the whole class.                 | Complete worksheet Parts 4-11 as each slide appears; answer checks with fingers. |
| 0:20-0:48 | Gallery Walk | Launch Artifacts of the Americas. Assign mission levels; circulate with the answer key.     | Play solo or in pairs; record code pieces; complete any written evidence task.   |
| 0:48-0:52 | Debrief      | Ask 2 debrief questions and revisit warm-up question 3.                                     | Finish worksheet Part 13 (prediction check + one thing learned).                 |
| 0:52-1:00 | Exit ticket  | Hand out the exit ticket. Collect and sort with the mastery guide.                          | Answer with evidence independently.                                              |

## Key vocabulary

| Word            | Student-friendly definition                                                                      |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Civilization    | A complex society with cities, government, specialized jobs, and a system of writing or records. |
| Chinampa        | An Aztec floating garden built in a shallow lake.                                                |
| Terrace farming | Cutting flat steps into mountainsides to farm (Inca).                                            |
| Quipu           | Knotted strings the Inca used to keep records.                                                   |
| Conquistador    | A Spanish conqueror of the Americas, such as Cortés or Pizarro.                                  |

## 1. WARM-UP

0:00–0:08 · 8 min

**Warm-up expectations (post these):** Answer in Part 2 of the lesson worksheet (or on this sheet). Number each answer to match the question. Answer in complete sentences. For math, show your work. Work silently for 5 minutes, then share with a partner for 2 minutes. Be ready to share one answer with the class.

| # | Question                                                       | Look for                                                                     |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | What does a group of people need to build a large city?        | Examples: food supply/farming, water, leaders/government, workers, trade.    |
| 2 | How could people farm on a steep mountain or in a swampy lake? | Build flat steps (terraces) on mountains; build raised garden beds in lakes. |
| 3 | How can we learn about people who lived 1,000 years ago?       | Artifacts, ruins, writings, codices, and descendants' traditions.            |

## 2. MINI-LESSON

0:08–0:20 · 12 min

Project the Lesson presenter from the room page. It runs the whole hour: target and agenda, warm-up with timer, hook vote, 4 teaching steps (key idea, interactive tool, turn and talk, check for understanding), I do / we do / you do, a work-time screen with a timer and expectations, debrief, and the exit ticket. Press N for teacher notes, T to pause the timer, and P to pick a student.

**Hook (1 min):** How would you grow food on a steep mountain? Class vote: Cut flat steps into it / Move somewhere else / Only hunt and fish

### Step 1 (3 min): The Maya

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teach                   | The Maya flourished about 250-900 CE in the Yucatán rainforests. City-states with kings, stone pyramids, a 365-day calendar, glyph writing, and the concept of zero. |
| Interactive tool        | Visual: Maya numerals: a dot = 1, a bar = 5                                                                                                                          |
| Students do             | Draw the number 13 with Maya symbols (2 bars and 3 dots).                                                                                                            |
| Turn and talk           | Why might a civilization with a calendar and writing be able to grow large?                                                                                          |
| Worksheet Part 5A       | The Maya built CITY-STATES, used GLYPHS to write, and understood the concept of ZERO.                                                                                |
| Check for understanding | What number is 2 bars and 3 dots? Answer: 13                                                                                                                         |

### Step 2 (3 min): The Aztec

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teach            | The Aztec built Tenochtitlan on an island in Lake Texcoco (today Mexico City). They farmed floating gardens called chinampas and collected tribute from conquered peoples. |
| Interactive tool | Board and notes                                                                                                                                                            |

|                         |                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students do             | Sketch a chinampa (a garden bed built up in a lake).                            |
| Turn and talk           | Why was building a city in a lake both smart and risky?                         |
| Worksheet Part 6A       | The Aztec capital was TENOCHTITLAN. They farmed on CHINAMPAS in the lake.       |
| Check for understanding | How did the Aztec grow food in a lake? Answer: (C) Chinampas (floating gardens) |

### Step 3 (3 min): The Inca

|                         |                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teach                   | The Inca ruled the Andes Mountains. They carved terraces, built 14,000+ miles of roads and rope bridges, and kept records on knotted cords called quipus. |
| Interactive tool        | Visual: A quipu cord                                                                                                                                      |
| Students do             | Read the quipu cord: count the tens knots, then the ones knots.                                                                                           |
| Turn and talk           | How would roads and quipus help the Inca rule a huge empire?                                                                                              |
| Worksheet Part 7A       | The Inca farmed on TERRACES and kept records on QUIPUS.                                                                                                   |
| Check for understanding | What number does the quipu cord show? Answer: 24                                                                                                          |

### Step 4 (3 min): Encounter and conquest

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teach                   | Spanish conquistadors (Cortés vs. the Aztec, 1519-1521; Pizarro vs. the Inca, 1532) had horses, steel weapons, and Native allies, but diseases like smallpox killed the most people. |
| Interactive tool        | Board and notes                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Students do             | Rank the causes of the conquest: disease, horses, steel, allies.                                                                                                                     |
| Turn and talk           | Why did disease have such a huge effect on Native populations?                                                                                                                       |
| Worksheet Part 8A       | Conquistadors had horses and steel, but DISEASES like SMALLPOX killed millions.                                                                                                      |
| Check for understanding | Which factor killed the most Native people? Answer: (A) Disease                                                                                                                      |

### I do: worked example (shown one step at a time)

1. Venn diagram: Maya | Aztec | Inca.
2. Maya and Aztec: stone pyramids and temples.
3. Inca only: roads, rope bridges, and quipus.
4. All three (center): farming adapted to geography, and a strong ruler tied to religion.

What to say on every slide is in the presenter script PDF.

## We do: guided practice

### Compare how the Aztec and Inca solved the problem of farming difficult land.

1. The Aztec lived on a lake with little dry land.
2. They built chinampas: floating garden beds made from mud and reeds.
3. The Inca lived on steep mountains.
4. They carved terraces: flat steps that held soil and water. Both changed the land to grow food.

Answer: Chinampas (Aztec) and terraces (Inca)

### You do: independent check (2 min)

Which achievement shows the Inca had a highly organized government? (A) A 365-day calendar (B) Pyramids in the rainforest (C) Quipus used to record census counts and tribute (D) Floating gardens

Answer: (C) Quipus used to record census counts and tribute. Students who miss it: 3-minute reteach at the teacher table, then start the room at the Explorer level.

**Misconception:** "The Maya, Aztec, and Inca lived at the same time and place." They were centuries and thousands of miles apart.

**Misconception:** "The Maya disappeared." Millions of Maya people live in Mexico and Central America today.

**Misconception:** "The Spanish won only because of weapons." Disease and alliances with other Native groups mattered most.

## 3. GALLERY WALK: ARTIFACTS OF THE AMERICAS

0:20–0:48 · 28 min

Launch: project the start screen, read the story aloud, and assign mission levels (Explorer = extra support, Agent = on level, Legend = challenge). Students can open Supports any time for read-aloud, bigger text, a word bank, and a scratch pad.

- Exhibits can be visited in any order, which spreads students out naturally. Encourage them to start at a different exhibit than their neighbor.
- Treat it like a real gallery walk: students record one "I see / I think / I wonder" per exhibit on the viewing guide, and the code piece in Part 12 of the lesson worksheet.
- Pause the class once midway and have two students share their favorite exhibit so far.

**Students turn in: the completion code plus their copied "turn in your work" block (Canvas Text Entry).**

## 4. DEBRIEF

0:48–0:52 · 4 min

1. Which civilization's achievement impressed you most, and why?
2. How did each civilization adapt to its geography?
3. Why were diseases so devastating to these civilizations?

Close the loop: return to warm-up question 3. Answer: Artifacts, ruins, writings, codices, and descendants' traditions.

## 5. EXIT TICKET

0:52–1:00 · 8 min

Print the exit ticket PDF (page 2 is the key and mastery guide). Every item requires evidence: Part A asks

students to justify each choice, Part B asks for an explanation, and Part C applies the standard to a new situation using Historian's Claim (Claim, Evidence, Source, Explain). Sort results into Mastered, Approaching, and Beginning to plan tomorrow's groups.

## LESSON RESOURCES

| Resource                                        | How it fits the lesson                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Warm-up worksheet (PDF)                         | Optional standalone warm-up (also Part 2 of the lesson worksheet), with a key.                                                                                       |
| Mini-lesson presenter                           | Projectable, step-by-step interactive lesson with tools and quick checks (room page).                                                                                |
| Lesson worksheet (PDF + key)                    | One printable packet students complete during the whole lesson: short fill-ins and quick checks in 13 small parts that match the presenter slides.                   |
| Artifacts of the Americas (.html)               | The gallery walk for Canvas, with differentiated levels, supports, and a turn-in.                                                                                    |
| Exit ticket (PDF + key)                         | Evidence-based check with a rubric and a mastery sorting guide.                                                                                                      |
| Google Arts & Culture (extra)                   | Search "Machu Picchu" or "Chichén Itzá" for 360° tours and artifact collections. <a href="https://artsandculture.google.com/">https://artsandculture.google.com/</a> |
| World History Encyclopedia (extra)              | Reliable articles and images on the Maya, Aztec, and Inca. <a href="https://www.worldhistory.org/">https://www.worldhistory.org/</a>                                 |
| Smithsonian NMAI: Native Knowledge 360° (extra) | Inka Road lessons and more. <a href="https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/">https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/</a>                                                  |
| National Geographic Education (extra)           | Encyclopedia entries and maps. <a href="https://education.nationalgeographic.org/">https://education.nationalgeographic.org/</a>                                     |

## ANSWER KEY: ARTIFACTS OF THE AMERICAS

Exhibit A: Artifact: A Folding Book (code piece: G)

1. What can we infer from the Dresden Codex? -> The Maya had writing and studied astronomy carefully
2. Why do so few codices survive? -> Most were destroyed by Spanish priests
3. A page of the codex shows the number above. What number is it? -> 14

Exhibit B: Artifact: The Sun Stone (code piece: L)

1. What does the Sun Stone suggest about the Aztec? -> Religion, time, and the Sun were deeply important to them
2. Moving a 24-ton stone without wheels or large work animals suggests... -> The Aztec could organize huge numbers of workers
3. The Sun Stone weighs about 24 tons. One ton is 2,000 pounds. About how many pounds does it weigh? -> 48000 pounds

Exhibit C: Artifact: Knotted Cords (code piece: Y)

1. What does the quipu tell us about Inca government? -> It kept careful records to manage a large empire
2. On a quipu, a knot in the "tens" position and 3 knots in the "ones" position would stand for... -> 13
3. True or false: The quipu shows the Inca used a place-value system. -> True
4. An official recorded llama herds from three villages on this quipu. What is the total? -> 70 llamas

Exhibit D: Artifact: A Farming Model (code piece: P)

1. What does Moray suggest about the Inca? -> They experimented to improve farming in the mountains
2. Why was chuño (freeze-dried potato) useful? -> It could be stored for years in case of famine

3. Scientists found that temperatures differ from level to level at Moray. Tap the level that stays the WARMEST. -> Tap Bottom of the bowl

Exhibit E: Artifact: The Curator's Challenge (code piece: H)

1. Sort each source. -> Primary source: The Aztec Sun Stone, An Inca quipu, Bernal Díaz's 1500s account of Tenochtitlan | Secondary source: A 2020 documentary about the Maya, Your textbook

2. Why should historians be careful with conquistadors' descriptions of the Aztec? -> The Spanish had reasons to exaggerate or show the Aztec negatively

3. Read this line from a Spanish soldier's letter. Tap the TWO words or phrases that show a one-sided (biased) view.  
-> "but its savage people" + "wicked idols."

**Final code: GLYPH**