



Encounter: The Fall of Two Empires

Mission: How did a few hundred Spanish soldiers bring down two of the largest empires in the world? Put the events in order, then link the causes and effects. The answer is more complicated than "better weapons."

Big question: Why did the Aztec and Inca Empires fall to the Spanish?

★ Warm-up: Rank the causes

Guess: which mattered MOST in the fall of the Aztec?

Steel swords ✓ **Helped, but not the biggest.**

Smallpox ✓ **Killed a huge share of the population.**

Key vocabulary

Conquistador	A Spanish conqueror of the Americas.
Epidemic	A disease that spreads to many people.
Alliance	An agreement to work together.
Civil war	A war between groups in the same country.

1 Box 1

Order the events

In the simulator: Put all 8 events in order.

What did you notice?

2 Box 2

Link causes and effects

In the simulator: Find all 5 cause-and-effect links.

What did you notice?

3 Box 3

Most important cause

Which cause appears in BOTH empires' falls?

☐ Smallpox ☐ The Tlaxcalan alliance ☐ The capture of Atahualpa

✓ **Smallpox**

Time math

How many years after Columbus did Tenochtitlan fall?

Answer: _____ years ✓ **29**

4 Box 4

Why did they fall? (CER)

What was the MOST important reason the empires fell?

Claim

Look for: Names a cause; at least 8 words

Evidence from the timeline

Look for: a number from the simulator; at least 14 words

Reasoning

Look for: at least 14 words

5 Box 5

Legend: a myth Legend only

Some books say the Spanish won "because of their superior weapons." Using the timeline, explain why this is an oversimplification.

Look for: Uses other causes; at least 30 words

Exit ticket: answer the big question in your own words

Why did the Aztec and Inca Empires fall to the Spanish?

Look for: The Aztec and Inca Empires fell mainly because of disease (smallpox killed millions who had no immunity), alliances with other Native peoples who opposed the Aztec, and an Inca civil war, along with Spanish steel, horses, and guns.

Completion codes

Students see a code like **ABC-I3** when they finish. The first part must match below. The letter is the level (E = Explorer, I = Investigator, L = Legend), and the number at the end is how many stars they earned.

Level	Code starts with
 Explorer	1Y4-E
 Investigator	902-I
 Legend	3RP-L

Watch for these misconceptions

- "The Maya, Aztec, and Inca lived at the same time and place." They were centuries and thousands of miles apart.
- "The Maya disappeared." Millions of Maya people live in Mexico and Central America today.

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