



Expedition: Maya, Aztec & Inca

Mission: Travel across 2,000 years and thousands of miles to visit three great civilizations. Enter each city, examine the evidence, and figure out how each civilization adapted to its geography and what it achieved.

Big question: How did the Maya, Aztec, and Inca adapt to their environments, and what did they achieve?

★ Warm-up: Solve the geography

How would you farm in each place?

A steep mountain ✓ **Cut flat steps (terraces).**

A shallow lake ✓ **Build up islands of mud (chinampas).**

Key vocabulary

Civilization	A complex society with cities, government, specialized jobs, and records.
City-state	An independent city with its own ruler.
Tribute	Payments of goods to a ruling power.
Chinampa	An Aztec floating garden.
Quipu	Knotted cords the Inca used for records.

1 Box 1

Enter Tenochtitlan

In the simulator: Enter Tenochtitlan and examine all 3 objects.

Bernal Díaz compares the city to "enchantments" in a legend. What does this tell you?

- ☐ The Spanish were amazed by how advanced the city was ☐ The city was imaginary
☐ The Spanish thought the city was small

✓ **The Spanish were amazed by how advanced the city was**

2 Box 2

Visit all five sites

In the simulator: Enter all 5 sites and collect at least 12 pieces of evidence.

What did you notice?

3 Box 3

Compare the civilizations

Complete the comparison chart from your journal.

Civilization	Geography	One achievement
Maya		
Aztec		
Inca		

4 Box 4

Adaptation

Which geography problem did each solution solve?

Sort: Terraces · Chinampas · Cenotes · Causeways · Rope suspension bridges

Steep mountains	A lake	No rivers
Terraces Rope suspension bridges	Chinampas Causeways	Cenotes

Misconception check

Which statement is TRUE?

- ☐ Millions of Maya people still live in Mexico and Central America today ☐ The Maya disappeared completely
- ☐ The Maya, Aztec, and Inca all lived at the same time in the same place
- ✓ **Millions of Maya people still live in Mexico and Central America today**

5 Box 5

Greatest achievement (CER)

Which achievement was the most impressive? Support your claim with evidence from the expedition.

Claim

Look for: Names a civilization; at least 10 words

Evidence (quote or fact)

Look for: Names specific evidence; at least 12 words

Reasoning

Look for: Connects to geography or challenge; at least 14 words

6 Box 6

Legend: whose words? 🏆 Legend only

Both primary sources on this expedition were written by Spanish visitors. Quote one and explain what perspective might be missing.

Look for: Discusses perspective; an exact quote from the text; at least 25 words

 **Exit ticket: answer the big question in your own words**

How did the Maya, Aztec, and Inca adapt to their environments, and what did they achieve?

Look for: Each civilization solved the problems of its geography: the Aztec built chinampas in a lake, the Maya used cenotes in a riverless rainforest, and the Inca built terraces and roads in the Andes. Their achievements include calendars, the concept of zero, glyph writing, quipus, and engineering that still stands today.

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	11P-E
 Investigator	180-I
 Legend	1VY-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.