**Jigsaw Reading: World Book Online on Aztec Food**

Source: The following is an excerpt from worldbookonline.com.

"Food and Drink." *Early Peoples.* World Book, 2014. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

# **Food and Drink**

Corn was the main ingredient of most Aztec dishes. For their first meal of the day, they usually ate cornmeal porridge (a hot cereal) sweetened with honey. At midday and in the evening, workers often ate flat cornmeal pancakes, which we now call tortillas. Sometimes they ate tamales.

Aztec farmers grew many kinds of vegetables and fruits on their chinampas. Beans, tomatoes, squash, and chili peppers were the most common. Most Aztec ate little meat. Typically, the only animals raised for food were turkeys, ducks, rabbits, and a special breed of small dogs (different from the dogs they kept as pets).

The Aztec caught wild birds and animals, as well as fish and frogs. They sold many of these, along with their own produce, in the city markets. The Aztec also collected and ate insects—including ants and grass-hoppers—worms, and a blue-green algae (simple, one-celled life forms), which they gathered in nets from lakes.

Aztec nobles had a much grander diet than ordinary people. Grandest of all was the food served to Montezuma II. Every day his cooks prepared more than 300 different dishes, from which he would choose. There were dishes made from fruits and vegetables, and items featuring duck, rabbit, crow, and pigeon. While eating, Montezuma sat at a low table covered with a white cloth. Because the tlatoani was considered to be a god, servants set up a golden screen so that no one could see him eating. The Spanish told stories of Montezuma drinking chocolate after his meal from cups made of solid gold.

**Jigsaw Reading: World Book Online on Aztec Government**

Source: The following is an excerpt from worldbookonline.com.

"The Tlatoani and His Advisers." *Early Peoples.* World Book, 2014. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

# **Government**

A council of **noblemen** chose the tlatoani from among the men of the royal family. Once chosen, he ruled all the land and people inside the Aztec empire.

The tlatoani was also the religious leader, and he played a major part in religious ceremonies. He was the military leader, organizing wars and even commanding his soldiers in battle. He was also called the “father and mother” of the people. This meant he was responsible for protecting them from famine or invasion and making sure they were treated fairly.

The tlatoani had a deputy who ruled the country when the ruler was absent. The deputy was called the “Snake Woman,” even though the person who held this position was a man. The position was named for an Aztec goddess, the Earth Mother Cihuacoatl, the goddess of birth and of women who died in childbirth. The man who had the position of “Snake Woman” controlled the law courts and the wealth of the royal palace.

Before making important decisions, the tlatoani got advice from his council. The four members of the council were always nobles and were usually senior army leaders. When a tlatoani died, the same council chose someone to replace him.

With the exception of the tlatoani, the highest rank of people in Aztec society were the nobles. They held most of the powerful positions in government; they made up most of the priesthood; and they controlled nearly all of the empire's wealth.

Nobles also had special rights that set them apart from the rest of the people. They could wear fine jewelry and clothing made of cotton. Nobles were allowed to build houses of two stories. Men who were of the noble class could have more than one wife. Children of this class were educated in special religious schools.

**Jigsaw Reading: World Book Online on Aztec Military**

Source: The following is an excerpt from worldbookonline.com.

"Soldiers and Warfare." *Early Peoples.* World Book, 2014. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

# Military

Warfare was a vital part of Aztec life. They fought wars for two main reasons. One reason was to defeat other states and force them to hand over their wealth. The second—and most important reason—was religion. The Aztec needed a steady supply of prisoners to sacrifice to their gods.

The main aim of the Aztec when in battle was not to conquer for land, but to capture enemy soldiers and citizens. The Aztec army would spread out in a long line across the battlefield. The soldiers would mock the other side, daring them to charge. Then the two ends of the Aztec line would move forward and try to surround the enemy army.

The most elite soldiers in the Aztec army—the eagle warriors—were nobles. They wore a special costume into battle sewn with real eagle feathers. Their armor included a beaked helmet, armguards in the shape of feathers, and talons (claws) on their knees. The main job of the eagle warrior was to capture enemy prisoners and take them to the temple for sacrifice.

Nearly all Aztec males had to serve for a time in the army. Boys started their military training at school. Up to the age of 10, boys had their head shaved. Once they began their training, they grew a lock of hair on the back of their head. They were not allowed to cut off this lock of hair until they had captured a prisoner in battle.

At school, boys learned how to use weapons and took part in mock battles. Their teachers were usually older soldiers. Then the boys were sent to a real war. At first, they carried equipment for other soldiers. Once they had gained experience, they were allowed to fight.

**Jigsaw Reading: World Book Online on Aztec Religion**

Source: The following is an excerpt from worldbookonline.com.

"Beliefs and Gods." *Early Peoples.* World Book, 2014. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

# **Religion**

The Aztec had many stories about the creation of the world and the people in it. One story explained how the sun was created. One of the gods threw himself into a fire as a sacrifice and then rose out of the fire as the sun. However, he could not move unless other gods gave their blood, so they too burned on the fire, and the sun was able to move around the sky.

This myth shows how Aztec religion was based on the idea of sacrifice. As the gods had willingly burned themselves, humans had to repay them for this sacrifice with their own blood. If they failed to do this, the sun might stop moving and disaster would follow.

Death was not the only sacrifice in Aztec religion. Aztec paintings and carvings show the gods cutting themselves to draw blood. The Aztec people copied this, often when they were asking the gods for good crops. The Aztec would pierce their ear lobes, tongues, and other parts of the body, with thorns. The blood they collected was their sacrifice to the gods.

The Aztec believed that there had been five ages, or “suns,” in the history of the world. A different god had ruled the four ages, each of which was ended by a disaster. The sun was then reborn each time.