



The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent

5

✓ Lesson Objectives

Core Content Objectives

Students will:

- ✓ Identify the area in which the Aztec lived
- ✓ Explain that the Aztec established a vast empire in central Mexico many, many years ago
- ✓ Explain that the Aztec had a religion

Language Arts Objectives

The following language arts objectives are addressed in this lesson. Objectives aligning with the Common Core State Standards are noted with the corresponding standard in parentheses. Refer to the Alignment Chart for additional standards that are addressed in all lessons in this domain.

Students will:

- ✓ Sequence five pictures illustrating the read-aloud of “The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent” (RI.1.7)
- ✓ Compare and contrast orally and in writing cultural elements of the Maya and the Aztec (RI.1.9)
- ✓ With assistance, categorize and organize information about aspects of the Aztec culture into a civilizations chart (W.1.8)
- ✓ While listening to “The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent,” orally predict what will happen in the read-aloud based on a picture and previous knowledge of Aztec geography and then compare the actual outcome to the prediction

Core Vocabulary

awe, n. Wonder, or surprise

Example: The children stared in awe at the giant elephant.

Variation(s): none

island, n. A body of land surrounded completely by water

Example: During summer vacation, the boy's family visited a warm island.

Variation(s): islands

legend, n. A story told over the years that may or may not be true, but that many people know

Example: Have you heard the legend about George Washington and the cherry tree?

Variation(s): legends

scouts, n. People sent ahead of a traveling group to gather information about what lies ahead


Example: The scouts rode ahead of the rest of the tribe to search for drinking water.

Variation(s): scout

valley, n. An area of low land between hills or mountains

Example: Although Kim's family lived near the mountains, their house was actually in the valley.

Variation(s): valleys

At a Glance	Exercise	Materials	Minutes
Introducing the Read-Aloud	Where Are We?	world map or globe	10
	Essential Background Information or Terms		
	Purpose for Listening		
Presenting the Read-Aloud	The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent		15
Discussing the Read-Aloud	Comprehension Questions		10
	Word Work: Legend		5
 Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day			
Extensions	Civilizations Chart	Image Card 11	20
	Sequencing the Story	Instructional Master 5B-1; scissors; glue or tape; paper	
Take-Home Material	Family Letter	Instructional Master 5B-2	



The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent

5^A

Introducing the Read-Aloud

10 minutes

Where Are We?

On a world map or globe, have students locate the area where the Maya lived. If students have trouble, point out the area where the Maya lived. (the rainforests in Mexico and Central America, in and around what we now call the Yucatán Peninsula)

Next, point to central Mexico (around Mexico City), and explain to students that the next civilization they will be hearing about, the Aztec civilization, was also located in what is now Mexico, north of the Maya.

Essential Background Information or Terms

Explain to students that the type of story they will hear today is called a *legend*. Tell students that legends are kind of like folktales; they often tell a story about why things are the way they are. (You should have covered folktales already as part of the *Fables and Stories* domain, so you may wish to draw parallels between the legends and the folktales students may have heard.) Explain to students that legends may or may not be true, but there is no way to prove that they are true. Often, however, many people know and repeat a legend as an explanation for something.

One place that you will hear about in today's read-aloud is Lake Texcoco (tesh-ko-ko), is a natural lake in the valley of central Mexico.

Purpose for Listening

Explain to students that today they will be hearing a legend about the Aztec. Tell students to listen to find out why the Aztec chose a particular place to make their home.



The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent

◀ Show image 5A-1: Journeying Aztec¹

- 1 Describe the people in this picture. Who do you think these people are? Where do you think they are going?

- 2 Why do you think the Aztec have been traveling so much?

The Aztec people had been walking every day for months now, searching for a new home. They carried the oldest and youngest among them. Some of the weakest were not able to complete the long journey. Some new Aztec had been born on the way, and were passing their first days of life in the constant motion of travel. They took short breaks to eat, stopping only at night to sleep.²



◀ Show image 5A-2: The Aztec priest

- 3 A valley is an area of low land between hills or mountains.

- 4 [Point to the priest in the illustration.]

Now the Aztec were in the center of a great **valley**.³ Their leaders at the front of the long line strode once more to the old high priest.⁴ “Is this the right place for us to stop?” the leaders asked. “Is this our new home?”

The priest was very old. His long hair was gray and wrinkles furrowed his brow, but he stood as straight as the mightiest warrior. When he spoke, it was always with a voice that was strong and sure. Once again he told them, “No, not yet. We are waiting for a sign from the gods. When they want us to stop and make a home, they will tell us.” So their journey continued.



◀ Show image 5A-3: Aztec scouts pointing to Lake Texcoco

- 5 Scouts are people who travel ahead of the group to see what lies ahead.

- 6 [Point to the island in the picture.] Who can describe what an island is? (An island is land that is completely surrounded by water.)

Finally, one day their forward **scouts** came back to report,⁵ “There is a great lake ahead, in the center is an **island**.⁶ There are no signs of enemies anywhere. There are not even any people to be seen.”

“Then we will camp on the shore,” said the Aztec leaders. “We can all use a rest, and we can wash the dust off ourselves.” So, they all moved forward.

In several hours, they had reached the lakeshore.



← **Show image 5A-4: The sign**

Suddenly, the high priest's eyes opened wide. He raised his hand and pointed. "Look!" he exclaimed. "On the island."

The people all turned to see what the priest had seen. On the island stood a tall, green cactus.⁷ Sitting atop it, unharmed by the cactus' sharp thorns, was a great bird, an eagle. One of its powerful hooked talons, or claws, held the eagle steady on the cactus branch. In its other talon was a long, wriggling snake. As the Aztec people looked on in wonder, the eagle began to eat the snake.

"It is the sign!" the people all muttered, and they fell to their knees on the green lakeshore.

A small boy knelt on the ground beside his mother, tugging at her robe and asking, "What sign?" The mother gathered her son close to her and promised that he would hear the story of the Aztec people before the end of the day. For now, they sat in **awe** of the sight that was before them.⁸

7 [Point to the cactus in the image.]

8 They sat in wonder of the sight they saw.



← **Show image 5A-5: Storytelling Aztec priest**

Other children were curious as well to know what this unusual sign was all about. Why were their parents and grandparents so amazed by the sight of the eagle eating the snake?⁹ That afternoon, they sat in wonderment at the foot of the ancient priest, as he retold the story that had been passed down among the Aztec for generations.

9 What do you think? Why was everyone amazed at the eagle and the snake?



← **Show image 5A-6: Dying crops**

"Many, many years ago," he began, "our people lived in the far north. One year no rain came to their lands. Their crops dried out and died in the sun-baked fields. They feared that the rain god was angry with them, though they did not know what they had done wrong."¹⁰ So, the Aztec leaders turned to the wise priests and asked them, 'What shall we do?'

10 Like the Maya, the Aztec also believed in many gods, each in charge of a different thing.

“The priests answered, ‘The gods wish us to leave our home. Our stories have told of a time when all our people would have to move on. That time has come.’

11 The priest is telling the children the story of what the leaders had said before they began their journey.



← **Show image 5A-7: Journeying Aztec**

“‘We will go south,’ the Aztec leaders said to the hungry people.¹¹ ‘Some of our brothers have gone there already and are serving as soldiers for the rulers of other tribes. These brothers have sent back word that there is a huge valley there with plenty of water. They say we may have to fight the people who live there to force them to let us in. But we are Aztec! We fear no men, only the gods.’

“And so, a few days later, they put all that they could carry onto their backs and set out for the promise of green valleys with plenty of water for drinking and growing crops. Day after day, month after month, they traveled, resting only at night.

“That was many years ago, but our people have never been settled for long. Every time we settled in the green valley around us, we have been forced to move, time after time, from one place to another.



12 or snake

13 So the Aztec were traveling in search of a new home. They waited until they saw an eagle sitting on a cactus, eating a snake, to tell them where they should stop to make their home.

← **Show image 5A-8: Close-up of the sign**

“For years we have sought the sign of our new home, predicted by the gods long ago. The gods said that when the Aztec people saw an eagle on a cactus eating a serpent,¹² they would know that they had found their true home. For nearly one hundred years now, our people have wandered in search of this sign from the gods.¹³



← **Show image 5A-9: Storytelling Aztec priest**

“And so,” the old priest continued, “you can see why this is such an important day for our people. At last, we have found our home.”

The children smiled at one another. They began to understand the importance of seeing the wondrous sight of the eagle eating

the snake. They began to realize that they would no longer have to wander without a home. “We are home,” they said to one another. “Yes,” their parents said to them. “You are home. We are all home.”



14 A legend is a story that has been told over the years that may or may not be true.

◀ **Show image 5A-10: Aztec city on the islands of Lake Texcoco**

That is the **legend** of how the Aztec came to live on and around Lake Texcoco (tesh-ko-ko) in what is now Mexico.¹⁴ The legend explains why they built their city on islands in the lake, beginning with the island on which they had seen the eagle.

Discussing the Read-Aloud

15 minutes

Comprehension Questions

10 minutes

If students have difficulty responding to questions, reread pertinent passages of the read-aloud and/or refer to specific images. If students give one-word answers and/or fail to use read-aloud or domain vocabulary in their responses, acknowledge correct responses by expanding students’ responses using richer and more complex language. Ask students to answer in complete sentences by having them restate the question in their responses.

1. *Literal* Did the Aztec move around a lot or a little at the beginning of the story? (a lot)
2. *Literal* Why did the Aztec leave where they had been living and begin traveling to try to find a new home? (The fields dried up, and they didn’t have enough food.)
3. *Inferential* What did the Aztec see that made them decide to stay and live in this area around Lake Texcoco? (They saw the sign that they believed was from the gods—the eagle on the cactus eating the snake, or serpent.)
4. *Evaluative* Was the ending of the story happy or sad? (happy) Why? (because the Aztec found a place for their home and didn’t have to travel around anymore)

[Please continue to model the *Think Pair Share* process for students, as necessary, and scaffold students in their use of the process.]

I am going to ask you a question. I will give you a minute to think about the question, and then I will ask you to turn to your neighbor and discuss the question. Finally, I will call on several of you to share what you discussed with your partner.

5. *Evaluative Think Pair Share:* The Aztec used the story about the eagle and the serpent to explain where they should make their new home. What makes this story a legend? (Answers should reflect that a legend is a story told over the years; it may or may not be true, but there is no way to prove it either way; and that it was used as an explanation for why the Aztec had settled where they did.)
6. After hearing today's read-aloud and questions and answers, do you have any remaining questions? [If time permits, you may wish to allow for individual, group, or class research of the text and/or other resources to answer these questions.]

Word Work: Legend

5 minutes

1. In the read-aloud you heard, "The *legend* of how the Aztec people came to live on and around Lake Texcoco in what is now Mexico."
2. Say the word *legend* with me.
3. A legend is a story that has been told over a long time, that cannot be proven to be true.
4. Kayla loved listening to the legend of Robin Hood.
5. Tell what you liked about "The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent." Use the word *legend* when you talk about it. [Ask two or three students. If necessary, guide and/or rephrase students' responses: "I liked that the children finally had a home in the legend about the eagle and the serpent."]
6. What's the word we've been talking about?

Use a *Sharing Activity* for follow-up. Directions: Share what you liked about the legend. Be sure to answer in complete sentences and use the word *legend* when you tell about it.



Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day



The Aztec: The Legend of the Eagle and the Serpent

5_B

Extensions

20 minutes

Civilizations Chart

Show students Image Card 11 (The Eagle and the Serpent). Talk about the Image Card and have students share what they learned from the read-aloud about the sign that the Aztec were looking for and about the Aztec religion. (The Aztec believed in multiple gods that were responsible for different things. The Aztec believed the sign was from the gods and that they should make a home wherever they saw the sign.)

Review what students learned about the Maya religion. How are the Maya and Aztec religions the same? How are they different? Tell students that you are going to place the Image Card on the Civilizations Chart to help them remember that the Aztec had a religion.

10 Sequencing the Story (Instructional Master 5B-1)

Explain to students that this worksheet has pictures of events that are from the story they have just heard. Remind students what is happening in each image:

- The eagle and snake on the cactus—the “sign” (4)
- The journeying Aztec (1)
- The Aztec priest (2)
- The Aztec city on the islands of Lake Texcoco (5)
- The Aztec scouts pointing to Lake Texcoco (3)

Have students cut out the five pictures. Next, have them think about what is happening in each picture. Students should then arrange the pictures in order to show the proper sequence of events. Check to see if students are able to correctly sequence the pictures. Have students glue or tape the pictures on paper once they have been sequenced.

As students complete this activity, have individual students retell the story referring to their sequenced pictures. You may also want to have students write or dictate words or sentences that describe the pictures and retell the story.

Take-Home Material

Family Letter

Send home Instructional Master 5B-2.