

Name: _____

Age of Exploration

Hernán Cortés

Directions: Read the following passage then answer the questions.



A Time of Discovery and Opportunity

Picture a time when brave explorers sailed across wide oceans, searching for treasures and excitement. The success of Columbus's voyages inspired others to set out on their own journeys to the New World aiming to find riches and glory. Hernán Cortés was one of these explorers, a Spanish conqueror with big dreams. In the 1500s, he went on a journey that would forever change history. Cortés and his men sailed to Mexico in search of wealth and adventure.

A Daring Move

In a bold move, Cortés ordered the burning of his own ships upon reaching the shores of Mexico. This act sent a clear message to his men: there was no turning back. With their only means of escape reduced to ashes, the men had no choice but to forge onward into the unknown.

Battles and Alliances

Cortés and his men fought through the Aztec Empire. The Aztecs controlled this land. They forced many local tribes to pay tribute to them. Cortés used rivalries among native groups to his advantage. He got one group to fight against another. As he met with each group and asked about treasure, they all spoke of the same city: Tenochtitlán, center of the Aztec Empire.

The Magnificent Aztec Empire

Imagine a massive stone city in ancient Mexico, right in the middle of mountains and lakes. This was Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec Empire. The Aztecs were clever engineers and their culture was lively. When Cortés and his men came to this faraway place, this city impressed them. It had tall pyramids and a winding system of canals. It was as grand as the big cities in Europe. They saw crowded markets, stunning temples, and busy streets. They also saw a chance to conquer.

Toppling an Empire

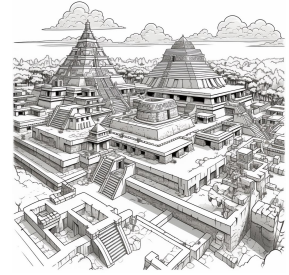
The Aztecs were led by their emperor Moctezuma. They defended their empire with courage. But Cortés and his men were joined by native warriors, eager to break free from Aztec rule. Also, the Spanish conquistadors had better weaponry. The Aztecs struggled to pierce Spanish steel armor and defend against swords. Cortés and his 800+ conquistadors, along with their allies, killed a massive number of Aztecs. Almost the entire capital was destroyed in the process.

After the fall of Tenochtitlán, Cortés and his forces gained control over the Aztec Empire and the surrounding area. Over the course of several years, the Aztecs faded away. Survivors blended into the new Spanish colony, joined other tribes, or were destroyed. Cortés returned to Spain, where he faced legal troubles due to politics and unhappy rivals. But after these struggles, he was honored for his victory. The fall of the Aztec Empire marked a key moment in history.

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Reading Questions

1. What motivated Cortés to set out on his journey to Mexico? _____

2. Why did Cortés burn his own ships upon arriving? _____

3. How did forming relationships with native tribes aid Cortés in his conquest? _____

4. Why were some native tribes so willing to work with Cortés against the Aztecs?

5. Why were Cortés and his men impressed by Tenochtitlán? _____

6. What advantages did the Aztecs have in defending their empire against Cortés? _____

7. Why do you believe this?

8. What advantages did Cortés and his men have against the Aztecs? _____

9. What was the ultimate outcome of the fall of Tenochtitlán for the Aztec Empire? _____

10. Why was the conquest of the Aztec Empire by Cortés a significant moment in history? _____
