

Part Three Sample

The topic that I have chosen for A Walk Through the Middle Ages is “Aztec Science and Inventions.” I have three questions that will help guide my research as I learn about my topic. My three questions are: *Who were the Aztecs and what was life like in their medieval society? What were some of the main scientific inventions of the Aztecs and what impact did they have on the people in their tribe? How were Aztec science and inventions similar and different to other tribes in the Americas such as the Mayas and the Incas?*

My first question regarding this topic is: *Who were the Aztecs and what was life like in their medieval society?* This question proved to be important to my research because it gave me general information about my topic before I dove into more detailed and focused questions. After performing my research on this question, I can safely say that **the Aztecs were a group who were very advanced for their time, creating a sustainable home for themselves, conquering land, developing social classes, and assigning ranks for each other.**

The Aztecs, who called themselves the Mexicas, were the last tribe to enter the Valley of Mexico and were poor outcasts with no place to call home. Eventually, they discovered a swampy, deserted island in Lake Texcoco and at some point between 1325 and 1345 built a village there. Over time, this small town increased in size and became the Aztecs’ capital city. Along with the increase in land, the Aztec tribe also grew to a size so big that it consisted of around fifteen million people. The environment of this capital city was a refreshing thing for the people who lived there because it sat on one of the only places in Mexico with liveable and sustainable conditions for growing and harvesting crops. Harsh, uncomfortable environments covered the rest of Mexico at that time. This resulted in strong, tough Aztec people who were taught to obey the gods they worshiped, whom they believed controlled Mother Nature and could bring flood, starvation, and earthquake. This led them to sacrifice

human beings to their gods so they could acquire good luck. Over 20,000 people per year were being killed at one point, and they were mostly prisoners from the Aztecs many battles.

Although the medieval Aztecs might have seemed bloodthirsty and murderous, they actually took part in regular, everyday activities such as constructing houses, weaving clothing, farming, trading, sports and games, academics, and many other things as well. According to Michael Salutan in his book titled *The Aztec People*, “to keep this large tribe of people orderly and efficient, the Aztecs created a social pyramid, where the highest ranked citizen was the king, or *tlatoani*, which translates to chief speaker in Nahuatl.” This is important because it shows that, just like the feudal system in Europe, the people had a hierarchy system. On the next level down was the prime minister, the *cihuacoatl*, and then were a group of Aztec nobles (*pipiltin*). The rest of society in that tribe was made up of the *macehualtin*, the “commoners.” While these social classes were incredibly important to Aztec people, families were one of the communities most important components. People chose to strongly associate themselves with specific groups of families called *calpulli* or *calpolli*, which were small communities or neighborhoods.

As well as having organized social classes to keep citizens in line, the Aztecs also had general and objective rules for behavior, which also highlighted proper and improper actions. Based on their parents or their own achievements, Aztec people were either nobles or commoners, divided by social classes. Even though these rules were simple, there were slight differences between the expectations of nobles and commoners, as well as gender roles. The Aztec man was required to teach his children, provide for his family, take care of the household’s property, be a fierce and courageous warrior in battle, and to act kind, lively, and provident. Citizens of the opposite sex, women, were diligent and alert, caretakers of the household, teachers of daughters, and were expected to be skilled at weaving and cooking. Younger generations of Aztecs, children, were polite, compliant, and modest. These behavioral habits were enforced on Aztec children by chastisement about correct attitudes.

The second question I researched on Aztec science and inventions was: *What were some of the main scientific inventions of the Aztecs and what impact did they have on the people in their tribe?* I spent many hours researching this question, and what I found is that **some of the main inventions of the Aztecs included the development of their grand city and great agricultural advancements of the land they lived on.** Their scientific advancements regarding their city greatly impacted the way that the citizens living there carried out their day-to-day lives.

The Aztecs' capital city of Tenochtitlan was the result of a very grand project requiring advanced technology of the time. In this city, freshwater was brought to citizens through aqueducts and was connected to the mainland by the use of causeways. On Tenochtitlan, blades and stones were some of the simple, yet effective tools that the Aztecs used to create pyramids, used for worship and prayer. Builders and other workers involved in the construction of the capital focused on strong structures and used a volcanic rock called tezontle to make buildings and housing for the citizens living there. To split Tenochtitlan into various parts, canals, roads and bridges were built, creating a grid network. **In the article titled "Engineering Kings: The Aztecs," Michelle Alvarez stated "The canals that Aztecs created in their capital allowed citizens to travel by use of these waterways, since most of the island was covered with artificial islands called chinampas and waterways in between."** This shows that the people who lived in Tenochtitlan used the waterways on a daily basis. This reminds me of Venice, which I know also had canals that the people traveled on.

Another feat of technology the Aztecs invented was their original medical methods, which were very ahead of their time. People knew a lot about plants and their many useful properties, so Aztecs sold these herbs at local markets. The varieties of plants being bought and sold could be used for differing situations, the most common being treating wounds of Aztec soldiers after battles. Sap from the maguey plant was used to help cleanse and heal the injuries of citizens and soldiers. Various plants,

herbs, and methods were utilized for the wounded, and these seemingly simple methods were much more effective and advanced than the ones of Europe in the Middle Ages.

Mathematics was also a very big factor to the Aztecs technological advancements, and they used a vigesimal system, which was a system based on the twenties. Single numbers, like ones, were dots, while five could be written as either five dots or a line, ten was usually a diamond or rhombus, and twenty consisted of a flag, shell, or vase. Along with this invention of mathematical systems, the Aztecs also developed their own means of communication. Illustrations and glyphs were utilized rather than letters to depict the sounds of articulation, and often, this form of Aztec writing was not a finished record of an event. This form of writing was the simplest way to note happenings, making use of pictures depicting objects. In some instances, it was impractical to sketch an object, so instead, scribes (trained painters and writers) drew something related to the original word or phrase. These trained scribes generated the codex picture writing, though others could write as well, including theorists and priests.

A very important scientific invention of the Aztecs was their two calendars. One of these was made up of 365 days, and displayed occurrences such as harvesting. Four weeks, each including five days made up every month, and another “unfortunate” week was added additionally to finish the eighteen-month year. The other calendar, called *Tonalpohualli*, was sacred to the people, and was made up of twenty months and thirteen days, adding up to a total of 260 days in the ancient Aztec year. Holy customs and ceremonies were recorded on the *Tonalpohualli*, adding to the importance of this particular schedule.