

## Lesson Plans

### Day 1:

- Students will be expected to logon to [www.quizlet.com](http://www.quizlet.com) to study their terms. They will ~~find our class link in the Microsoft Teams Page.~~
- The study sets are divided into 5 parts with 10 words each. Students are expected to study the first set.
- For students that do not have internet access, they need to make their own flash cards to study.
- There will be a list of the terms.
- ~~Students need to handwrite each of the terms and definition one time.~~

### Day 2

- Students will need to logon to the Microsoft Teams. They will then need to go to Khan Academy and click the link.
- There is an article for the students to read.
- At the end of the article, there are questions for the students to answer.
- ~~Students will also answer an extended response question.~~

### Day 3

- ~~Host a conference call of Microsoft Teams with the students.~~
- ~~Discuss the article in depth with the students.~~
- ~~Create an atmosphere that is most similar to the classroom.~~
- After the lecture, students will complete a crossword puzzle of the first 10 terms.

### Day 4

- Students are to complete the Term Test Part 1 quiz that was generated by quizlet.com

### Day 5

- Students are to logon to [quizlet.com](http://quizlet.com).
- They will study the next set of terms.
- These are the next 10.
- Students with no internet access will make their own set of flash cards.
- They are to study these.
- The next activity for the students to do is to complete a crossword puzzle.

### Day 6

- ~~Students will draw an ancient Aztec Pyramid.~~

### Day 7

- Students will review for the next term test.
- Students will take the next term test created by quizlet.com.

### Day 8

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- Students will logon to quizlet.com
- They will study Term Test Part 3 flashcards.
- Students that do not have internet access will make their own flashcards.

### Day 9

- Students will logon onto Khan Academy through their Microsoft Teams Account.
- They will watch the first video over the Aztec Empire.
- ~~For students who do not have internet access, a transcript will be provided.~~
- Students will watch the second video over the Inca Empire.
- ~~For students who do not have internet access, a transcript will be provided.~~
- ~~Students will write a summary of the articles.~~

### Day 10

- Students will complete the Term Test Part 3 that was generated by quizlet.com
- ~~Host a meeting with the students on Microsoft to discuss the articles in depth with the students.~~
- ~~Have a grand conversation with the students.~~

### Day 11

- Students will logon to quizlet.com and study flashcards for Term Test Part 4.
- Students who do not have internet access will create their own flashcards.

### Day 12

- Students will go to the next Khan Academy link that is located on Microsoft Teams.
- They will watch a YouTube Video on the Mayan Civilization.
- ~~A transcript will be provided for students with no internet access.~~
- ~~Students will need to write a summary of the video.~~

### Day 13

- ~~Host a Microsoft teams call to discuss the video with the students and lecture about the Mayan civilization.~~
- ~~Have a few students give their summaries of the video.~~
- Students will complete the Term Test 4 that is generated by quizlet.com

#### Day 14

- Students will logon to quizlet.com and review term test 5 flashcards.
- Students who do not have internet access will make a set of flashcards.

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#### Day 15

- ~~Have a conference call on Microsoft teams with the students.~~
- ~~Discuss the entire chapter in depth with the students.~~
- Students will complete the term test 5 test created by quizlet.com
- ~~Students will complete a Geographic Activity from their textbooks.~~
- ~~It will be photocopies and part of the packet.~~

Microsoft Team Code:

**skztk63**

Quizlet Link

<https://quizlet.com/join/y5CV7fdqD>

## Chapter 10 Terms

### Lesson 1

1. Isthmus – A narrow piece of land linking two larger areas of land.
2. Caribbean – A string of islands that spreads across the Caribbean Sea.
3. Andes Mountains – The world's longest mountain system.
- ~~4. Plateaus – Large areas of raised land that have flat surfaces.~~
5. Rocky Mountains - Large mountain range located in western North America.
6. Appalachia Mountains – Mountain range that runs near the Atlantic Coast.
7. Great Plains – The rolling grasslands of central North America.
8. Mississippi River – The largest river system in North America. It flows about 2,350 miles before it empties into the Gulf of Mexico.
9. Amazon River – The largest river system in South America. It starts in the Andes and flows south for about 4,000 miles before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean.
10. Hunters and Gatherers – Early Americans who moved from place to place in search of food and water.
11. Meso – Greek word meaning middle.
12. Mesoamerica – Land that stretches from central Mexico to Costa Rica in Central America.
13. Olmec – May be the oldest culture in Mesoamerica. They lived along the Gulf Coast and began about 1200 B.C. and lasted for about 800 years.
14. Maize – Another name for corn.
15. Teotihuacan – A city built by a group of inland peoples. It was one of the first planned cities and existed from about 250 A.D. to 800 A.D. The name means: "Place of the gods". About 120,000 to 200,000 people lived in this city.
16. Zapotec – Another group of people that lived in and around south central Mexico and built farms and cities. They developed a writing system based on hieroglyphs.
17. Monte Alban - The capital city of the Zapotec people.
18. Maya – A group of people that developed a complex culture in the steamy rain forest of the Yucatan Peninsula. They later spread into southern Mexico and Central America.
19. Toltec – A warlike people that conquered much of Mexico and northern Central America. Their empire reached its height of power between 950 and 1150 A.D.
20. Aztecs – Another group of warlike peoples who invaded the Toltec city of Tollan and gained control of Central Mexico around 1300 A.D.
21. Moche – Developed around A.D. 100 along the dry coastal desert of Peru. They built canals to bring water from rivers in the Andes foothills to their desert homeland.
22. Inca – The first empire in South America. They lived in the Andes mountain ranges of Peru.
23. Cuzco - Built around A.D. 1100. It became the capital city of the Inca.
24. Hohokam – A group of people that settled in the deserts around present day Arizona around A.D. 300. They dug hundreds of miles of irrigation canals to carry river water to their fields.
25. Anasazi – A group of people that lived about the same time as the Hohokam. They settled in the canyons and cliff of the Southwest.
26. Pueblos – Name given by Spanish explorers, these large stone dwellings were built and inhabited by the Hohokam and the Anasazi.
27. Mound Builders – A group of people located east of the Mississippi river. They began around 1000 B.C. Their civilization lasted to about A.D. 400.
28. Mississippians – A group of people located in the Mississippi River Valley around A.D. 700. They were also mound builders and lived in cities.

29. Cahokia - One of the largest cities built by the Mississippians. It may have contained 16,000 to 30,000 residents.

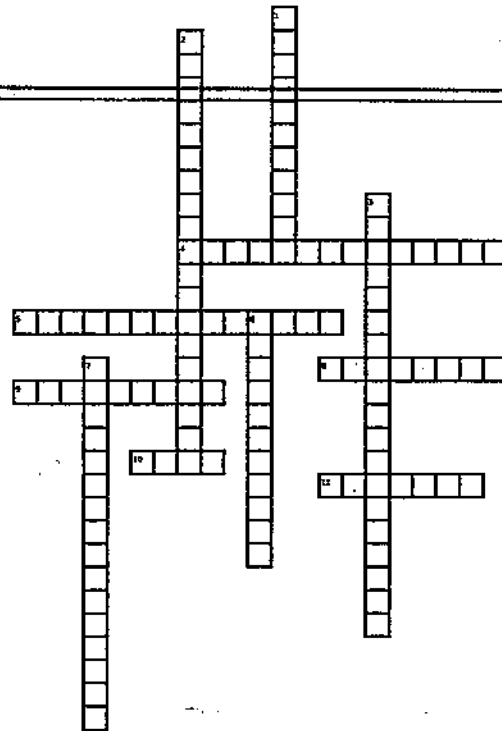
## Lesson 2

1. Sinkhole – An area where the soil has collapsed into a hollow or depression. They gave the Maya access to a network of underground rivers and streams.
2. Pacal II- The greatest of the Mayan Kings. He ruled the city-state of Palenque for 67 years during the A.D. 600's.
3. Chac – The Mayan god of the rain.

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4. Quetzalcoatl – The feathered serpent sun god of the Aztecs.
5. Lake Texcoco – The Aztecs chose this site to build their new home which would be called the city of Tenochtitlan.
6. Montezuma – Perhaps the most powerful of the Aztec rulers. He governed from 1440 – 1469.
7. Pachacuti – The first of the great Inca rulers. He launched a campaign of conquest in the 1430's.
8. Quechua – Inca emperors required people to learn this language.
9. Terrace Farming – Developed by Inca engineers. It used wide steps built into a mountainside to grow crops on.
10. Inti – Inca sun god.
11. Machu Picchu – A retreat that was built for Inca emperors in the Andes. It was constructed of white granite and made thousands of feet high.
12. Quipu – Used by the Incas, it is a rope with knotted cords of different lengths and colors. It was used for both mathematics and record keeping.
13. Inuit – Means “the people”. A group of people that settled along the northern area of the North Pacific coast.
14. Tundra – A treeless very cold region located south of the Arctic Circle.
15. Igloos – Temporary homes made from cut blocks of hard-packed snow.
16. Blubber – Fat from seals and whales that and was used as food, cooking oil and lamp oil.
17. Adobe – Apartment-like homes built from sun-dried mud bricks in the North American Southwest.
18. Hogans – Square wooden homes built by the Navajo.
19. Tepees – Tent like homes that were built by Native Americans on the Great Plains that were made from animal skins.
20. Eastern Woodlands – The land east of the Mississippi River. It consisted of several complex societies with different kinds of governments.
21. Iroquois Confederacy – Formed in the 1500's and is believed to be the first constitution written in North America. It ended the fighting that existed amongst five Native American groups.

# Chapter 10 Term Test 1



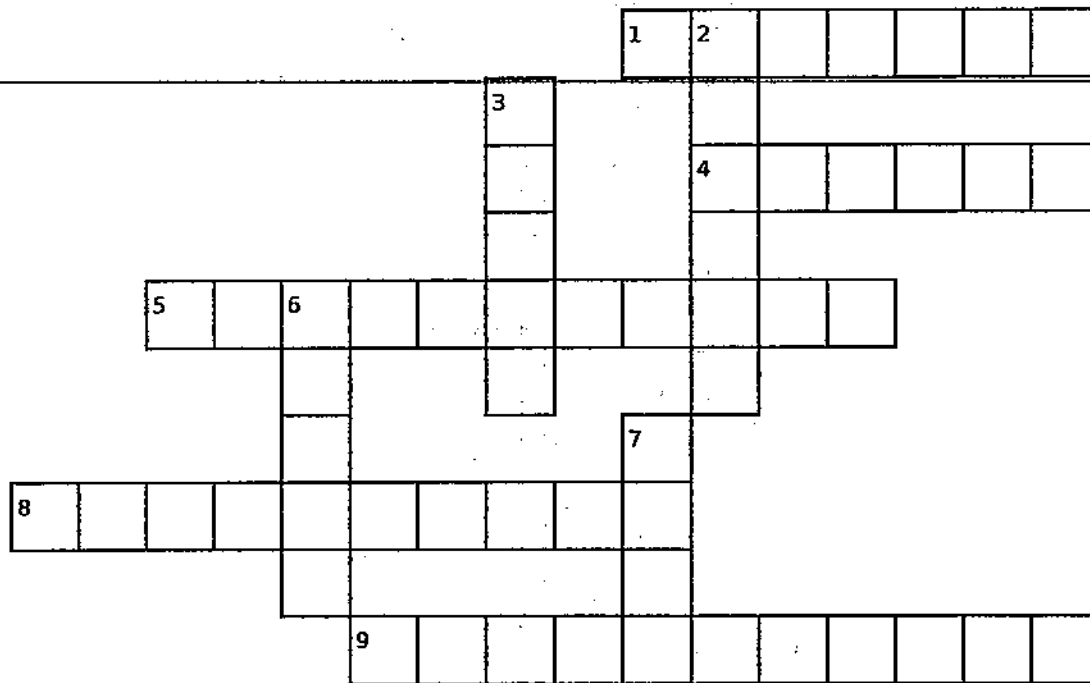
## Down:

1. The rolling grasslands of central North America.
2. Mountain range that runs near the Atlantic Coast.
3. Early Americans who moved from place to place in search of food and water.
6. The largest river system in South America. It starts in the Andes and flows south for about 4,000 miles before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean.
7. The largest river system in North America. It flows about 2,350 miles before it empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

## Across:

4. The world's longest mountain system.
5. Large mountain range located in western North America.
8. Large areas of raised land that have flat surfaces.
9. A string of islands that spreads across the Caribbean Sea.
10. Greek word meaning middle.
11. A narrow piece of land linking two larger areas of land.

# Chapter 10 Term Test 2



## Down:

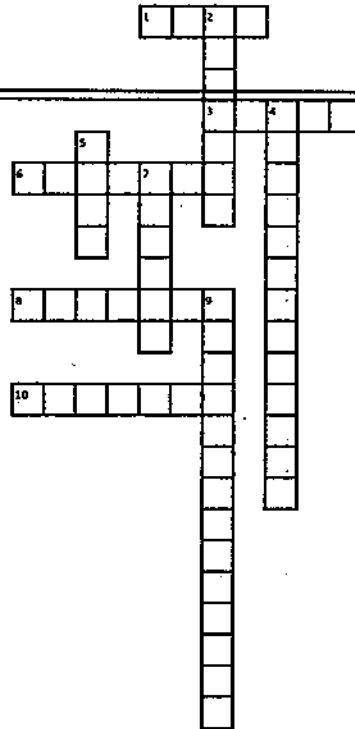
2. Another group of warlike peoples who invaded the Toltec city of Tollan and gained control of Central Mexico around 1300 A.D
3. Developed around A.D. 100 along the dry coastal desert of Peru. They built canals to bring water from rivers in the Andes foothills to their desert homeland.
6. May be the oldest culture in Mesoamerica. They lived along the Gulf Coast and began about 1200 B.C. and lasted for about 800 years.
7. The first empire in South America. They lived in the Andes mountain ranges of Peru.

## Across:

1. Another group of people that lived in and around south central Mexico and built farms and cities. They developed a writing system based on hieroglyphs.
4. A warlike people that conquered much of Mexico and northern Central America. Their empire reached its height of power between 950 and 1150 A.D.
5. A city built by a group of inland peoples. It was one of the first planned cities and existed from about 250 A.D. to 800 A.D. The name means: "Place of the gods." About 120,000 to 200,000 people lived in this city.
8. The capital city of the Zapotec people.
9. Land that stretches from central Mexico to Costa Rica in Central America.



# Term Test 3



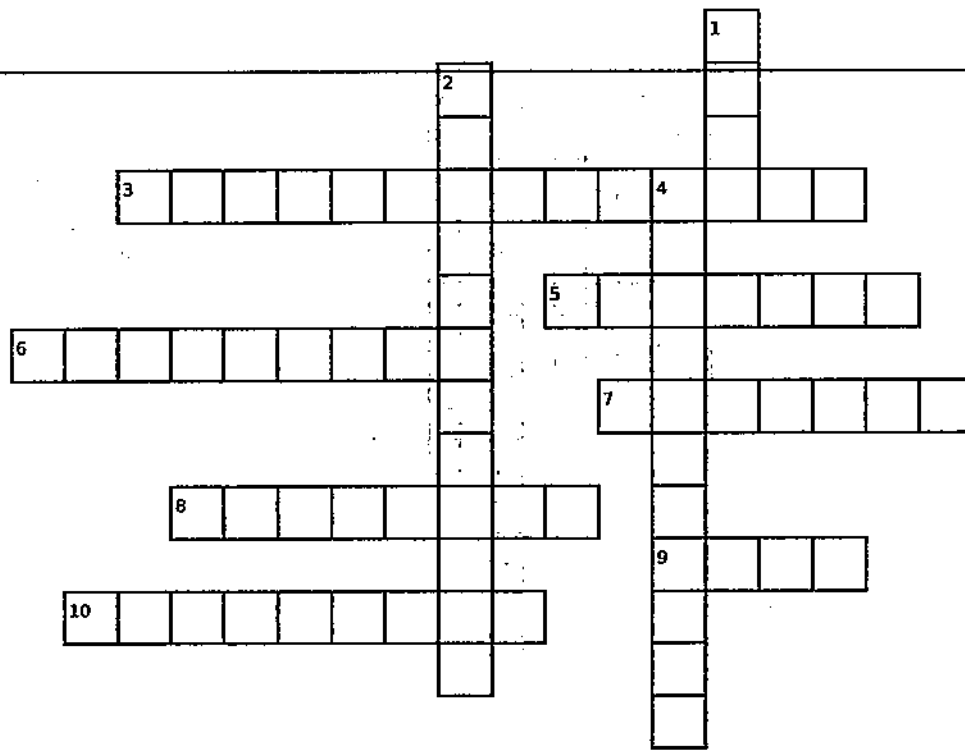
## Down:

2. One of the largest cities built by the Mississippians. It may have contained 16,000 to 30,000 residents.
4. A group of people located east of the Mississippi river. They began around 1000 B.C. Their civilization lasted to about A.D. 400.
5. A group of people that developed a complex culture in the steamy rain forest of the Yucatan Peninsula. They later spread into southern Mexico and Central America.
7. Another group of warlike peoples who invaded the Toltec city of Tollan and gained control of Central Mexico around 1300 A.D.
9. A group of people located in the Mississippi River Valley around A.D. 700. They were also mound builders and lived in cities.

## Across:

1. The first empire in South America. They lived in the Andes mountain ranges of Peru.
3. May be the oldest culture in Mesoamerica. They lived along the Gulf Coast and began about 1200 B.C. and lasted for about 800 years.
6. A group of people that lived about the same time as the Hohokam. They settled in the canyons and cliffs of the Southwest.
8. A group of people that settled in the deserts around present day Arizona around A.D. 300. They dug hundreds of miles of irrigation canals to carry river water to their fields.
10. Name given by Spanish explorers, these large stone dwellings were built and inhabited by the Hohokam and the Anasazi.

# Ch. 10 Part 4 Crossword



## Down:

1. Inca sun god.
2. The feathered serpent sun god of the Aztecs.
4. A retreat that was built for Inca emperors in the Andes. It was constructed of white granite and made thousands of feet high.

## Across:

3. Developed by Inca engineers. It used wide steps built into a mountainside to grow crops on.
5. The greatest of the Mayan Kings. He ruled the city-state of Palenque for 67 years during the A.D. 600's.
6. Perhaps the most powerful of the Aztec rulers. He governed from 1440 - 1469.
7. Inca emperors required people to learn this language.
8. An area where the soil has collapsed into a hollow or depression. They gave the Maya access to a network of underground rivers and streams.
9. The Mayan god of the rain.
10. The first of the great Inca rulers. He launched a campaign of conquest in the 1430s.

### 3 Written questions

1. The largest river system in South America. It starts in the Andes and flows south for about 4,000 miles before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

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2. A string of islands that spreads across the Caribbean Sea.

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3. Mountain range that runs near the Atlantic Coast.

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### 3 Matching questions

1. \_\_\_\_ Rocky Mountains

A. The world's longest mountain system.

2. \_\_\_\_ Great Plains

B. Large mountain range located in western North America.

3. \_\_\_\_ Andes Mountains

C. The rolling grasslands of central North America.

### 3 Multiple choice questions

1. Large areas of raised land that have flat surfaces.

- A. Isthmus
- B. Caribbean
- C. Plateaus
- D. Rocky Mountains

2. A narrow piece of land linking two larger areas of land.

- A. Plateaus
- B. Caribbean
- C. Rocky Mountains
- D. Isthmus

3. The largest river system in North America. It flows about 2,350 miles before it empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

- A. Mississippi River
- B. Andes Mountains
- C. Great Plains
- D. Amazon River

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## 2 True/False questions

1. Early Americans who moved from place to place in search of food and water. → Mississippi River

- True
- False

2. Greek word meaning middle. → Andes Mountains

- True
- False



1. Another group of warlike peoples who invaded the Toltec city of Tollan and gained control of Central Mexico around 1300 A.D → Zapotec

- True  
 False

2. Developed around A.D. 100 along the dry coastal desert of Peru. They built canals to bring water from rivers in the Andes foothills to their desert homeland. → Moche

- 
- True  
 False

3. A city built by a group of inland peoples. It was one of the first planned cities and existed from about 250 A.D. to 800 A.D. The name means: "Place of the gods." About 120,000 to 200,000 people lived in this city. → Teotihuacan

- True  
 False

### 3 Written questions

1. May be the oldest culture in Mesoamerica. They lived along the Gulf Coast and began about 1200 B.C. and lasted for about 800 years.

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2. The first empire in South America. They lived in the Andes mountain ranges of Peru.

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3. A group of people that developed a complex culture in the steamy rain forest of the Yucatan Peninsula. They later spread into southern Mexico and Central America.

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### 3 Matching questions

1. \_\_\_\_ Azteks

A. A group of people that lived about the same time as the Hohokam. They settled in the canyons and cliffs of the Southwest.

2. \_\_\_\_ Anasazi

B. Another group of warlike peoples who invaded the Toltec city of Tollan and gained control of Central Mexico around 1300 A.D.

3. \_\_\_\_ Hohokam

C. A group of people that settled in the deserts around present day Arizona around A.D. 300. They dug hundreds of miles of irrigation canals to carry river water to their fields.

### 2 Multiple choice questions

1. Name given by Spanish explorers, these large stone dwellings were built and inhabited by the Hohokam and the Anasazi.

- A. Azteks
- B. Pueblos
- C. Anasazi
- D. Olmec

2. A group of people located east of the Mississippi river. They began around 1000 B.C. Their civilization lasted to about A.D. 400.

- A. Mississippians
- B. Anasazi
- C. Hohokam
- D. Mound Builders

## 2 True/False questions

1. A group of people located in the Mississippi River Valley around A.D. 700. They were also mound builders and lived in cities. → Mississippians

- True
- False

~~2. One of the largest cities built by the Mississippians. It may have contained 16,000 to 30,000 residents. → Cahokia~~

- True
- False



# Quizlet

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Written questions

1. The Mayan god of the rain.

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2. A retreat that was built for Inca emperors in the Andes. It was constructed of white granite and made thousands of feet high.

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3. The first of the great Inca rulers. He launched a campaign of conquest in the 1430's

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## 3 Matching questions

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Quechua

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Quetzalcoatl

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Sinkhole

A. Inca emperors required people to learn this language.

B. The feathered serpent sun god of the Aztecs.

C. An area where the soil has collapsed into a hollow or depression. They gave the Maya access to a network of underground rivers and streams.

## 2 Multiple choice questions

1. Inca sun god.

- A. Quechua
- B. Chac
- C. Inti
- D. Montezuma

2. The greatest of the Mayan Kings. He ruled the city-state of Palenque for 67 years during the A.D. 600's.

- A. Montezuma
- B. Pacal II
- C. Sinkhole
- D. Pachacuti

## 2 True/False questions

1. Developed by Inca engineers. It used wide steps built into a mountainside to grow crops on. → Machu Picchu

True

False

2. Perhaps the most powerful of the Aztec rulers. He governed from 1440 - 1469. → Pachacuti

True

False

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# Quizlet

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

## 3 Written questions

1. Means "the people". A group of people that settled along the northern area of the North Pacific coast.

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2. Used by the Incas, it is a rope with knotted cords of different lengths and colors. It was used for both mathematics and record keeping.

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3. A treeless very cold region located south of the Arctic Circle.

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## 3 Matching questions

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Hogans

A. Apartment-like homes built from sun-dried mud bricks in the North American Southwest.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Tepees

B. Square wooden homes built by the Navajo.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Adobe

C. Tent like homes that were built by Native Americans on the Great Plains that were made from animal skins.

## 2 Multiple choice questions

1. Formed in the 1500's and is believed to be the first constitution written in North America. It ended the fighting that existed amongst five Native American group

- A. Iroquois Confederacy
- B. Eastern Woodlands
- C. Tundra
- D. Quipu

2. The land east of the Mississippi River. It consisted of several complex societies with different kinds of governments.

- A. Blubber
- B. Eastern Woodlands
- C. Tundra
- D. Iroquois Confederacy

## 2 True/False questions

1. Fat from seals and whales that and was used as food, cooking oil and lamp oil. → Blubber

True

False

2. Temporary homes made from cut blocks of hard-packed snow. → Igloos

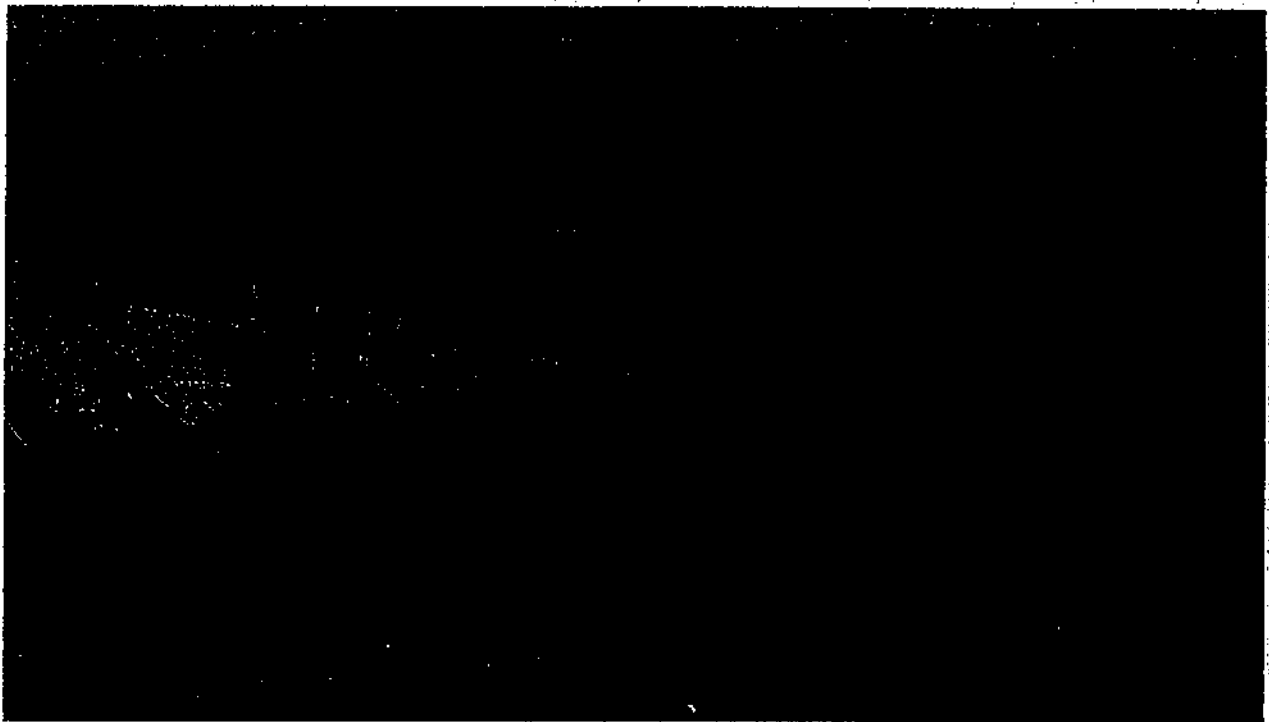
True

False

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# Metropolis

An impressive city of 125,000-200,000 inhabitants, by the 6th century, ~~Teotihuacan was the first large metropolis in the Americas.~~ Teotihuacan, as the city is called, is a Náhuatl name that means “the place where the gods were created” and was given by the Aztec centuries after it was abandoned in the 7th century. The Aztecs attributed names and significance to its buildings but had no contact with this earlier culture. Very little is known of the people who built Teotihuacan, and as a result much of our knowledge of the site, its art, and Teotihuacan culture is derived from Aztec sources. Largely created before 250 C.E., Teotihuacan is a testament to the ambition of its people, who built the first American city on a grid plan.



**Pyramid of the Moon seen from the Avenue of the Dead with Cerro Gordo in the distance, Teotihuacan, Mexico**

Pyramid of the Moon seen from the Avenue of the Dead with Cerro Gordo in the distance, Teotihuacan, Mexico

Due to an absence of (or as of yet undiscovered) royal palaces and graves, the lack of evidence for a cult of personality, and the as-of-yet undeciphered hieroglyphs, the governing system of Teotihuacan remains largely elusive to scholars. Nevertheless, the dramatic monumental architecture and dense urban fabric reveal a complex environment carefully planned to support a large population but also structured by the surrounding natural environment and in relation to specific constellations and planetary events. In keeping with the stratified nature of other Mesoamerican societies, Teotihuacan also benefitted from rulers, or a ruling elite, who commissioned massive architectural landmarks such as the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon, and who spread Teotihuacan's sphere of influence throughout Mesoamerica—even into the Maya region as far away as Guatemala.

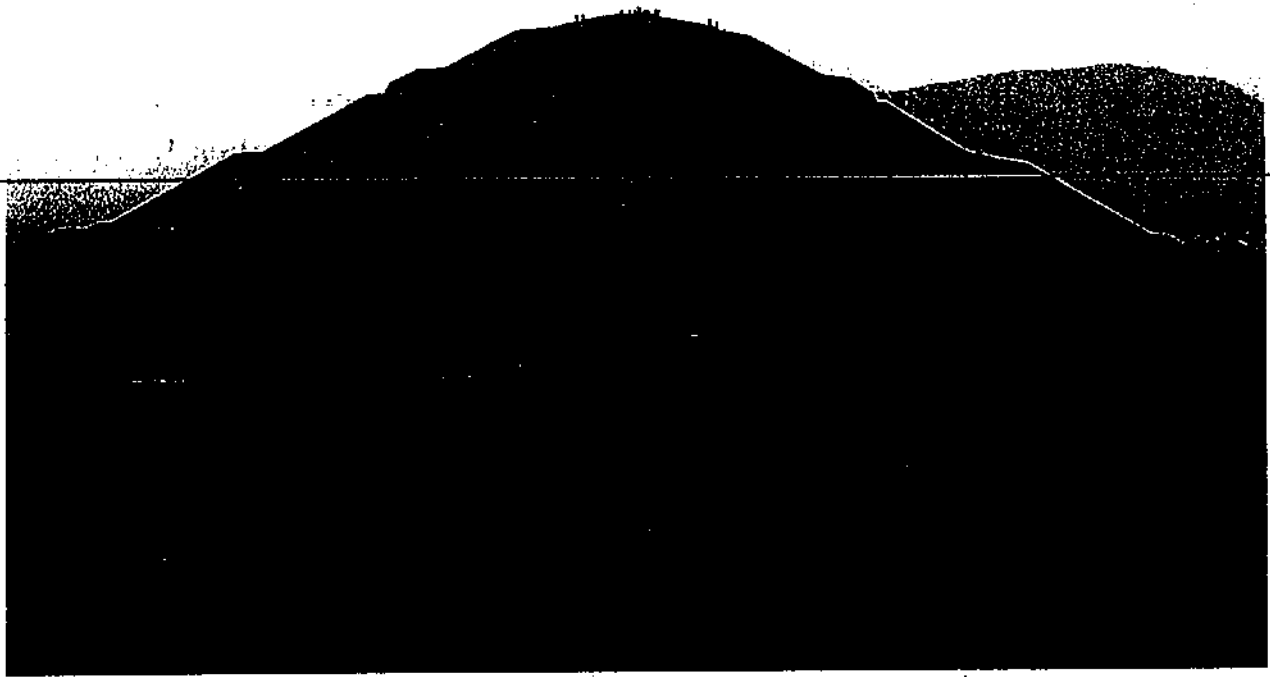


Pyramid the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent), Teotihuacan,  
Mexico

Pyramid the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent), Teotihuacan, Mexico

## Plan and pyramids

The city of Teotihuacan is aligned, like other Mesoamerican cities such as ~~La Venta, on a north-south axis. This alignment is made explicit by the~~ central artery, known as the Avenue of the Dead, which extends more than 1.5 miles across the city. Entering the city from the south, the Avenue of the Dead leads visitors to the city's three main architectural monuments, the *Ciudadela*, a sunken plaza at the southernmost tip that contained temples, including the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent (above), the Pyramid of the Sun further down the avenue (below), and the Pyramid of the Moon (top of page) located at the northernmost point. In the distance and behind the Pyramid of the Moon, visitors can also catch a glimpse of the impressive Cerro Gordo, an extinct volcano that frames the pyramid and demonstrates the harmonious relationship between architecture and natural topography. Running perpendicular to the Avenue of the Dead another street follows the San Juan River. These axes help to define the grid of intersecting horizontal and vertical corridors that structure and organize the city plan. The urban grid helped to establish order for religious, domestic, and commercial complexes and a structural coherence that supported the management of the city and its population. Thousands of apartment complexes also reflect the ordered planning of the site.

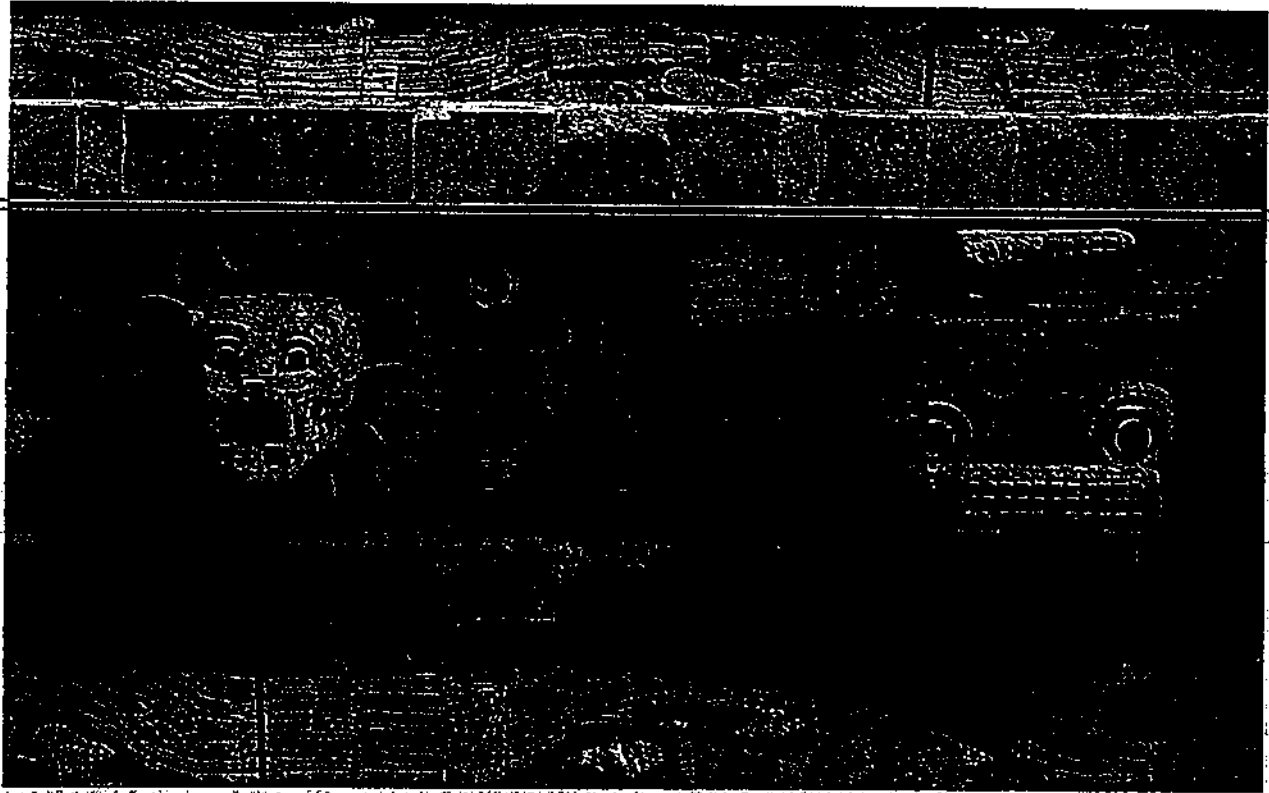


## Pyramid of the Sun and the Avenue of the Dead, Teotihuacan, Mexico

Pyramid of the Sun and the Avenue of the Dead, Teotihuacan, Mexico

The Pyramid of the Sun, which reaches a height of over 200 feet, was the tallest structure in the Americas at the time. Built over a cave, it is unclear who, or what, the pyramid was built to commemorate although art historians have suggested that creation mythology may be at issue, since Aztec and Maya sources refer to caves as places of origin and fertility. The pyramid was meant to be viewed and approached from the East. Visitors can still climb the pyramid's steep staircase, which originates near the Avenue of the Dead and rises over five levels to what is now a bare flattened top (above). Keep in mind that this pyramid was heavily reconstructed in the modern era, so its original shape may have appeared somewhat differently than it does today.





### Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent), Teotihuacān

Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent), Teotihuacān

The Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent occupies a prominent place in the Ciudadela, a large open space that offers a respite from the massive presence of the Pyramid of the Sun and Pyramid of the Moon. Like so much else at Teotihuacan, the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent was built in the talud-tablero style (a sloping wall, talud, that is surmounted by a vertical wall, tablero). The temple stands out for its sculptural ornamentation depicting the feathered serpent, known by its Aztec name Quetzalcoatl. The feathered serpent is associated with water imagery and is depicted numerous times on the exterior of the temple as an undulating snake navigating among seashells (above). Two faces project outwards, one of which depicts the feathered serpent (above left). The identification of the other head is more challenging. One interpretation is that it represents an early version of the Aztec god Tlaloc (known for his

goggled eyes) and associated with rain and warfare (above right). However, some scholars identify the head as an early precedent of Xiuhcoatl, or Fire Serpent, and who was associated with warfare, fire, and time (or the calendar). Most scholars agree that the temple was associated with warfare and human sacrifice, as confirmed by numerous skeletal remains (presumably of warriors) that were discovered by archeologists in the 1980s. Speculation has also arisen about whether the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent may have contained the body of a ruler.



Reconstruction of mural from Tepantitla in Teotihuacan in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City

Reconstruction of mural from Tepantitla in Teotihuacan in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City

## Paintings

Teotihuacan was a heavily painted site, with murals found throughout the city. For example on the walls of the apartment complex in the Tepantitla district, we find an elaborate mural showing a figure often identified as the Great Goddess and more recently as a mountain-tree.

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The female figure stands frontally while a blossoming tree with butterflies and spiders emerges from her head (potentially a reference to the heavenly realm), while her feet remain attached to the underworld. The inverted u-shape found below the mountain-tree may function as a symbolic womb, similar to the cave found at the Pyramid of the Sun.

The identity of the two individuals to her side, possibly priests, have sparked interest. Considering the cosmopolitan nature of the city, it had been thought that Teotihuacan's figurative art was not portraiture, but rather generic representations that sought to unify a diverse population. Recently however, some painted signs have been recognized as representing the names of individuals, leading to a re-examination of whether Teotihuacan artists portrayed specific individuals and reminding us that there is still much to learn about this complex and ancient city.

Archeologists have dated the city's collapse to the seventh century when many of Teotihuacan's buildings were destroyed.

## Article Review

### Metropolis-Teotihuacan

1. How many inhabitants did the city have?

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2. What does "Teotihuacan" mean?

3. How is the city of Teotihuacan aligned?

4. How tall is the pyramid of the sun?

5. What did you think of the article?

## Who were the Olmec?

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The Olmec were the first major civilization in Mexico. They lived in the tropical lowlands on the Gulf of Mexico in the present-day Mexican states of Veracruz and Tabasco. The name Olmec is a Nahuatl—the Aztec language—word; it means the rubber people. The Olmec might have been the first people to figure out how to convert latex of the rubber tree into something that could be shaped, cured, and hardened. Because the Olmec did not have much writing beyond a handful of carved glyphs—symbols—that survived, we don't know what name the Olmec people gave themselves.

Appearing around 1600 BCE, the Olmec were among the first Mesoamerican complex societies, and their culture influenced many later civilizations, like the Maya. The Olmec are known for the immense stone heads they carved from a volcanic rock called basalt. Archaeological evidence also suggests that they originated the Mesoamerican practices of the Mesoamerican Ballgame—a popular game in the pre-Columbian Americas played with balls made from solid rubber—and that they may have practiced ritual bloodletting.

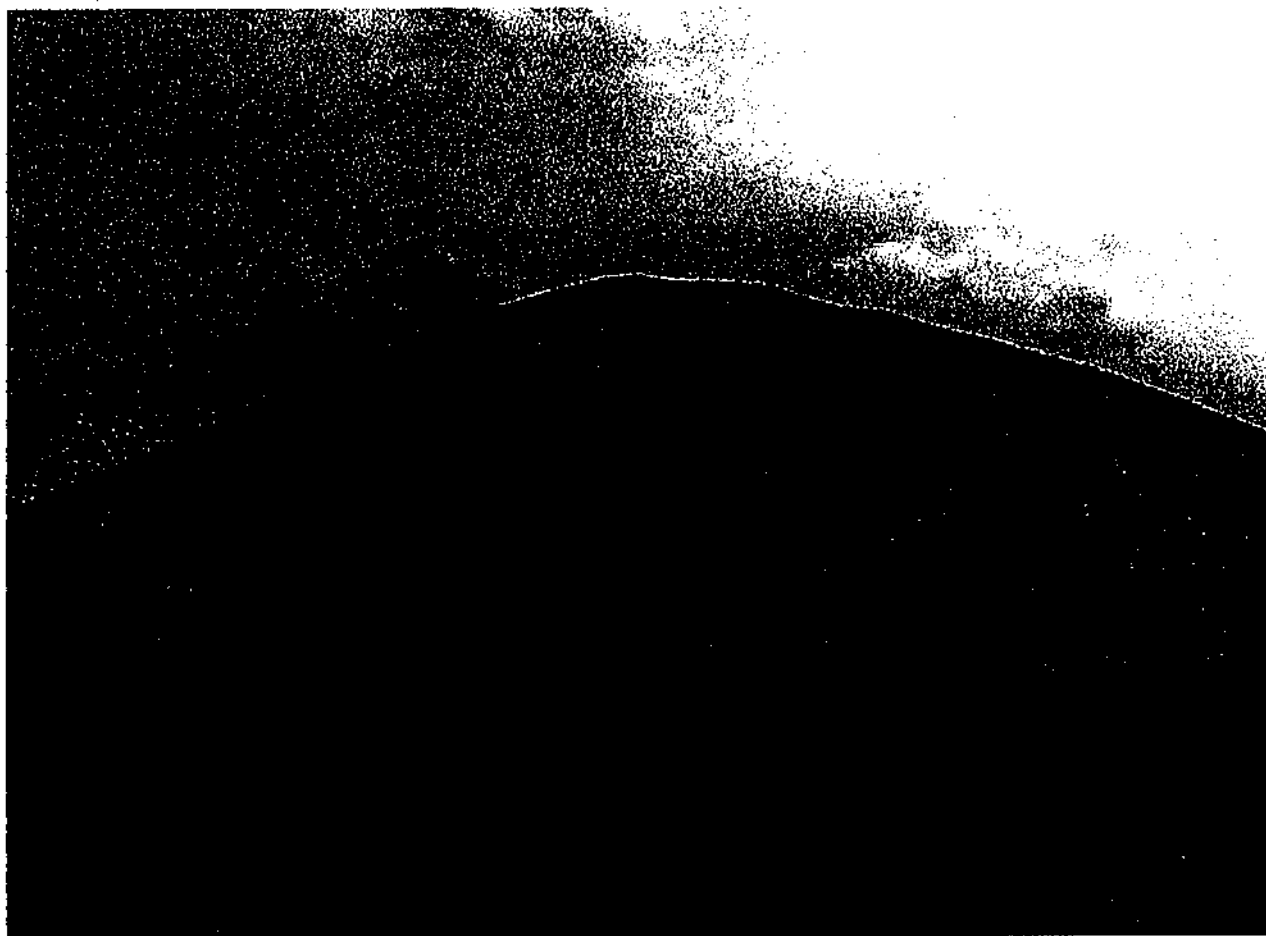
### Trade and village life

There are no written records of Olmec commerce, beliefs, or customs, but from the archaeological evidence, it appears they were not economically confined. In fact, Olmec artifacts have been found across Mesoamerica, indicating that there were extensive interregional trade



Trading helped the Olmec build their urban centers of San Lorenzo and La Venta. These cities, however, were used predominantly for ceremonial purposes and elite activity; most people lived in small villages. Individual homes had a lean-to—sort of like a garage shed—and a storage pit for storing root vegetables nearby. They also likely had gardens in which the Olmec would grow medicinal herbs and small crops, like sunflowers.

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A photograph of the Great Pyramid in La Venta on a partly cloudy day. The pyramid takes up most of the image and there is a small tree with green leaves on the left-hand side. Mostly dead, brown grass covers the pyramid but there are patches of green at the bottom.

Great Pyramid in La Venta, Tabasco. [Image](#) courtesy Boundless.

Most agriculture took place outside of the villages in fields cleared using slash-and-burn techniques. The Olmec likely grew crops such as maize, beans, squash, manioc, sweet potatoes, and cotton.

## Religion

There are no direct written accounts of Olmec beliefs, but their notable artwork provide clues about their life and religion.





Photograph of a stone carving. A chief wears an elaborate headdress and carries a weapon. His face has been worn down over time so features are not discernible.

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Surviving art, like this relief of a king or chief found in La Venta, help provide clues about how Olmec society functioned. Image courtesy Boundless.

There were eight different **androgynous**—possessing male and female characteristics—Olmec deities, each with its own distinct characteristics. For example, the Bird Monster was depicted as a harpy eagle associated with rulership. The Olmec Dragon was shown with flame eyebrows, a bulbous nose, and bifurcated tongue. Deities often represented a natural element and included the following:

- The Maize deity
- The Rain Spirit or Were-Jaguar
- The Fish or Shark Monster

Religious activities regarding these deities probably included the elite rulers, shamans, and possibly a priest class making offerings at religious sites in La Venta and San Lorenzo.

## Art

The Olmec culture was defined and unified by a specific art style. Crafted in a variety of materials—jade, clay, basalt, and greenstone, which is an archaeologist's term for carved, green-colored minerals—much Olmec art is naturalistic. Other art expresses fantastic **anthropomorphic**—human-shaped—creatures, often highly stylized, using an iconography reflective of a religious meaning. Common motifs include downturned mouths and cleft heads, both of which are seen in representations of were-jaguars and the rain deity.



Photograph of a realistic ceramic baby figurine. The child is nude, with its eyes shut and furrowed brow, appearing to cry. It is seated and reaches one arm up. Its legs are splayed out.

Olmec hollow baby figurine. Realistic ceramic objects, such as this portrayal of an infant, illustrate the highly skilled artistic style of the Olmec culture. Image courtesy Boundless.

## Olmec colossal heads

The most striking art left behind by this culture are the Olmec colossal—very big—heads. Seventeen monumental stone representations of human heads sculpted from large basalt boulders have been unearthed in the region to date. The heads date from at least before 900 BCE and are a distinctive feature of the Olmec civilization. All portray mature men with fleshy cheeks, flat noses, and slightly crossed eyes. However, none of the heads are alike, and each boasts a unique headdress, which suggests they represent specific individuals.

The Olmec brought these boulders from the Sierra de los Tuxtlas mountains of Veracruz. Given that the extremely large slabs of stone used in their production were transported over large distances, requiring a great deal of human effort and resources, it is thought that the monuments represent portraits of powerful individual Olmec rulers, perhaps carved to commemorate their deaths. The heads were arranged in either lines or groups at major Olmec centers, but the method and logistics used to transport the stone to the sites remain uncertain.



Photograph of an Olmec colossal head. There is a headdress carved onto the head and its eyes, nose and lips are prominent while its ears are not visible. The head is made of stone and is placed outdoors with palm fronds in the background.

This sculpture, which stands almost eight feet tall and weighs about 24 tons, is typical of the colossal heads of the Olmec. It's now housed in the Parque-Museum La Venta, in Villahermosa, the capital of the Mexican state of Tabasco. Image courtesy Boundless.

## **The end of the Olmecs**

The Olmec population declined sharply between 400 and 350 BCE, though it is unclear why. Archaeologists speculate that the depopulation was caused by environmental changes, specifically by the silting-up of rivers, which choked off the water supply.

Another theory for the considerable population drop proposes relocation of settlements due to increased volcanic activity as the cause rather than extinction. Volcanic eruptions during the Early, Late, and Terminal Formative periods would have blanketed the lands with ash and forced the Olmec to move their settlements.

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## **What do you think?**

- What do the colossal heads of the Olmec tell us about how their society was organized?
  - Given that the Olmec worshiped anthropomorphic deities, do you think they believed their rulers were human beings?
  - What kind of ecological disaster would have to take place in order to make your home unlivable?
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### Olmec Review

1. \_\_\_\_\_ They were the first major civilization in what present day country.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The Olmecs appeared what year?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Using the first map the Olmec Heartland what major body of water borders the northern coastline?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ What farming technique do we believe that did the ancient Olmecs use?
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Scientist believe that this natural disaster is what may have caused the Olmec Civilization to move or cease to exist?