

Name _____

Date _____

Mesoamerican Civilizations - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. The Olmec are considered Mesoamerica's first major civilization. They lived along the Gulf of Mexico beginning around 1200 BCE and built pyramids in the jungle. The Olmec culture is often called the "mother culture" of Mesoamerica because they strongly influenced the societies that would follow, including the Maya and Aztec. They developed trade networks within their cities, created early calendar and writing systems, and practiced deity worship. Olmec items have been found in various parts of Central America, but the most notable artifacts are the large stone heads they carved. The first colossal stone head was discovered in the late 1850s by a Mexican farmer clearing land. Historians believe these heads may have been a way to pay homage to Olmec rulers.

Which of the following is most likely true?

- ☒ **A.** Later societies carried on some Olmec traditions.
- ☐ **B.** After the fall of the Olmec civilization, they were forgotten.
- ☐ **C.** The Olmec were not a religious civilization.
- ☐ **D.** The Maya heavily influenced the Olmec civilization.

2. The Maya lived on the Yucatán Peninsula and bore a lot of similarities to the Olmec. They are considered the longest-lasting Mesoamerican civilization. The earliest Maya settlements date to around 1800 BCE, but they didn't reach the peak of their civilization until 250 CE. The Maya built large city-states, each led by its own ruler. Some archaeologists estimate that the city-state Tikal, now found in Guatemala, was home to as many as 100,000 residents. There were more than 3,000 buildings there, some towering high over the jungle. The Mayans were advanced in mathematics, astronomy, and engineering. In Tikal, this manifested in their construction of pyramids and reservoirs to hold water for the city. One notable pyramid, the Temple of Kukulcan inside the city Chichén Itzá, not only served as a religious temple, but also a calendar. The Temple of Kukulcan has 365 steps to represent each day of the year, and the four sides of the pyramid represent the seasons.

Which of the following is NOT true of the Maya?

- A. The Maya are considered the longest-lasting Mesoamerican civilization.
- B. The Maya and the Olmec shared similarities.
- C. The Maya built pyramids for religious purposes only.
- D. Instead of one empire, the Maya built multiple city-states, each with its own ruler.

✓

According to the passage, "One notable pyramid, the Temple of Kukulcan inside the city Chichén Itzá, not only served as a religious temple, but also a calendar."

3. In 1325, the Aztecs, who referred to themselves as Mexica, founded their island city Tenochtitlán. They built bridges, or causeways, that connected the island to the mainland. The Aztecs expanded their empire through military conquest across Mexico, emerging as a dominant force. Historians estimate the population in Tenochtitlán to have been about 200,000 at its height and was the most densely populated city to exist in Mesoamerica. In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico from Spain with goals of conquest. The Aztecs initially viewed Cortés as a messenger from the gods, but tensions grew as the conquistadors' intentions became clear. The Spanish defeated the Aztec empire and rebuilt Tenochtitlán as Mexico City. About 240,000 people died during the conquest due to disease brought by the conquistadors as well as warfare. Tenochtitlán was rebuilt to become modern-day Mexico City.

What inference can we make about the Aztecs?

- A. They had more advanced weapons than the Spanish conquistadors.
- B. They were religious.
- C. They were a smaller civilization than the Olmec.
- D. They lacked architectural and engineering skills.

✓

According to the passage, "The Aztecs initially viewed Cortés as a messenger from the gods, but tensions grew as the conquistadors' intentions became clear."

4. While the Aztecs ruled what is now northern Mexico, the Inca were busy in the Andes. Although the Inca didn't have contact with Mesoamerican cultures, they're notable for building the largest empire to ever exist in the Americas. Based in Peru, the Incan empire, at its height in the 12th century, spanned modern-day Ecuador to central Chile. More than 10 million people lived in its bounds, and there were close to 15,000 miles of roads connecting the empire, allowing for communication and transportation. Incan engineers built acres of farmland on terraces in the Andes. They constructed fortresses that still stand today. One of the most famous architectural ruins left by the Inca is Machu Picchu. It's an ancient city located 7,972 feet above sea level. There are many theories behind the purpose of Machu Picchu. Some historians believe it was a place of sacred worship; others believe that it was an estate built for the Incan emperor. It was home to more than 150 houses and palaces, temples, and baths. Machu Picchu is now a Unesco World Heritage site.

The Inca {}.

- A. had a small population of less than 15,000 people
- B. inspired the Mayans to build pyramids



C.

built the largest empire in the Americas

According to the passage "Although the Inca didn't have contact with Mesoamerican cultures, they're notable for building the largest empire to ever exist in the Americas."

- D. were located in Mesoamerica