

Name _____

Date _____

The Age of Exploration - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, Indigenous people lived in thriving societies across both continents. While most tribes in North America formed relatively modest-sized towns and nomadic groups, Native Americans in Mesoamerica developed into three huge empires: the Aztecs, the Mayans, and the Incas. The Aztec empire was centered in Tenochtitlán, an enormous city in the middle of a lake with 100,000 inhabitants. Aztec society consisted of distinct social classes: nobles, peasants, and enslaved people. The Aztecs also had a powerful standing army with a corps of professional warriors whose rank depended on how many prisoners of war they had captured. Mayan civilization flourished from 300 to 1000 CE. The Mayans were based on the Yucatán Peninsula. They built giant temples, pyramids, palaces, and ball courts. The Mayans had a written language, studied math and astronomy, and used their astronomical measurements to create the most accurate calendar in the world at that time. Incan civilization began in today's Peru and eventually spread north to Ecuador and south to Chile. The empire flourished in the 15th and 16th centuries, expanding rapidly through military conquest and peaceful assimilation. By the time the Spanish conquistadors arrived, however, the Incan empire was sprawling and difficult to control. The Spanish used this to their advantage. They set one city against another until the empire was destroyed.

What is the main purpose of the second paragraph of this passage?

A. To suggest that accounts of the Aztecs' human sacrifices are exaggerated



B.

To describe the location and the structure of the Aztec empire

The passage begins by identifying three large Native American empires, including the Aztecs. The second paragraph then describes the location of the Aztec empire: "Centered in Tenochtitlán, an enormous city in the middle of a lake with 100,000 inhabitants." It also describes the structure of the empire: "Aztec society consisted of distinct social classes: nobles, peasants, and enslaved people."

C. To contrast the Aztec empire with the Mayan empire

D. To support the claim that the Aztecs were peaceful and did not practice warfare

2. Seeking gold, spices, and trade routes, Christopher Columbus set out in 1492 to find a western route from Europe to Asia. Two months after Columbus left Spain, just as his crew was planning to mutiny and turn the ships around, a lookout spotted land. Columbus had sailed to the islands of the Bahamas, and the locals swam out to greet him. The Arawak men and women welcomed Columbus's crew with gifts and hospitality. However, Columbus soon enslaved many of the Arawaks, whom he thought could lead him to gold. Columbus returned to Spain after exploring Cuba and Hispaniola, still believing he had landed in Asia. He reported to the royal court about the amount of gold, exaggerating his findings. The Spanish monarchs gave Columbus the title "Admiral of the Ocean Sea" and promised him 10 percent of the gold and spices he found for them. Columbus and a 1,500-man crew returned to the Americas and demanded that the Taíno people on Hispaniola bring them gold. They established a system of quotas, in which the Native Americans had to bring the Spanish certain amounts of gold. If they failed to meet the quota, the Spanish would cut off their hands or, in many cases, crucify them on hilltops.

Based on the passage, what was one reason that Columbus was motivated to find gold in the Americas?

- A. Because he had exaggerated the amount of gold he'd found and was worried the Spanish monarchs would be angry with him
- B. Because he wanted to pay his 1,500-man crew
- ✓ C. Because the Spanish monarchs promised him 10 percent of the gold and spices he found for them
- D. Because he wanted to keep his new title of "Admiral of the Ocean Sea"

The text states that the Spanish monarchs "promised [Columbus] 10 percent of the gold and spices he found for them." So, the promise of this profit was one reason that Columbus was motivated to search for gold.

3. Historians' estimates of the size of the Native American population when Columbus arrived vary. Most estimate the total population of the Americas before Columbus to be around 50 million people. Some estimate that just 200 years later, the Native American population across the Americas dropped to 6 million. Explorers' greed and the new arrivals' misplaced religious conviction led to millions of Native American deaths. Even more deadly were the diseases that Europeans brought to the Americas. Smallpox and other diseases would eventually claim the lives of tens of millions of Native Americans. The word genocide, the planned extermination of an ethnic group, is rarely used, probably because the killings were not methodical. The effect of the killings, however, was as devastating as a genocide.

With which statement would the author of this passage most likely agree?



- A. The word "genocide" should be used to describe the deaths of millions of Native Americans at the hands of Europeans.
- The text states that the word "genocide" is "rarely used" to describe the deaths of millions of Native Americans after European contact, but that "the effect of the killings, however, was as devastating as a genocide." So, the author would likely agree with the statement that the word "genocide" should be used to describe the deaths of millions of Native Americans at the hands of Europeans.*
- B. Because they vary widely, historians' estimates of Native American populations should not be trusted.
- C. European contact vastly improved the lives of most Native Americans.
- D. Historians use the word "genocide" too much when writing about the past.