The Aztec Empire 15.1

- The Aztecs built a great empire in central Mexico but were conquered by the Spanish in 1521.

A. The Aztecs built an empire through warfare and trade and created an impressive capital city in Mesoamerica.

- The first Aztecs were farmers, but when they arrived in Central America, all the good farmland was taken. To survive, they had to hire themselves out as warriors.
B. The Aztecs’ Rise to Power

- War was the key factor in the Aztecs’ rise to power.
- The Aztecs built alliances, or partnerships, to build their empire.
- The Aztecs made the people they conquered pay tribute, or give them cotton, gold, or food.
- The Aztecs controlled a huge trade network. Markets drew buyers and sellers from all over the Aztec Empire.
- By the early 1500s the Aztecs had the most powerful state in Mesoamerica.
C. Tenochtitlán

- Tenochtitlán was the capital of the Aztec Empire. It was built in the middle of a lake, on an island.
- The Aztecs built causeways, or raised roads across water or wet ground, so people could access the city.
- The Aztecs built stone canals to bring water to the city and floating gardens to raise food and flowers.
- The city had huge temples, a busy market, clean streets, and magnificent palaces.
- It was the greatest city in the Americas during the time of the Aztecs.
D. Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec Empire.

- In the late 1400s Spanish explorers and soldiers arrived in the Americas. The soldiers, or **conquistadors**, came to explore new lands, search for gold, and spread the Catholic religion.
E. Cortés and Moctezuma

- A small group of conquistadors led by Cortés reached Mexico in 1519.
- Moctezuma II, the Aztec leader, believed that Cortés was a god.
- Moctezuma sent Cortés gifts, including gold. Cortés wanted more gold, so he went to Moctezuma.
- Cortés took Moctezuma prisoner. The other Aztecs attacked Cortés and his men. The Spanish were driven out, but Moctezuma was killed.
- Cortés returned with many Indian allies and in 1521 they defeated the Aztecs and ended their empire.
F. Causes of the Defeat of the Aztecs

- **Alliances** The Spanish had made allies in the region who gave them supplies, information, and warriors.

- **Weapons** The Spanish had better weapons than the Aztecs. They had cannons, armor, swords, and horses that the Aztecs did not have.

- **Geography** The Spanish were able to cut off the capital city. The people had no food or water, so many Aztecs died of starvation.

- **Disease** The Spanish had unknowingly brought deadly diseases such as smallpox to the Americas. These diseases killed the Aztecs, who had never been exposed to such diseases.