Aztec Life and Society 15.2

Essential Question:

- The Aztecs developed complex social, religious, artistic, and scientific systems in their empire.
I. Aztec society was divided by social roles and by class.

People in Aztec society had clearly defined roles. These roles, along with social class, determined how Aztec men and women lived. They had four distinct social classes.

- Kings and nobles
- Priests and warriors
- Merchants and artisans
- Farmers and slaves
A. Classes of Aztec Society: Kings and Nobles

- The king was the most powerful person in Aztec society.
- The king was in charge of law, trade and tribute, and warfare.
- The king had nobles to help him manage the kingdom.
- The nobles were tax collectors and judges as well as other jobs. They passed their titles down from father to son.
B. Classes of Aztec Society: Warriors and Priests

- The priests had a great deal of influence over the lives of the Aztecs.
- The priests had many duties, including keeping calendars to decide when to plant crops and hold religious ceremonies.
- Aztec warriors also had many duties. They fought to capture victims for religious sacrifices. They also brought great wealth to the empire.
- The warriors were very well respected by the Aztecs.
C. Classes of Aztec Society: Merchants and Artisans

- Merchants gathered goods from all over the empire and sold them in the main market.
- Many merchants were very wealthy and used their money to build large houses and send their sons to private schools.
- Artisans were also rich and important to the Aztecs. They made gold jewelry and elaborate headdresses.
D. Classes of Aztec Society: Farmers and Slaves

- Farmers and slaves made up the lowest class of Aztec society.
- Most of the people who lived in the empire were farmers who grew maize, beans, and a few other crops.
- Farmers were very poor and did not own their own land.
- Slaves were people who had been captured in battle or who could not pay their debts. They were laborers, and if they did not obey, they were sacrificed to the gods.
II. Aztec religion required human sacrifice for keeping the gods happy.

- The Aztecs believed that they had to feed the gods. Most sacrifices were enemy warriors.
A. Aztec Sacrifices

- The Aztecs believed that keeping the gods happy meant that their lives would be blessed.
- The greatest number of sacrifices were made to the war god Huitzilopochtli and the rain god Tlaloc.
- Priests led the sacrificial rituals, which took place on top of the temples that had been built.
- Humans were sacrificed because it was believed that the human hearts and blood would “feed” the gods and keep them strong.
- Aztec priests sacrificed as many as 10,000 victims a year in religious sacrifices.
The Aztecs had many achievements in science, art, and language.

- The Aztecs valued learning and art. Aztec scientific achievements, artistic traditions, and language contributed to their culture.
A. Scientific Achievements

• The Aztecs studied astronomy and created a calendar much like the Mayan calendar.

• The Aztecs also knew many different uses for plants. They knew of 100 different plants that could be used for medicine.
B. Writing and Literature

• The Aztecs had a complex writing system and kept extensive written records.

• The Aztecs also had a very strong oral tradition.

• They considered fine speeches very important and also enjoyed riddles.

• Stories about ancestors and gods were also a part of the oral tradition. The Aztecs told these stories to their children and passed them down from generation to generation.

• After the Spanish conquered the Aztecs, many of these stories were written down.