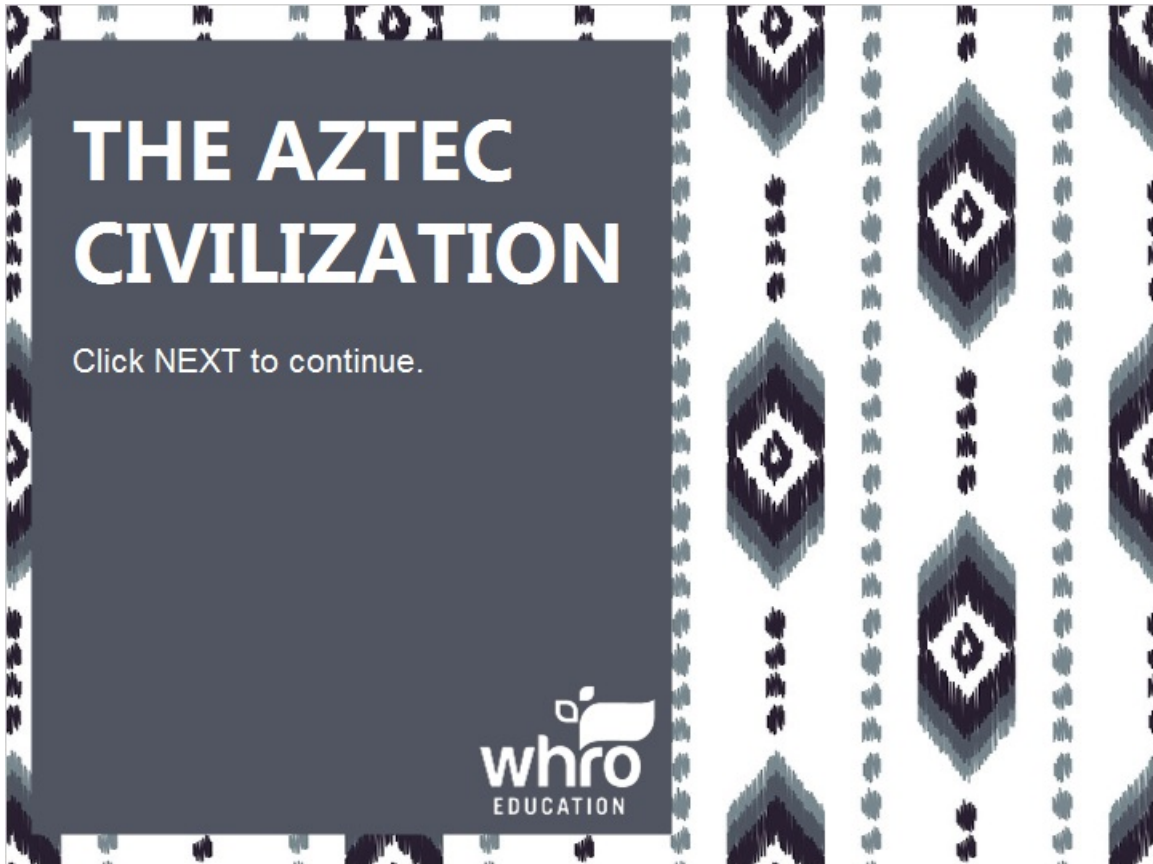


## Module 9: Empires of Africa and the Americas

### Topic 2 Content: The Aztec Civilization

#### Introduction



Click NEXT to continue.

## Module 9: Empires of Africa and the Americas

### Topic 2 Content: The Aztec Civilization

#### Location

**LOCATION**

*Legend of Huitzilopochtli*

Mexica people

Valley of Mexico

Eagle, prickly pear, and snake

Lake Texcoco

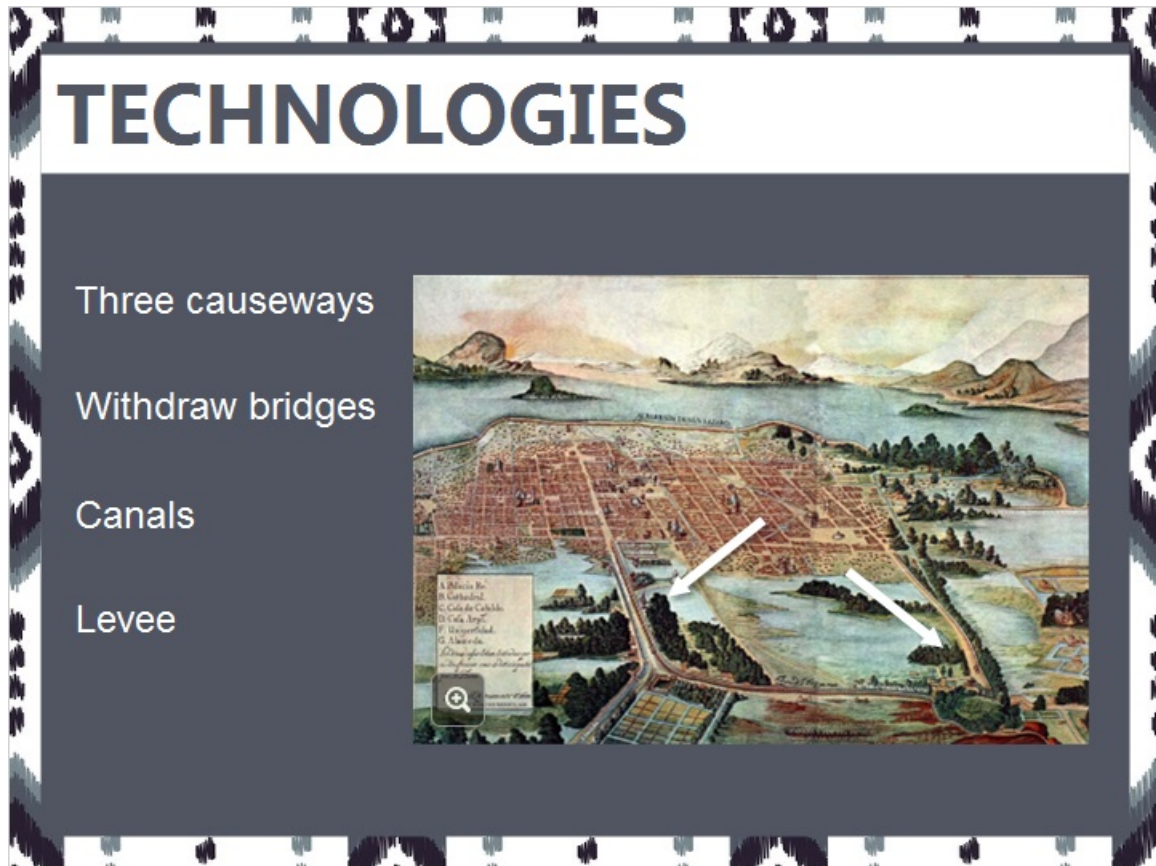
Capital city of Tenochtitlán

Although the origins of the Aztec civilization are not certain, their legends recount that the wandering Mexica people arrived in the arid Valley of Mexico looking for a sign from their god Huitzilopochtli. He told them their journey would end upon finding an eagle perched on a prickly pear cactus, eating a snake. This sign appeared on a small island in Lake Texcoco, and so it was there that the Aztec founded their capital city Tenochtitlán, or "place of the prickly pear cactus." The eagle atop of a cactus is represented today in the Mexican flag, and Mexico's current capital city is in the same location.

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#### Technologies



The city was connected to the mainland by three causeways, or roads, with bridges to allow canoes to pass through. These bridges could be withdrawn to prevent invaders from entering. A series of canals throughout the city allowed people to get from one place to another via foot or canoe. The city's Lake Texcoco had very brackish water, so the Aztecs remedied the problem by constructing a levee that kept fresh water around Tenochtitlán, and held the brackish water beyond the dike.

## Module 9: Empires of Africa and the Americas

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#### Society

**SOCIETY**

- Emperor
- Absolute power
- Descended from gods
- Smaller territories
- Tribute
- Prisoners and slaves

**1 2 3**

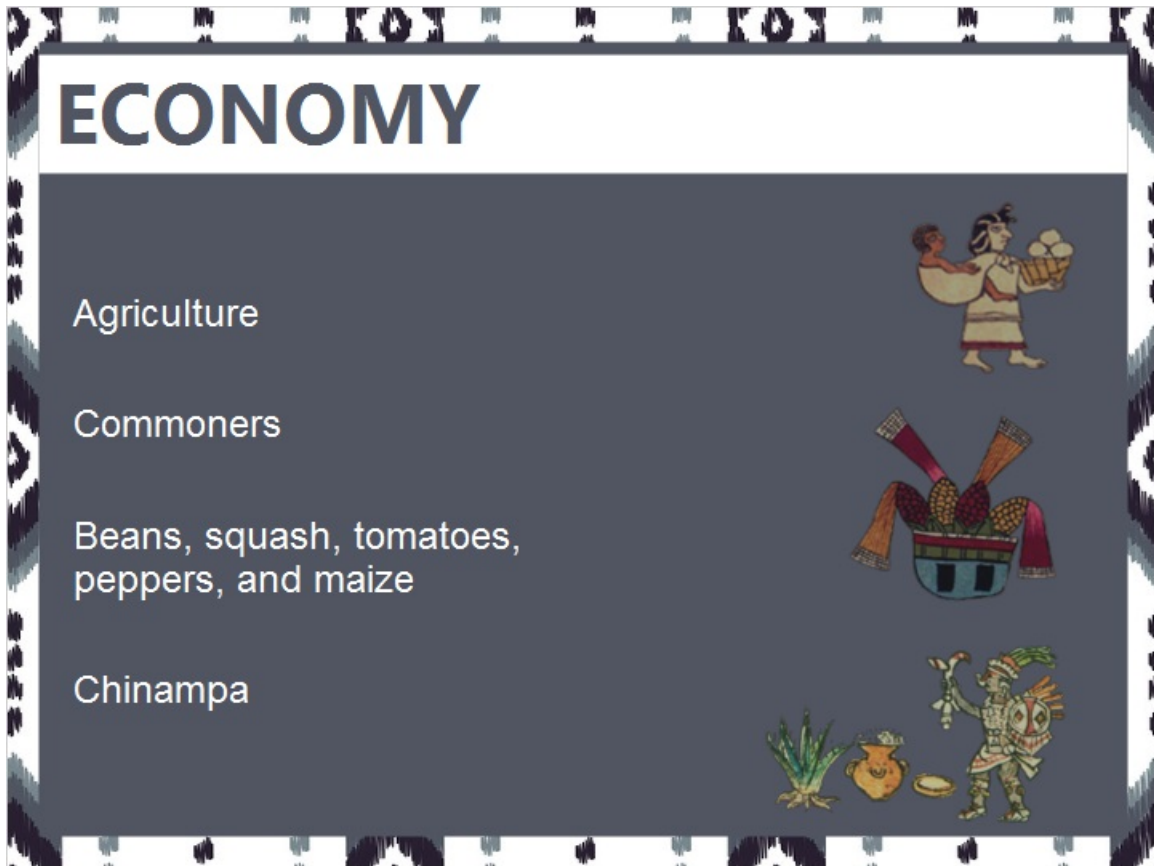
*Triple Alliance*

The people living in the Valley of Mexico belonged to one of three kingdoms, which together are referred to as the Triple Alliance. With time, the Aztec kingdom came to be the dominant power. The empire was ruled by an emperor with absolute power who claimed he was descended from the gods. The emperor reigned over a kingdom broken up into smaller territories whose rulers paid tribute to him in exchange for his support of their indirect rule. As the empire expanded and more people were conquered, the tribute system unified the empire. The conquest carried out by the empire's many fierce warriors provided prisoners and slaves, who were often used in religious sacrifices. Other slaves were able to buy their freedom.

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#### Economy



The economy of the Aztec civilization was largely based on agriculture. Most people were commoners who farmed crops such as beans, squash, tomatoes, peppers, and maize. The Aztec also developed a farming technique known as a chinampa. This practice involved draining swamps and building up fields in shallow lake beds. These artificial islands had extremely high crop yields and provided at least half of the food consumed by the people of Tenochtitlán. Remnants of chinampas have survived and are still used today.

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#### Religion



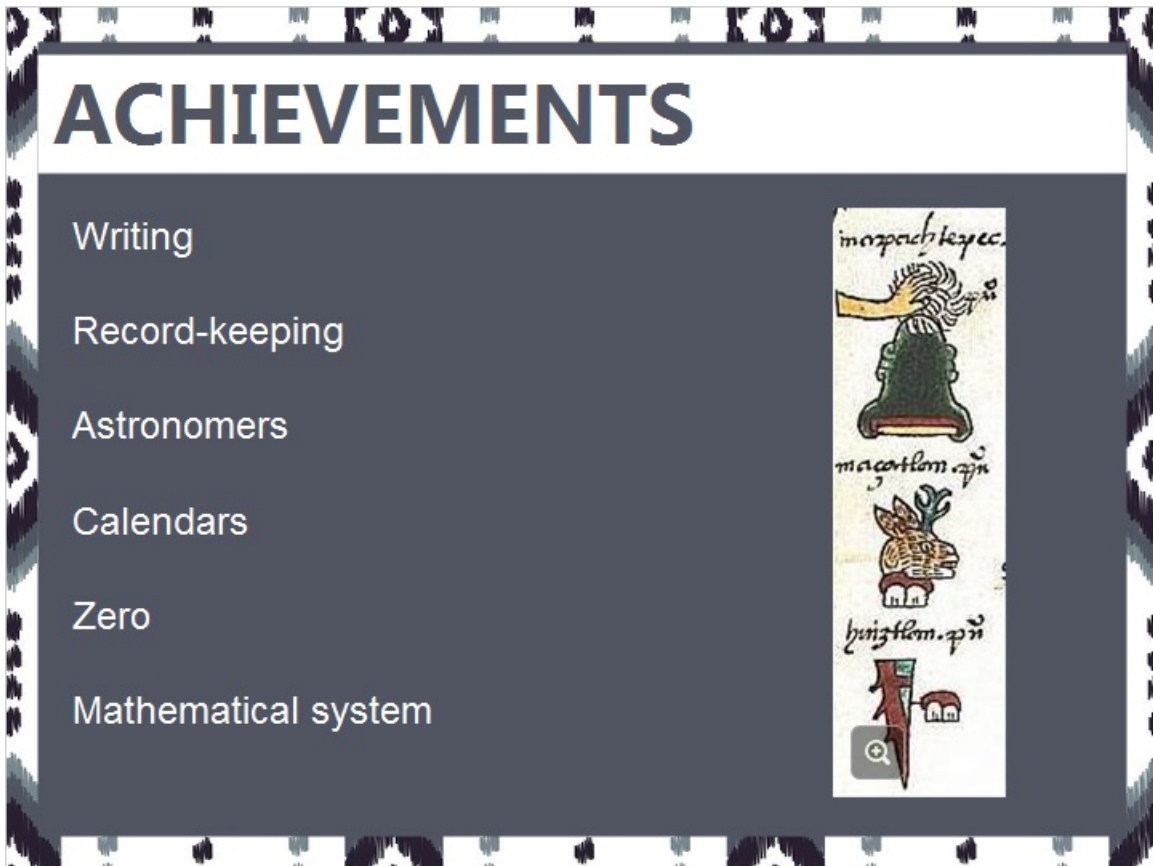
The Aztec people practiced a polytheistic religion. Their chief god, Huitzilopochtli, was the god of the sun and of war. Another important god was Quetzalcoatl, who according to legend left the Valley of Mexico hundreds of years prior and would one day return. While the Spanish conquistadors were shocked to encounter people in Mesoamerica, the Aztecs simply assumed the leader of the European visitors was Quetzalcoatl returning.

The Aztec religion was militaristic and based on the belief that the universe was consumed in a struggle between good and evil. The struggle would always end in the destruction of the world, after which a new world would be created. In order to prolong the destruction of their world, the Aztec sought to appease their gods by offering human sacrifices. Religion was a cultural core in Aztec life, and ritualistic ceremonies were performed daily. Priests and priestesses belonged to a special social class made up of important intellectuals. They recorded knowledge, administered schools, and served as astronomers and mathematicians.

## Module 9: Empires of Africa and the Americas

### Topic 2 Content: The Aztec Civilization

#### Achievements



**ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Writing
- Record-keeping
- Astronomers
- Calendars
- Zero
- Mathematical system

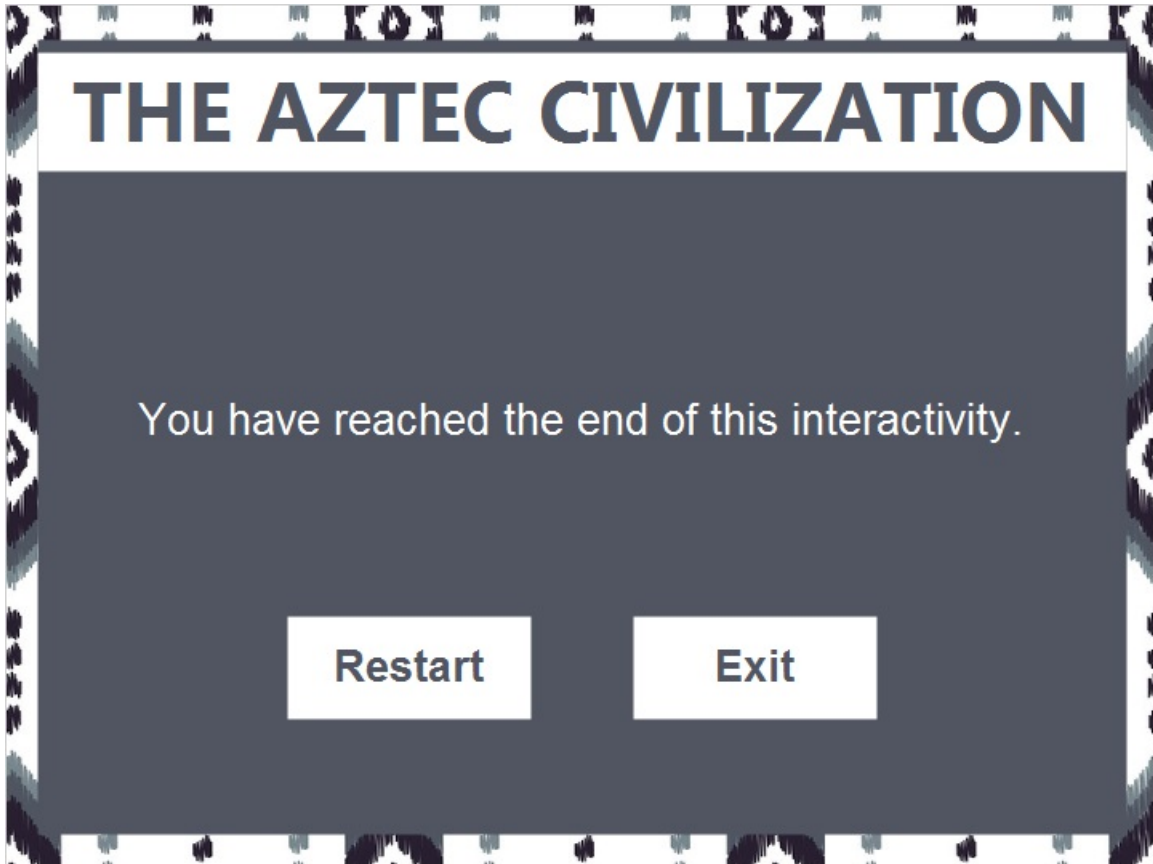
The infographic features a vertical strip of Aztec pictographs on the right side. The top pictograph shows a hand holding a green object, with the Nahuatl text "in apach tepec." above it. The middle pictograph shows a deer-like animal, with the Nahuatl text "macotlom apn" above it. The bottom pictograph shows a red object, with the Nahuatl text "huztlem apn" above it. A small circular icon with a plus sign is located at the bottom left of the pictograph strip.

The Aztec civilization also developed systems of writing and record-keeping. They were adept astronomers who designed calendars that were more accurate than those of their European counterparts. Also, they incorporated the concept of zero into their advanced mathematical system.

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#### Conclusion



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