**Alec T. Smith**

**Student Grade Level: Seventh Grade**

**Lesson Content Area: World History**

**Topic: Hernan Cortes and the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire**

**Duration of Lesson: 4 Days**

**Rationale**:

If you saw a society that you viewed as barbaric, do you have the right to conquer them? If someone possesses power, shouldn’t they be able to take what they want? How should Cortes and his men be remembered? Should they be remembered as saviors or as villains? Is Cortes, the Church, or the country of Spain responsible for conquering the Aztecs? At the same time, imagine the fear and terror that your community would experience if strangers arrived to your homes and claimed your property for their land. Does the same group of strangers have the right to force their customs because they think their culture is superior to your way of life? What if your whole town was subjected to a disease that they had no cure for, and half of the town's population died out? These are the methods of warfare that Hernan Cortes and the Spanish Conquistadors used in their conquest of the Aztec Empire.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

* Identify the location of the areas of the Aztec Empire in Present-day Mexico
* Explain how the Spanish Conquistadors defeated the Aztecs
* Measure how modern weaponry and strategic leadership helped in the Spaniards in seizing territory over the Aztecs
* Analyze how diseases helped greatly in the fall of the Aztec Empire

**Condition:**

For this class session, we are going to focus on how Cortes and his rather small fleet of Spanish soldiers were able to conquer a vast and powerful empire of the Aztec civilization. We will focus on how Cortes was able to manipulate the hatred that opposing city-states had for the Aztec society to his benefit. In addition, some focus will be placed on how modern weaponry and strategic leadership helped in the Spaniards seizing the territory over the Aztecs. We’ll ask the question such as, “how do technological advances impact the vulnerability of a civilization?”

Finally, we will place a lot of focus on how disease and plagues helped greatly in the fall of the Aztec empire. We will also link how disease became a precursor to the Spaniard’s overall war strategy.

**WV CSO Standards: World History**

SS.7.H.CL1.2-   
identify the contributions and influences of ancient civilizations and categorize the factors that led to their fall (e.g., philosophy, architecture, civics, literature, the arts, science and mathematics).

-Ancient civilizations of North and South America.

SS.7.H.CL4.1

Summarize the establishment of colonies in the Americas

**WV CSO Standards: Geography**

**SS.7.G.3-**

Analyze the impact of cultural diffusion on a variety of regions

**SS.7.G.4-**

Examine and summarize the effects the effects of human/environmental interaction

**Lesson Materials:**

* Paper
* Pencil
* Computer with Internet access
* Overhead Projector

**Assistive Technology for Students with Disabilities:**

* Personal FM listening devices for students with hearing impairments
* Closed Captioning when the YouTube clips are being viewed
* Magnifying glass for students to view assignment guides who suffer from visual impairments
* iPads for children with vision impairments
* Pencil grips for any student who may have motor impairments

**Instructor-led method:**

1. In the beginning of class, the teacher will access the Prezi website.

<http://prezi.com/lkjvqpi0xdxx/the-spanish-conquest-of-the-aztec-empire/>

The teacher will ask the students what is a Conquistador? Give the students a moment to respond. If not, the teacher will say, “how about conqueror?” This should give students a good idea of what a Conquistador is (slide 1 in Prezi). Have the teacher go to the first and second slides in order to show what a Conquistador looks like. The teacher will go to the Prezi presentation slide (slide 2), and ask students to describe what they see? Then the teacher will talk about Hernan Cortes, who was a Spanish Conquistador who led a force of 600 Spanish soldiers on an expedition to claim new wealth the empire of Spain. The teacher will go through Prezi slides 4 and 5. He/she will then stop at slide 6 for a minute to ask the students questions on the slide in regards to the Spanish Conquest. **This introduction should take five minutes.**

2. Next, the teacher will ask the students why Cortes and his crew traveled to the new world (present-day Mexico). This will be in slide 7. Give them a minute to think about it. If there is no response, ask the students why did Christopher Columbus sail to America? This is the same reason Hernan Cortes sailed to present-day Mexico; for their quest to find a faster route to China, and to find riches such as gold for Spain. However, the major turnout was to spread the rule, influence, and religion (Christianity) on behalf of the Spanish empire. The teacher will proceed to the next couple of slides of Hernan Cortes. The teacher will show the slide which will ask some questions for the students to think about the Conquest throughout the lesson (slide eight).

Then the teacher will proceed to go to the slide of Mexico, which shows the layout of the Aztec Empire. The teacher should mention, “instead of finding a new trading route, they found a completely different civilization.

These questions will serve as anticipatory sets.

3. When Cortes and the Spaniards had an altercation with the Tlaxcala tribe (before journeying to Aztec territory), Cortes and his army spared the Tlaxcala tribe from death. The teacher should ask the students, “Why did Cortes spare them?” Cortes was able to communicate to the Tlaxcala tribe through slaves who knew the native language. Cortes found out that the Tlaxcala tribe viewed the Aztecs as enemies. The Aztecs practiced human sacrifice in order to please their gods. This was a huge reason why the Aztecs had so many native enemies, because they would capture their enemies and use them for their sacrificial rituals.

The teacher will go through the sacrifice slides (slides 12 and 13 on the Prezi path), and ask the students why the soldier raising the heart of the sacrificial victim? Hopefully, the students will answer, “to please their gods”. **Spend five minutes on recapping the slide.** The next step that the teacher will do is hand out a paper for the students to read about the history of the sacrificial rituals of the Aztecs. **The teacher should give the students about ten minutes to read the article and this will be followed up with some questions about the article.**

<http://www.legendsandchronicles.com/ancient-civilizations/the-ancient-aztecs/aztec-human-sacrifices/>

The teacher is going to show the next slide (slide 14 on Prezi), which will provide questions for the students. Students are going to answer three questions after they read the article. It will be labeled activity II on the slide. **Give the students five minutes to answer the questions** (these questions will also serve as anticipatory sets).

4. The next topic that the teacher will review the Spaniard’s modern weaponry compared to the Aztecs. The important superior points and practices that the Spaniards had going for them was their method of conventional warfare. The teacher will show the next two slides of this step (slides 15 and 16). Once he/she gets to the slide of the combating soldiers, he/she will ask the students, “From viewing this picture, does one of the soldiers look like he holds an advantage over the other soldier?” Give them a moment to think about it. Discuss about the Spanish soldier leather armor and steel sword. Ask the students if the weapon and armor would prove to have an advantage over the Aztec’s club and headdress. The Spaniards also used ambush tactics, mass killings of their opposition, and long-ranged combat. The Native Indians practiced forced rituals before and during warfare. “Mexica methods of war emphasized the observation of pre battle ceremonies that eliminated the possibility of surprise attacks and the capture of Spaniards for ritual execution rather than killing them on the spot” (2003, p.144). Discuss this topic and open the floor to the students for about five minutes. The teacher will present the YouTube clips of “Cortes-Conqueror of Mexico.” **The teacher will spend 15 minutes on this part of the discussion and the Cortes YouTube clip (slide 17 on Prezi).**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN8FXcuNmco>

Have the teacher pause the clip after the narrator describes Cortes’ Tips for Conquerors:

* Make alliances where and when you can
* Determine and exploit your enemies weaknesses
* A secret weapon gives you an advantage

The anticipatory sets which were used earlier in class should give the students a good idea in thinking about the tips from the video. **Spend five minutes in discussing these bullet points with the students. Finish up the clip, there should be no more than two minutes left.**

5. Next, the teacher will discuss about some circumstances that worked in favor of the Spaniards. One of the biggest factors in the Spaniards’ conquest of the Aztecs was the introduction of diseases and plagues into the Aztec culture. Smallpox was the big killer of the Aztec people. The Spaniards unknowingly brought this disease with them. The Aztecs never had to deal with this disease until the Spaniards invaded them. When this disease was introduced to the Aztec people, it killed millions of the Aztecs over time, while killing thousands during the battle of Tenochtitlan. Diseases and plagues helped greatly in the fall of Tenochtitlan the main city of the Aztec Empire. When the Aztec soldiers were sickened with smallpox, they did not have the physical energy to fight or protect themselves. Go through the Prezi slides 18 through 21, and discuss what the smallpox virus looks like inside the human body and on the skin of an affected person with the students. Try to answer some questions that students may have in regards to the slides. **Use about 15 minutes to introduce smallpox and to view the conclusion of the Hernan the Conqueror YouTube clip (slide 22).**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZinjqqUsBvs>

**Conclusion:**

**The teacher should have about 15 minutes left in the class period.** Go through the remaining slides (23 through 26). Slide 24 will provide a recap of Hernan Cortes and his army’s victory over the Aztec empire. Go through the points of the slide, then slide 25. This picture depicts the aftermath of the fall of the Aztec empire. Ask them questions about what they see in the picture. Students may notice that the natives are all chained up and are forced into slavery. In bring closure to the lesson ask the students if Cortes and the Conquistadors should be viewed as heroes or villains? With the remaining few minutes left in class, pass out the writing assignment to students for homework.

**Assessment:**

Students will be given a writing assignment for homework. The homework will be due tomorrow at the end of class.

**Writing Assignment:**

1. I want you to share your thoughts on how the Aztecs could have made some changes; not only in warfare, but in how they encountered Hernan Cortes, and his Spanish forces. Could there have been any precautions of defense that the Aztec empire could have done to defend themselves from the onslaught of Cortes and the conquistadores?

2. How do you view the Spanish forces? Do you view them as crusaders in promoting the message of God, or do you view Cortes and his forces as greedy, evil men who were claiming more land for the Spanish empire?

**Evaluation Rubric – Writing Assignment**

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| |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Points** | **Criteria** | **Score** |  |  | | 4 | Collects a great deal of information--all relates to the topic  Completed all activity assignments on time  Always does the assigned work without having to be reminded |  |  |  | | 3 | Collects some basic information--most relates to the topic  Hands in most activity assignments on time  Usually does the assigned work--rarely needs reminding |  |  |  | | 2 | Collects very little information--some relates to the topic  Hands in most activity assignments late  Rarely does the assigned work--often needs reminding |  |  |  | | 1 | Does not collect any information that relates to the topic  Does not complete activity assignments  Hands in very limited work |  |  |  | | 0 | Does not collect any information that relates to the topic  Does not complete activity assignments  Does not hand in the assignment at all |  |  |  | |

**Bibliography:**

Restall, Matthew. Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest. New York, New York: Oxford

University Press, 2003

Legends & Chronicles. Aztec Human Sacrifices, 2007

<http://www.legendsandchronicles.com/ancient-civilizations/the-ancient-aztecs/aztec-human-sacrifices/>

**YouTube Clips**

Conquerors: Hernan Cortes. The History Channel, part 4/5. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN8FXcuNmco>.

Conquerors: Hernan Cortes. The History Channel, part 5/5

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZinjqqUsBvs>.

**Pictures used:**

<http://images.nationalgeographic.com/wpf/media-live/photos/000/012/cache/smallpox-virus_1216_600x450.jpg>

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/66/Child_with_Smallpox_Bangladesh.jpg/230px-Child_with_Smallpox_Bangladesh.jpg>

<http://www.2-clicks-swords.com/images/category_image/36.jpg>

<http://tracy-chao.wikispaces.com/file/view/rivera1.jpg/192950348/rivera1.jpg>

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<http://www.plu.edu/~arnoldwp/img/sacrificial-stone.gif>

<http://www.reformation.org/aztec-empire-map.jpg\>

<http://t3.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcS7B1qIMhUz0gRgqC2RmTwi434raA_>

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