THE BRITISH MUSEUM

MOCTEZUMA
AZTEC RULER

24 SEPTEMBER 2009 – 24 JANUARY 2010

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS
KEY STAGES 2 AND 3

Supported by
ArcelorMittal
## CONTENTS

- Essential information about your visit 3
- Background information 4
- Highlights checklist 12
- Secondary schools: your visit 13
- Primary schools: your visit 14
- Activity sheets for primary schools 15
- Adult briefing sheets for primary schools 27
- PowerPoint presentation notes 31
- Further information 36
**ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR VISIT**

Please read this information carefully

- Make sure you have enough adult helpers (at least 1:6 for primary, 1:8 for secondary).

- Organise small groups with one adult per primary group and activity sheets before you arrive at the Museum.

- On arrival at the Museum, make your way to the Ford Centre for Young Visitors, downstairs in the Great Court. Allow 20 minutes for check-in, depositing bags, toilets etc.

- If you have time to fill after finishing your visit to the exhibition, consider visiting some of the other galleries, especially Room 27 (Mexico) rather than waiting in the Great Court or Ford Centre.

You may be sharing the exhibition with other school students and regular visitors. The resources have been designed to minimise crowding, so please use them as suggested. If an area gets overcrowded, please advise students to act sensibly and wait their turn or move on to the next activity and come back later. Please look through all the resources so you are familiar with what the students will be doing.

**Aztecs or Mexica?**

The Aztecs are known by this name because a Spanish chronicle from the 1520s named their homeland as Aztlan. However, they never referred to themselves as Aztecs – instead they called themselves Mexica (pronounced Mé-shée-ka). Academics are now seeking to return the term Mexica to common use and this is the name the exhibition and this resource pack will use to refer to the people popularly known as Aztec.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After some general information, this section covers the six topics that link to the activity sheets for students:

- Moctezuma the ruler
- Religion and the gods
- Writing and the calendar
- Warriors and warfare
- Houses, palaces and temples
- Trade and tribute: materials

The Mexica

The Mexica were migrant people who arrived in the basin of Mexico in the 1200s. They were not accepted by the native people of the area but were seen as intruders who could pose a threat. After attempts to integrate with local towns failed, the Mexica moved to Lake Tetzcoco. According to legend, the Mexica saw a sign sent to them by Huitzilopochtli, the patron deity and god of war and sacrifice, which designated an island in the lake as the place where they should found their city. This sign was an eagle perched on a cactus and is still used on the national flag and money in Mexico today.

The foundation of an empire

The city that the Mexica founded was called Tenochtitlan, located in the western area of Lake Tetzcoco. Developing the city was difficult because of a lack of building materials and agricultural land, and the presence of hostile neighbours. However, it did offer food in the form of birds and fish and strategically it was well located for defence and travel for trade by canoe. To combat the lack of agricultural land, the Mexica built chinampas, floating gardens, by driving piles into the marshes and forming small areas of land suitable for farming.

The city gradually developed and by 1430 the Mexica had assimilated aspects of the surrounding people and developed into a structured society. The city had a series of causeways between the islands for transport, aqueducts to carry fresh water (because Lake Tetzcoco was a saltwater lake) and sewers to dispose of waste. To overcome hostile threats to the city, the Mexica created an alliance in 1428 between their city and the cities of Tetzcoco and Tlacopan, referred to as the Triple Alliance. This further strengthened the Mexica’s power and laid the foundations for their territorial and economic expansion. By the start of the 1500s, the empire stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific and into what are now Guatemala and Nicaragua.
Fall of an empire

The Spanish, led by the adventurer Hernan Cortés, arrived in 1519 and landed near Veracruz. Moctezuma was aware of their arrival and sent gifts to Cortés. It is possible that these gifts were a sign of preliminary friendship, an attempt to awe the Spanish with the wealth and craftsmanship available to the Mexica ruler. Alternatively, Moctezuma might have thought Cortés was the feathered serpent god, Quetzalcoatl, returned. Cortés moved towards Tenochtitlan forging alliances or defeating opposition as it occurred. When he arrived in Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma allowed him entry into the city and housed him in one of the palaces. He was taking a diplomatic route advised by his council and following Mexica hospitality traditions. In turn, this also allowed him to study Cortés and his Spanish troops as well as effectively keep them confined within the inner area of the city.

After two weeks Cortés decided to act and took Moctezuma hostage, a physical act which was abhorrent to a ruler who did not allow commoners to even look at him. In the following months, Moctezuma continued to rule his empire but may have been following a line of appeasement to the Spanish. The critical moment came when Cortés left the city to confront another contingent from Spain, led by Narvaez.

During his absence tensions in Tenochtitlan boiled over and the resentment against the Spanish came to a head. Mexica warriors attacked the Spanish troops and chaos ensued. Moctezuma was brought to the palace balcony and addressed his people pleading for calm. His plea was heard for a short time but calm did not last. When a second rush of attacks occurred, Moctezuma once again came to the balcony to appeal to his people. This plea was not successful. What happened next is unclear and subject to controversy. Was Moctezuma stoned to death by his people, as Spanish accounts contest, or secretly strangled by the Spanish, as later local accounts attest?

Moctezuma the ruler

Moctezuma II was born in the Mexica year 1 Reed (1467). His full name was Moctezuma Xocoyotzin (Angry Lord). He was proposed as ruler by his uncle, Ahuitzotl, who was his predecessor in the role. In 1502 he was elected and adopted the title of ‘huey tlatoani’ (‘he who speaks’ or ‘he who gives orders’). He ruled the Mexica empire until its fall in 1520. He inherited an empire that had recently been expanded through warfare which needed to be carefully maintained and brought under more permanent control.

Moctezuma developed an administration system that operated throughout his empire. He had a council of nobles and elders to advise him and commands were carried out by a structured system of governance.
Rulers had become increasingly more remote and this continued in Moctezuma’s reign. When he went around the city, which was rare, he was carried on a special litter which was highly decorated and accompanied by an elaborate procession of people. Moctezuma displayed his wealth and power on these occasions and in the palace by wearing coloured, patterned garments and an array of expensive jewellery made from gold or precious stones. People were not allowed to look directly at the ruler and when they visited him they had to be barefoot and wear old clothes. Commoners were not allowed in the same room as him. Moctezuma further increased the divide between nobles and commoners with a series of new laws, one of which restricted the clothing even a decorated warrior could wear.

Moctezuma ordered the construction of a new palace. The palace was built on a raised platform so it was higher than other buildings in the city. The remarkable palace complex also included elaborate gardens, courtyards, orchards and a royal zoo filled with exotic animals. Quetzal birds and parrots were kept in the grounds so that there would always be a regular supply of feathers for the ruler. The complex also housed buildings for administration, the central law courts and storerooms for tribute. The buildings themselves were brightly coloured and highly decorated with statues and carvings. All this further elevated Moctezuma’s position and demonstrated his power.

Moctezuma was regarded as being semi-divine. As such, he was expected to participate in ongoing rituals to ensure the world functioned correctly and the relationship with the gods was maintained. An important ritual during his reign was the New Fire Ceremony which occurred every 52 years. As part of this, Moctezuma expanded the Great Temple and sent warriors out to secure sufficient sacrificial victims.

Religion and the gods

Religion was thought by the Mexica to be vital to maintaining their world. They believed that the world had ended four times previously and that the fifth era in which they lived was possible through the intervention of the gods. The gods were what made life possible. As the gods provided life, the Mexica sacrificed life for the gods in return.

Sacrificial offerings included personal bloodletting and human sacrifices at important ceremonies. Traditionally, each year a young man was chosen to adopt the persona of Tezcatlipoca (Lord of the Night or Smoking Mirror). For the next year he was treated well and granted special privileges. He accepted his death because it would lead to automatic entry to Ichan Tonatiuh, the home of the sun in the sky. In the days before his sacrifice, other captives were also sacrificed. The majority were prisoners from wars and this in turn was a reason the Mexica sent their warriors out to battle. The ritual concluded on the fifth day with the young man’s sacrifice as a finale to the celebration.
The Mexica believed in many gods who controlled, maintained or affected every aspect of the world. For example, Tlaloc, the rain god, had helpers who carried pots of water into the sky and smashed them to produce rain. Thunder was the sound of these pots being smashed.

Because of the great importance placed on the gods, every town or city had at least a small temple or shrine. Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Mexica, had a central ceremonial precinct as well as smaller temples in the suburbs. The ceremonial precinct was enclosed by a stone wall carved with serpents and housed the major shrines, the calmécac (priests’ school) and a ritual ball court. Boys, primarily from noble families, were able to go to the priests’ school to be educated. Priests lived a hard life; they worked at the temple, fasted often and could not marry. However, they were relied upon to maintain the relationship with the gods, perform rituals and foretell the future and, as such, ranked highly in the Mexica social structure.

Successive rulers expanded the Great Temple, or Templo Mayor, in the central precinct. The temple was a four-sided pyramid with two steep staircases leading straight to the top level. On this level were two shrines, one for Tlaloc and one for Huitzilopochtli. Tlaloc’s temple was painted blue and white to represent his bringing rain to the land. Huitzilopochtli’s was bright red and white reflecting war and sacrifice.

Writing and the calendar

The Mexica used glyphs for written communication. These pictorial symbols represented names, dates and other elements and were developed from earlier Central Mexican writing systems. They wrote on codices made of deerskin or paper which folded out to a long strip. None of the codices survive because they were destroyed after the Spanish Conquest, but Mexica scribes did complete codices after this which used the same system.

The glyphs did not represent alphabetic letters, but components of words, ideas and names. For example, death can be shown by a corpse wrapped ready for burial, speech by a scroll bubble from a person’s mouth, and travel by a line of black footprints.

The glyphs were not set on the page in a linear way but were carefully arranged to illustrate the scene they were describing. In this way, the page was not viewed as text is today, but more as a painting that told the story of its meaning through glyphs, scene arrangement and labels to provide other clues. For example, the sky was at the top of the page and the ground at the bottom. Colour was also important in marking out a particular glyph’s meaning in that context. For example, in the Codex Mendoza, the similar signs for grass, canes and rushes are immediately distinguished by colour; grass is yellow, canes are blue and rushes are green.
The numbering system worked using 20 as a base. 1 to 19 were normally dots, 20s were flags, 400s (20x20) a glyph similar to a feather or a fir tree, and 8,000 (20x20x20) a bag (probably viewed to contain cocoa beans).

The writing system is also linked to the calendar through the glyph day or year signs of their calendars. The Mexica had two calendars, the tonalpohualli, a 260-day sacred calendar, and the xiuhpohualli, a 365-day calendar.

The sacred calendar is the one most often quoted on codices and other written communication, including sculptures. This calendar is most easily imagined as two rotating, interlocked wheels. The larger wheel had 20 symbols, each a day name. The smaller wheel had the numbers 1 to 13. The sacred year was divided into 20 ‘weeks’ and each week had 13 days. A year would begin on 1 Alligator and each day the interlocking wheels would rotate one notch. Thus, day two would be 2 Wind, then 3 House and so on. A week ended when the numbers went past 13 back to 1. The new week then began with a different day sign; this ensured each week was a unique combination.

The xiuhpohualli was a 365-day calendar based on solar movement. Within this calendar the year was broken into 18 ‘months’ of 20 days each, plus 5 days at the end of the year which were considered unlucky. Dates from this calendar were not often recorded in codices or on monuments.

The two calendars only began a new year at the same time every 52 years. This marked the end of a 52-calendar-year round. The event was celebrated by the New Fire Ceremony which involved sacrifices and a special new fire being lit. Men from across the empire lit their torches from this fire and took them to their towns and villages. In preparation, all fires in the empire had been extinguished and so the new flame would herald the new year and a new beginning for each town, village and household. This ceremony occurred during Moctezuma’s reign in the year 2 Reed.
Warriors and warfare

As the Mexica ruler, Moctezuma was the head of the Mexica warriors. At the beginning of his rule he needed to ensure that control was maintained over all the rival towns conquered by his predecessor. This demanded a strong leader and a powerful commander, both of which Moctezuma proved to be.

Warfare was vital for the Mexica empire as it was a way to expand the empire to gain control of more territories, access to valuable materials and commodities, and an increased source of tribute, as well as being the primary way to obtain victims for sacrifice. Indeed, if there were not enough sacrifices for a scheduled ritual then a ‘war of flowers’ would be undertaken with the sole purpose of gaining captives.

All Mexica boys learnt about weapons and warfare as they grew up and had to undergo military training at the age of 17. In order to progress to adulthood, a boy had to capture his first prisoner. Up until this time they were only allowed to wear a cape made of rough material. Once the first capture was made, the boy was seen as an adult and permitted to wear finer clothing and grow his hair over the right ear. After four prisoners, the warrior became a tequiuia and wore an ornate cape with brighter colours and patterns (demonstrating how the Mexica reflected status in clothing). The effort of capturing four prisoners also entitled them to a share of the tribute gained. Warriors who were most successful at capturing prisoners could advance in society and even possibly join the nobility.

The traditional weapons of Mexica warriors were spears (the preferred choice), bows and arrows, and wooden clubs studded with sharp obsidian flakes. The warriors held hide shields, which could be decorated in feathers and wore quilted cotton garments that had been soaked in saltwater to stiffen them for protection.

Professional warriors who rose through the ranks strove to become eagle or jaguar warriors. These were the elite of the Mexica forces, reputedly feared above all. Jaguars represented Tezcatlipoca, god of the night and the symbol of the moon, and eagle warriors the sun. Jaguar warriors wore jaguar skins with their heads coming through the animal’s mouth. As well as regular fighters, the jaguars were also used as spies, especially when looking for opponents’ weaknesses that the Mexica could exploit in battle. Eagle warriors wore beaked feathered helmets and suits of feathers. In a similar way to the jaguars, they were regular fighters plus specialist scouts who had the ability to run long distances.
Houses, palaces and temples

Tenochtitlan was a remarkable city built on a lake. The ingenious Mexica began on a small island and expanded to create a city which could accommodate 300,000 inhabitants. This metropolis contained an array of temples, palaces, shrines, marketplaces and houses, all interlinked by a system of causeways, roads and canals. The city was divided into four areas called campas, each sub-divided into twenty districts called calpullis. Each of these smaller areas had its own temple and marketplace.

Houses were made from baked mud bricks and painted bright white. Houses for the commoners were generally one-room buildings separated into areas for sleeping, cooking and eating. The roofs were flat and could be utilised as another room when the weather dictated. Houses of nobles could be slightly more elaborate two-storey buildings, sometimes incorporating a courtyard.

In the centre of the city was the administrative hub of government and the ceremonial precinct. Moctezuma ordered construction of a new palace during his reign, sculptural pieces of which are displayed in the exhibition. This palace acted as his home and the seat of government. Palaces were built on raised platforms and were complex buildings housed in palace precincts. They were two-storey stone buildings with multiple rooms used for living, entertaining, governance and display or storage of tribute. They were decorated with sculptures, symbols of power, and painted reliefs. The surrounding precinct contained other buildings (such as administrative, housing, storage, and law courts), courtyards, gardens, orchards and even, in some cases, a zoo. Buildings in the palace complex were painted blues, reds, greens and white. Palace precincts were located adjacent to the walls of the ceremonial precinct as a visual reminder of the ruler’s semi-divine status and power.

The ceremonial precinct was enclosed with a stone wall carved with serpents and housed the major temples, shrines and ritual ball court. The Great Temple was a four-sided pyramid with four tiers. A steep double staircase provided access to the top tier where the twin shrines of Tlaloc, the rain god, and Huitzilopochtli, the sun and war god, were located. The temple and its twin shrines loomed across the city and it was a visible and instantly recognisable shape on the skyline.
Trade and tribute: materials

The Mexica were able to gather some food and materials from the Basin of Mexico. However, other materials were obtained from further outlying areas and this pushed the Mexica to expand their trade routes and territory. Tribute and trade combined provided the Mexica with enough food for all in Tenochtitlan, as well as luxury goods.

Most of the goods the Mexica exported were items crafted from imported materials. However, some goods were entirely local, such as obsidian items, pottery and rabbit skins. Imported crafted goods such as cotton garments, colourful pottery and jewellery came from craft centres, a famous example of which is Cholula (in the modern state of Puebla, Mexico). Exotic luxuries such as jaguar skins, quetzal feathers and jade came from southern areas. However, because of the network of markets and merchants, goods could originate from much further away, including what is now New Mexico and Central America.

Long distance traders, pochteca, brought in these luxury items and sold them to nobles or in the local markets. The Mexica did not use money but instead traded items; cocoa beans could be used as small change if required. Local markets were thriving and busy places and most towns had at least one marketplace. In some areas, especially the south, the pochteca do not seem to have been able to attend the local markets but had to work with local merchants and the rulers of the area to trade.

The Mexica empire was well designed to facilitate trading and the collection of tribute. Merchants were respected, roads were designed for travel by foot (there were no draught animals) and, where possible, rivers were used to increase speed and efficiency of travel. This expansive trade network was enhanced by alliances with other towns, conquest of new territory leading to an expanding empire, and the rigorous collection of tribute.

The Codex Mendoza is a useful source of information about tribute. It details the exact tribute required biannually and annually by certain tributary towns.
HIGHLIGHTS CHECKLIST

☐ Portrait of Moctezuma at the beginning of the exhibition

How you would describe Moctezuma?

☐ Moctezuma’s stone box in the first section of the exhibition

On the inside of the lid is his name in Mexica picture writing. As you go round the exhibition look for more examples.

☐ Coronation stone of Moctezuma in ‘Moctezuma as a Ruler’ section

The Mexica believed the world had already ended four times. This stone is carved with picture symbols representing each world.

☐ Teocalli object shaped like a 4-sided pyramid in the central room

Depictions on it include a sun-disc, bowls for sacrificial hearts, eagle feathers, jaguar spots and an eagle on top of a cactus.

☐ Procession of warriors in the ‘Warfare’ section

This a large stone object decorated with warriors. Imagine them all going to battle.

☐ Codex Duran in the ‘Omens of change’ section

This codex shows a comet flying across the sky, one of the bad omens that occurred towards the end of the Mexica empire.

☐ Double-headed serpent in the ‘Arrival of the Spanish’ section

This serpent may have been a gift from Moctezuma to the Spanish leader Cortés.

☐ Horse armour in the ‘Arrival of the Spanish’ section

The Mexica had never seen horses before the Spanish arrived. Imagine what a strange sight they must have been.

☐ Final highlight

Go to the ‘Death of Moctezuma’ section. People aren’t sure if Moctezuma was killed by his own people, the Mexica, or by the Spanish conquerors. Look at the objects and pictures in this section which show both versions. Discuss what you have found with your group.
SECONDARY SCHOOLS: YOUR VISIT
You may also find it useful to look at the resources for primary schools as many of these may be suitable for adaptation for secondary students.

Before your visit
• Explain the exhibition’s use of the term Mexica instead of Aztec and the reasoning behind this.
• Think of other ancient civilisations you have studied. Plot them on a timeline with the Mexica empire, use the British Museum website www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk to help with this.
• Create a mind map of what your students know about the Mexica.
• Look at some of the great archaeological discoveries, and the remains associated with them, such as Tutankhamun and Pompeii. What can be learnt about peoples from the things they leave behind?

During your visit
• Ask students to locate each of the objects on the highlights checklist (see page 12) and examine them closely.
• Ask students to think about one or two of these key questions as they go through the exhibition:
  – How did Moctezuma show he was the most powerful man in the Mexica empire?
  – Look for examples of Mexica gods, temples or religious ceremonies. What does this tell you about the importance of religion in general and its significance for the status of Moctezuma?
  – Look for examples of Mexica glyphs. What different symbols can you see, what do they mean and what objects are they on?
  – How did warriors reflect their status?
  – How did buildings in the Mexica empire reflect importance or wealth? What could buildings communicate to visitors?
  – Look for different materials in the exhibition. See if you can find out where they originated. What does this tell you about the Mexica empire? Could these different materials be used to reflect the social hierarchy of the Mexica society?
• The exhibition is very rich in visual images. Drawing is not possible but quick sketches and notes can be made. Students could focus on a theme such as colour, graphics, 2D/3D, animals etc.
• Go through the PowerPoint with students before the visit and discuss what they would be able to or like to research in the exhibition. Students could set their own independent learning targets or themes.

After your visit
• Discuss the key questions that students thought about during the exhibition and what information they gathered to help form their answer.
• Which highlight object did students find most interesting and why?
PRIMARY SCHOOLS: YOUR VISIT

• The resources are divided into sections for use before, during and after a visit to the exhibition. There are also background information sheets to help you.

• The PowerPoint presentation can be used both before and after a visit. It contains images and highlight objects that link to the activities and that the students may see during their visit. Information about the objects is in the notes section of each slide and on pages 31–35.

Before your visit

The following are suggestions for activities that you can use to prepare students for their visit to the exhibition.

• Locate the area covered by the Mexica empire in an atlas and look at the modern countries which it covered. Display a map in the classroom that can be added to during the length of the topic.

• Place the Mexica empire in its context by explaining to students when it existed and give examples of other cultures in the world at the same time.

• Discuss some of the names of people and places they will encounter in the exhibition.

• Introduce the Mexica religion and its range of gods. Do students know other examples of polytheism?

• Show examples of Mexica glyphs and codices. Discuss what the glyphs look like and how they differ from the modern alphabet. Ask students to investigate other pictographic writing used by different cultures.

• Show the students some of the key objects or images from the PowerPoint. Ask them what they would like to know about the objects. Where might they find this information in the exhibition? How do these objects help to understand the Mexica empire?

• Look at objects from the Mexica empire using Explore at www.britishmuseum.org

During your visit

• Activities for schools have been grouped under six topic headings:
  Moctezuma the ruler
  Religion and the gods
  Writing and the calendar
  Warriors and warfare
  Houses, palaces and temples
  Trade and tribute: materials

• Each topic is covered by a 2-page activity sheet for students designed to be printed on a double-sided sheet of A4.

• A highlights checklist is provided of objects not to be missed (see page 12).

• To reduce overcrowding, please divide students into groups of no more than 6 led by an adult.

• Give each group the activity sheet for one topic plus the highlights checklist.

• Adult briefing sheets provide information and guidance for adult helpers (see pages 27–28).

  See pages 29–30 for After your visit.
Moctezuma II was the ninth and last ruler of the Mexica empire. He was a powerful ruler and a fierce warrior.

- Find the stone casket (box) near to the painting. This belonged to Moctezuma. Carved inside the lid is his name glyph, a picture symbol.

Find each of these:
- his crown
- his hair
- his nose-ring or lip-plug
- a speech scroll (a bubble coming out of his mouth)

You will see Moctezuma’s symbol on other objects, so keep looking for it.

- Go to the ‘Moctezuma as ruler’ section. Work as a team to find different pieces of jewellery that Moctezuma might have worn. Look for things he could:
  - wear in his ear
  - wear in his nose
  - decorate his head with
  - put on his finger
MOCTEZUMA THE RULER

Now choose one of these pieces of jewellery and write down two or three sentences to describe it.

---

• Look for some large pieces of carved stone that decorated Moctezuma’s new palace. Find:
  - the serpent’s head with an open mouth and large teeth
  - the serpent’s tail ending in a rattle from a rattlesnake
  - the long pieces of carved stone decorated with bright colours

Imagine these all decorating the palace with lots of other images of animals, beasts and other brightly coloured patterns.

• Before leaving this area, look for the red-and-white striped cups. Some stories say that the cups and plates Moctezuma used were smashed after every meal so that he was the only one to ever use them!
  Draw the outline of one of the cups.
**REligion and the Gods**

- Go to the ‘Religion and the gods’ section.

Objects in this section have images of Mexica gods on them or are made to look like the gods. Can you find an image of each of these gods?

- Tlaloc – has goggle eyes and is sometimes shown with long sharp teeth.
- Quetzalcoatl – known as the feathered serpent. Look for a serpent or a human face surrounded by feathers.
- Tezcatlipoca – a human skull covered with bands of coloured mosaics.

- Find the stone skulls. The Mexica displayed the real skulls of their human sacrifices outside the temples. They believed that sacrifices provided the gods with energy.

How many skulls are on display here? [ ]
RELIGION AND THE GODS

• Now look at the model of the religious centre of the city. Find:
  □ the Great Temple
  □ two shrines on top of the Great Temple
  □ steep steps leading up to the top of the Great Temple

Only the priests and Moctezuma were allowed to go to the top of the temple. Discuss with your group how you can tell just by looking at the temple that is a very important building.

• Choose one object or sculpture of a god and draw it below.

Which god is it? __________________________________________

What material is it made from? ________________________________
WRITING AND THE CALENDAR

• As you come into the exhibition, look for the stone casket (box) that belonged to Moctezuma. His name is written in Mexica picture writing inside the lid.

Look for each bit that forms his name:

☐ his crown
☐ his hair
☐ his nose-ring or lip-plug
☐ a speech scroll (a bubble coming out of his mouth)

Keep looking for other examples of his name in the exhibition.

• Go into the ‘Moctezuma and his predecessors’ section.
  Find this stone.
  On the upper half you can see Moctezuma’s uncles. Underneath there is a glyph (picture writing symbol) for the Mexica date ‘8 Reed’.
  Can you work out what shows that it is '8'?
• Go to the ‘Religion and the gods’ section. Look for this stone pot. It was used to hold human hearts as sacrificial offerings. On the front is an image of a sun and in the centre of that is a glyph showing the date ‘4 Movement’. Draw the glyph below.

• Now find another stone casket of Moctezuma in this section. It has two date glyphs on the top. Does your group think it shows:

  □ 1 house and 4 house?  □ 2 rabbit and 6 rabbit?  □ 1 reed and 7 reed?

• Go into the central room which has a large stone block carved into the shape of a 4-sided pyramid. There are four different date glyphs on this object. Can you find them all?

  □ 1 Flint  □ 1 Rabbit  □ 2 Reed  □ 1 Death
WARRIORS AND WARFARE

• Go to the ‘Warfare and empire’ section.

Find the statue of a head of an eagle warrior.
Find the statue of the crouched jaguar warrior.
How can you tell which one is which?

Eagle warrior

Jaguar warrior

Discuss with your group why you think the eagle and the jaguar were the animals chosen to be the top ranks of Mexica warrior.

Would you prefer to be an eagle warrior or a jaguar warrior?

• Find the drum which has an eagle warrior and a jaguar warrior dancing on the bottom half of it. Tick the box when you find

☐ the eagle warrior
☐ the jaguar warrior

• Can you find another drum near this one? It is made to look like a prisoner lying down with his hands tied.
What material is it made from?
☐ metal  ☐ wood  ☐ plastic

Drums were played during religious ceremonies. Imagine the noise when lots of these were used.
WARRIORS AND WARFARE

• Go to the large stone block with warriors on it. Can you see:
  □ a serpent? □ a feathered headdress?
  □ a shield? □ a spear?
  □ an earring?

How many warriors are there? __________

Pick one of the warriors and draw him below. Don’t forget to include his feather headdress, weapons and any jewellery.

• Look around this area for other things that warriors might have used in battle. Can you find:
  □ something to help them throw their spears further?
  □ something to help protect the warriors?
HOUSES, PALACES AND TEMPLES

Go to the ‘Mexica’ section.
• Go to the map of the city drawn in 1524. Find the following on the map:
  - [ ] the lake surrounding the city
  - [ ] the causeways (roads built across the lake)
  - [ ] the religious area in the centre of the island
  - [ ] some houses in the city
  - [ ] boats in the lake

• Go to the ‘Moctezuma as ruler’ section.
  A codex is a book, and these Mexica ones have symbols, pictures and words.
  Find the Codex Mendoza which shows Moctezuma’s palace. Find:
  - [ ] Moctezuma sitting by himself in the top room
  - [ ] three empty rooms
  - [ ] four men sitting in a room having a discussion
  - [ ] one man walking outside the palace

• Look at the large sculptures which came from Moctezuma’s palace.
  Imagine the palace decorated with sculptures and painted bright colours.
  Do you think a palace like this would be a good place for a ruler to live?
  Tell your group why.

Write one of your reasons below:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
HOUSES, PALACES AND TEMPLES

- Find the model of the religious area. It is just around the corner by the ‘Religion and the gods’ section. Look for the Great Temple.

What shape is the temple?

Draw the outline of the temple

Discuss with your group how the temple is built to make it look important.
TRADE AND TRIBUTE: MATERIALS

As you go through the exhibition, look for objects made from different materials and try to remember some of the different examples you see.

• Go into the ‘Moctezuma as ruler’ section.
  Look for objects that are decorated with feathers. Can you see:
  □ stone carved to look like feathers?
  □ a shield decorated with feathers?
  □ a fan of feathers?
  What colours are the feathers?

• Go into the ‘Warfare and empire’ section and find the section about tribute.
  Look for the objects below and find out what material from which they are made.
  Draw a line from each object to the name of the material on the right.
  Some may be made from more than one material.

  a cup with a hummingbird on the edge          turquoise
  a bright green and blue mask of a face         pottery
  a statue of a man holding a gigantic cocoa bean gold
  a round shield                                 greenstone
  colourful bowls                                stone
  green beads                                    wood

• Once your group has finished looking at this section go into the ‘Conquest’ section. Find two swords. One of these was used by the Spanish and the other is a copy of one that was used by the Mexica.
  Draw each sword on the next page.
TRADE AND TRIBUTE: MATERIALS

Spanish sword

Mexica sword

Made of ____________________________  Made of ____________________________

• Find this double-headed serpent. What materials were used to create the serpent?

☐ shell  ☐ plastic  ☐ gold

☐ turquoise  ☐ wood  ☐ pottery

Double-headed serpent.

It is possible this serpent was worn as a necklace. How comfortable would it be to wear?

Do you think it was worn every day or just for special occasions?

Does the serpent look friendly or fierce? Discuss with your group other words you would use to describe it and write them below:
ADULT BRIEFING SHEET 1

This sheet has been designed for you to use with the group of students you accompany round the exhibition.

- Please remind students not to touch any objects.
- Encourage the group to take time studying objects.
- You may need to help by reading some labels for them.
- Encourage students to explore the whole exhibition, not just the areas their activity sheets guide them to.

Moctezuma the ruler

Moctezuma II was the ruler of the empire, commander of the warriors and considered semi-divine. Strict laws ensured that commoners were separated from the ruler physically and socially; these included rules on dress and personal adornment.

Remind students to look for Moctezuma's name glyph (symbol) throughout the exhibition.
Encourage students to think about how Moctezuma's power and position are reflected throughout the exhibition.

Religion and the gods

The Mexica worshipped many different gods and goddesses, all thought to be vital to maintaining the world as it was. As the gods provided life, the Mexica sacrificed life for the gods in return.

Remind students to look for different gods throughout the exhibition.
Can they work out what each god represented or by what animal or symbol it is shown?

Writing and the calendar

The Mexica used a pictographic writing system which used glyphs (symbols) to represent different words, names, dates and other elements. Glyphs were not used like text in our modern alphabet but instead were placed on the page in a way that creates a scene like a painting.

Help students to count the circles next to glyphs to read dates.
Encourage them to look for glyphs throughout the exhibition.

Highlights checklist

The highlights checklist directs students to 8 objects that they shouldn't miss.
They are spread throughout the exhibition, so you will need to keep referring to the highlights checklist during your visit.

The last highlight should be your final stop once you have finished the activity sheets as it is towards the end of the exhibition. This highlight covers the area of the exhibition which presents the differing ideas of how Moctezuma died.
Encourage students to look at all the different images in this section and then discuss in a group what they have seen.
ADULT BRIEFING SHEET 2

This sheet has been designed for you to use with the group of students you accompany round the exhibition.

- Please remind students not to touch any objects.
- Encourage the group to take time studying objects.
- You may need to help by reading some labels for them.
- Encourage students to explore the whole exhibition, not just the areas their activity sheets guide them to.

Warriors and warfare

The two elite warrior groups were called the eagle warriors and the jaguar warriors. Jaguar warriors wore jaguar skins with their heads coming through the animal’s mouth. Eagle warriors wore beaked feathered helmets and suits of feathers.

Encourage students to use their imagination to add bright colours to their outfits, the noise of them walking and talking, and the movement of their clothes and feathered headdresses. Talk in your group about what it would have looked like, and what you might have felt when they walked past.

Houses, palaces and temples

The capital of the Mexica empire was a city called Tenochtitlan. It was built on an island in Lake Tetzcoco. Royal buildings and temples were very different to commoners’ houses which were simple one-room mud-brick houses painted white.

Encourage students to discuss their responses to the questions on the activity sheet with their group.

Trade and tribute: materials

The Mexica used many different materials. Some of these materials were gathered from around their capital city and others were paid to them as tribute (tax) from people they had conquered.

Help students to gather information about the materials from which different objects are made. You may need to read object labels with them (the material is usually listed after the object description).

Highlights checklist

The highlights checklist directs students to 8 objects that they shouldn’t miss. They are spread throughout the exhibition, so you will need to keep referring to the highlights checklist during your visit.

The last highlight should be your final stop once you have finished the activity sheets as it is towards the end of the exhibition. This highlight covers the area of the exhibition which presents the differing ideas of how Moctezuma died.

Encourage students to look at all the different images in this section and then discuss in a group what they have seen.
After your visit

The activity suggestions further explore the six topic headings above. Before focusing on a topic, review the objects students saw during the exhibition using their activity sheets and the PowerPoint presentation. The PowerPoint presentation can be used both generally and to focus on specific objects relevant to the activities. Discuss with the students which ones they remember seeing. Ask them to think about what they were like in real life, for example their size or colour.

MOCTEZUMA THE RULER

Choose some objects or images from the PowerPoint that relate to the theme of Moctezuma the ruler to help with these activities.

• What objects in the exhibition reflected Moctezuma’s power? Discuss materials, symbolism, decoration and size.
• Ask students to investigate the different roles held by the Mexica ruler. These included roles within government, religion and warfare. You could take this topic further by asking students to compare these with the roles held by modern rulers, for example looking at both the British Prime Minister and the Queen.
• Discuss rulers throughout history. In what ways do they set themselves apart from the people they rule?
• Moctezuma enlarged the Great Temple and built himself a new palace. Look at examples of government or royal buildings known by the students. Why do rulers and leaders build monuments and large buildings?

RELIGION AND THE GODS

Choose some objects or images from the PowerPoint that relate to the theme of Religion and the gods to help with these activities.

• Identify the main gods and their symbols. Set students an investigation task to discover more information about the gods using books, the internet and any other resources available. This could be expanded to produce a wall display on Mexica gods.
• Discuss the topic of human sacrifice and explore Mexica beliefs behind the practice.
• Find the ‘Explore the Great Temple’ activity in the Aztec section of the www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk website, so that students can learn more about the temple. Show the students other drawings, illustrations or pictures of the Great Temple and discuss its architecture and main features. Get the students to draw the temple or to create it as a 3D artwork.

WRITING AND THE CALENDAR

Choose some objects or images from the PowerPoint that relate to the theme of Writing and the calendar to help with these activities.

• Discuss the tonalpohualli (sacred calendar system), and explain how it worked so that students can create their own, or a class, calendar (see Richard Townsend’s book The Aztecs pages 130–136).
• Provide the students with images of Mexica glyphs and codices. Explain the use of pictures and placement in a scene and contrast this with the English alphabet and linear text. Students could create their own picture glyphs and create a scene based on examples from the Mexica tradition.
• Tell students about the New Fire Ceremony and the main elements of the event. Ask them about other New Year festivals they know about or have experienced. Discuss the similarities and differences between New Year festivals in different cultures and periods of history. This discussion could lead to a written piece by each child explaining what their ideal New Year festival would comprise.

WARRIORS AND WARFARE

Choose some objects or images from the PowerPoint that relate to the theme of Warriors and warfare to help with these activities.

• Discuss how the Mexica empire expanded and the role of warriors in this expansion.

• Tell students about the jaguar and eagle warriors. Show them images of these warriors and discuss the choice of animal. If students had the choice of animal to represent themselves what would they choose and why? Ask them to draw a picture and write an explanation of the choice.

• Explore the weapons and materials Mexica warriors used. Contrast this with the Spanish weapons. How might this have contributed to the fall of the Mexica?

HOUSES, PALACES AND TEMPLES

Choose some objects or images from the PowerPoint that relate to the theme of Houses, palaces and temples to help with these activities.

• Describe and provide images, if possible, of commoners’ houses in Tenochtitlan and of the royal palaces. Contrast the use of materials, decoration and size. Look at examples of contrasting housing in other cultures, both modern and historical.

• Ask students to research the structural and decorative elements of the Great Temple. Groups could be given different areas on which to concentrate. Using this information, create and build a model of the Great Temple with the whole class.

TRADE AND TRIBUTE: MATERIALS

Choose some objects or images from the PowerPoint that relate to the theme of Trade and tribute: materials to help with these activities.

• Discuss the different materials the students saw in the exhibition. Were there any that were new to them?

• Ask groups to research the materials used by the Mexica. Find out where each came from and mark these on a map using different symbols for each.

• Find the Explore the market with an Aztec shopping list! activity in the Aztec section of the www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk website. This provides information about different materials and goods that were sold and traded in the marketplace.

• Identify the different towns or areas that provided the Mexica with tribute or traded with the Mexica. What did they provide that the Mexica did not have in their territory?

• Discuss the fall of the Mexica empire. What differences were there between the materials available to the Mexica and the Spanish? Did these contribute to the end of the empire?
Moctezuma’s empire
This map shows the extent of the Mexica empire and its expansion under Moctezuma.

Plan of Tenochtitlan
This plan of the capital city shows the four causeways linking the island to the mainland, the different residential areas of the city, the location of the Temple Precinct and Moctezuma’s palace.

Tribute map
This map shows the many different materials and goods brought to Tenochtitlan as tribute. It is taken from the Codex Mendoza.
Fan with feathers
The handle of this fan is carved into the shape of a warrior’s head and was found north of the Great Temple. The feathers (now restored) were from brightly coloured tropical birds.

Gold jewellery
Gold jewellery including a ring with the face of a sort of cat, a pendant with a human face, and a pendant figurine holding a circular shield.

Mosaic mask of Tlaloc
This turquoise mosaic mask is believed to represent Tlaloc, the rain god. Two serpents circle the eyes and mouth; one is light blue the other is green.
Stone bust of Quetzalcoatl
This statue represents Quetzalcoatl, whose name means ‘quetzal feathered serpent’.

Mosaic mask of Texcatlipoca
This mosaic was created by laying blue turquoise and black lignite mosaic pieces over a human skull. The deerskin straps were used to tie the mask around the waist of a priest or impersonator during ceremonies.

Sacrificial knife
The wooden handle of this knife is carved into the shape of a crouching eagle warrior. Radiography has shown that the blade is not set deep enough into the handle to be of practical use and so it must have been used as a symbolic element of a ceremony.
Teocalli
This object is in the shape of a pyramid-temple or *teocalli* (sacred house). The steps are similar to those on the Great Temple leading up to the double shrines. At the top is a sun disc flanked by the god Huitzilopochtli on the left and Moctezuma on the right. The glyphs either side of the steps are 1 Rabbit, to the left and 2 Reed to the right. They are the opening and closing years of the 52-year cycle in the Mexica calendar.

Teocalli
This is the left side of the *teocalli* (pyramid-temple) when looking from the front. The date glyph at the top is ‘1 Flint’. The two seated figures underneath are two of the cardinal directions (the other two are on the opposite side).

Procession of warriors
14 warriors parade around this stone block in full military costume with eight plumed serpents carved above them.
Head of eagle warrior
This eagle warrior wears a beaked helmet.

Jaguar warrior
This seated jaguar warrior is wearing a jaguar skin cloak.

Turquoise mask
This mask may have been made by Mixtec artisans who worked in Moctezuma’s court. It is thought to represent Tonatiuh, the sun god.

Double-headed serpent
A wooden base overlaid with turquoise mosaic pieces forms this double-headed serpent. The gums and nostrils are created with pieces of red shell from the thorny oyster and the sharp fangs with pieces of conch shell.
FURTHER INFORMATION

Websites
Find out more about various ancient civilisations (including the Aztecs/Mexica) for lower KS3 and some students in Years 5 and 6 at the British Museum’s www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk

Find out more about the exhibition, including an introductory video, and more about Mexican culture at www.britishmuseum.org

Adults and students will also find lots of information at www.mexicolore.co.uk

Books for students
*Pocket Dictionary of Aztec & Maya Gods and Goddesses* by Clara Bezanilla (British Museum Press, 2006)

*The Pocket Timeline of Ancient Mexico* by Penny Bateman (British Museum Press, 2009)

*The Aztecs Activity Book* by Penny Bateman (British Museum Press, 1999)

*Aztecs Sticker Book* by Susan Raikes (British Museum Press, 2009)

Books for adults

*Moctezuma and the Aztecs* by Elisenda Vila Llonch (British Museum Press, 2009)

*The Aztecs* by Richard F Townsend (Thames and Hudson, 2008)