

## **Ancient México: A Treasure to Find and Explore**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

I am a Puerto Rican teacher who came to Houston nine years ago to make it home for my family and me. I came here with a lot of expectations and a lot of dreams. I knew that the twelve years of experience I had under my belt would help me adapt to my new teaching environment. I knew the curriculum of what I had to teach and the methodology to do it. How surprised was I to see that even though I spoke Spanish and was able to communicate with my bilingual students, our cultures were so different that I might as well have come here from any place in the world because our backgrounds were that, worlds apart.

I came here ready to teach my students how to read. A lot of ideas, materials, and all the sounds, the syllables, the words were ready to go from my point of view. But did these elements match the students' reality? How incredible and disappointing for me to see that everything I had prepared in Puerto Rico was useless. Our Spanish vocabulary background was miles apart and nothing of what I had brought inside my head worked. Words like "lazo" and "moño" are synonyms of the word "bow" in my mind, but for my students these words were two completely different concepts. I soon learned to see my students as a new challenge for me, and I made it my goal to learn about their culture and to share mine with them as much as I could. We became one in our classroom, and it has been that way ever since. Now I teach third graders, and I want to take my personal and professional experience with my children to a deeper level.

I asked myself where these differences originated. I was sure the answer had something to do with Mexico's ancient history. My unit is about going "back in time" to explore that history. I am very impressed with the Mexican pride I have seen in the community I work with and in the people that I've established new relationships with after all these years. They are people who had also left everything behind to come to this country and to find a better way of life for them and their children. I feel very comfortable with them because somehow they remind me of my own experience. But deep inside I see how different we are. The Mexican culture is a very strong one, and even though they had to leave their country to improve their quality of life, I can see how their traditions and respect for their culture prevails. Their food, music and surroundings have that Mexican flavor no matter how much time has gone by since they arrived in this country, and they want their children to continue the traditions and pass them on to their children. Sometimes they resent how their children assimilate the American culture and want to leave behind all these traditions. I think there is something I can do as an educator to help my students preserve their culture and embrace the new one in a smooth transition using enriching and engaging new experiences in the classroom.

I want to help students increase their national pride supported by knowledge that their parents don't have and that will open their minds and hearts to loving their history even more. Young minds need to see where they come from and most of all, understand that today is not all we have. We, as Latin Americans, have a cultural background as amazing as other cultures that have been more widely studied, such as the Greeks or Romans, and must be proud of that treasure. Students need to relate their lives with their ancestors' lives and learn to respect them. I want my students

to learn how ancient societies were as rich in culture as is today's world as they know it. There were a lot of important things happening here in America before the Europeans came to "discover us," and the students need to be proud of all that. Students need to know their cultural contribution to the world by being exposed to rich cultural experiences that portray their ancestors' lives in a positive way, to promote pride and to create in them a sense of importance in the bigger picture that is our world.

My other goal is to explore the concept of communication between cultures. Coming from another country, every year I have to reach a point of understanding between my students and me: a common language. I try to learn from their vocabulary and show them how I use mine. Then, using literature, I expose them to a richer language that represents those same ideas but using words that we can all understand. My goal has always been to prepare my students to be great readers and writers and to be able to communicate with others no matter where they are from. Their ideas are important and in the future, when they are out there in the world, everybody has the right to express themselves and to be listened to. I want to give my students the tools to do just that now and always.

Finally, I want to help my students make a smooth transition between their native language, which is usually Spanish, and their second language, English. I work with bilingual children from Mexican families that came here to improve their quality of life. Having a second language is a priority for these children given that their families don't master the language. I have seen children in school, stores, offices and other places, being translators for their parents. It is necessary that these children become fluent in English as soon as possible to help their families and bring information to them as well as to be successful in school. This unit will be presented to the children in their native language and will be used also during their ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction to reinforce the concepts in English. Using art as the platform to develop the unit through the use of *The Codex Nuttall*, the students will be able to learn how to communicate in pictures and then use that same strategy to communicate in English according to their language development.

## **UNIT BACKGROUND**

This unit will be used during the Hispanic Heritage Month celebrated in September. It will be developed around the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills/ Texas' State Curriculum, developed by the Texas Education Agency) and will support the Social Studies Skills and Culture strands as well as CLEAR Objectives (Houston Independent School District Curriculum) for the Reading and Language Arts as well as for ESL. Children will have the opportunity to learn about their culture's historical background as Latin Americans and interact with literature as it was written at the time. This will provide the opportunity for them explore their cultural past and be proud of it as well as the concepts of communication and culture and how important is for us to be able to read and write to communicate our ideas.

The historical and cultural background for this unit will come from the concept of Mesoamerica. Students will learn about how Mesoamerica has been defined as a cultural zone where people spoke as many as sixty different languages but were united by their history. How even though it had a population of over 50 million of people and they lived in the areas where Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador are today, they shared traits that made them unique. They will learn that cultures have many different aspects to them but share similarities as well. Even more specifically, students will explore the Mixtec Culture:

The Mixtecs called themselves Ñuudzahui or "People of the Rain" in their own language. They rose to power in southern México between A.D. 950-1521. Formulating alliances with the Tolteca-Chichimeca to the north together with the Zapotecs to the east, Mixtec kings and queens used royal marriage to extend their influence over much of what are

today the Mexican states of Oaxaca and Puebla. By the time of the Spanish invasion, the highest ranked royal Mixtec dynasty resided at Tilantongo, Oaxaca. The Mixtecs were formidable enemies of the Aztecs whose capital was Tenochtitlán located in the Valley of México and they fought many wars against Aztec imperial armies throughout the fifteenth century. There are over a quarter million Mixtec people still living in Oaxaca today and many thousands have immigrated to the United States. Most Mixtecs in Oaxaca subsist by farming. (Pohl/famsi.org)

They will explore their most significant traits: their pictographs and hieroglyphics as well as their calendar. They will learn how symbols communicate ideas and stories from the past and how we can learn from them. Students will observe the pictographs to find meaning in the events depicted as well as find daily aspects of their lives, like clothing, costumes and ceremonies and be able to identify them given a concrete experience. Students will compare their way of life today and how they live compared to their ancestors in the past. They will compare how their daily activities and important events are recorded today and how they will be passed to other generations. They will compare how they communicate with others with the way it was done in the past, finding similarities and differences. They will use symbols to communicate an idea and expand what they have learned to create a unique writing piece featuring symbols that refer to the ones learned and others created by them that we can all understand. This will take them through the experience that they ancestors went through documenting events that were important for them and that they wanted to perpetuate for the future generations to see. This will be developed around the study of a part of *The Codex Nuttall*, one of eight examples of ancient manuscripts written in the Pre Columbian times:

These books are some of the very few examples of Ancient Mexican writing left to us today. After the conquest of the Aztec Empire in 1521, a few learned Spaniards began to collect pictographic books and sent them back to Europe. There are eight pre-Conquest style codices attributed to the Mixtec-speaking people of Oaxaca. They were made of animal hide and covered with a gesso-like foundation upon which figures were painted and then folded so that they could either be stored compactly or opened to reveal all of the pages on one side. The fact that the Mixtecs painted scenes from codices on drinking goblets is a testament to the role the recitation of the sagas played at royal banquets. (Pohl/famsi.org)

The way to read them is from right to left in an up and down fashion following red markings made by the scribes to define where the scenes start and end. They include the dates, places and important characters related to the events portrayed. The Mixtec Group codices were not meant to be read simply as books, they also served as scripts for the celebration and re-enactment of historical events. The codices could be displayed as "storyboards." A poet recited the text from the codex to musical accompaniment, while actors performed parts of the saga in costume. The setting for these literary and theatrical presentations was the royal feast. Imagine a banquet in which the participants were literally part of the art of the performance. They attended wearing garments painted with figures of culture heroes and gods while drinking and eating from polychrome pottery decorated with scenes from the codices, and exchanging gifts of gold, shell, bone, and turquoise engraved with images of the founding ancestors of the highest ranking dynasties. (Pohl/famsi.org)

The part that will be studied from *The Codex Nuttall*, will retell the story of Lord Eight Deer, a powerful ruler in ancient times. Students will read about his birth, life and conquests and as they do, familiarize themselves with the symbols used and their meaning.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC

In the time that I have lived here I have seen many changes in education. We, as teachers, are under a lot of pressure to balance out what our children should learn and what we know will spark their imagination and love for learning. This unit will be a great opportunity for children and teachers to interact with language, history and literature differently and to set the tone for an exciting way of learning concepts that are needed for their personal and academic growth.

Children from other countries living in the United States need to know where they come from and who they are. They should know that today and now is not all there is. Television, radio, video games, and technology in general are competing with the classroom and unfortunately are winning. It is our job to take the curricula we are given and infuse them with experiences that will enrich our students in many ways. Many of our families have limitations, and it is our responsibility to provide experiences for our students that will help them personally. Teaching the students about their Mexican traditions will help them understand their roots. Reading about how advanced their culture was a long time ago will increase their self-esteem as a citizen of this country. Knowing that there are many things that were already established in the ancient cultures before they were conquered will give them that sense of pride about who they are and what they know. It should open their eyes to see that there are a lot of contributions from their culture to the world, and they should be proud of these contributions.

I work with bilingual students who have in common their cultural background. The majority of them come from Mexican families that moved to the United States looking for a better life and opportunities. Some of them arrive when the year had already started because their families have to move and the transition to a new country and new school happens right there in front of me. My ultimate goal as a teacher is to make my students feel welcome in this country and help them in their transition process, which we know takes a long time. Is my responsibility also, to help them transition to a new language and help them be successful in their new school. For this reason it is very important to deliver a multicultural curriculum that celebrates cultural differences and teaches them to accept other cultures and different points of view.

Multicultural education can be developed in many ways. Students should be able to share their background through interactive activities with their peers to bring their lives into the classroom. The teacher should provide time for this throughout the year by taking advantage of holidays and special occasions. The physical environment of the classroom should have displays that include all cultures to make the students feel they belong no matter where they come from. Another way to promote multicultural experiences could be through multicultural literature circles. In this practice, children participate from a variety of reading experiences that offer literature from all over the world. This helps students develop a problem-solving approach to different forms of inequity in our society.

Maybe they have been victims of some kind of prejudice, and multicultural literature gives them the opportunity to open their minds to other cultures and show respect for them and feel empowered to demand respect for their own culture. This approach can enhance the multicultural climate of the classroom, help the children to view other perspectives of the world, and open their mind to other points of view besides theirs. In this particular unit, using the Legend of Lord Eight Deer shows the children not only how countries and cultures develop but also how they can relate this legend to their own lives as immigrants from Mexico.

Academically, this unit will work with critical-thinking skills in social studies, as well as in reading and language arts. Students will be able to learn about the culture in Mesoamerica and how it developed using the words and ideas of the Ancient Mesoamericans themselves. They will experience an overview of how life was lived then and compare it to life for them now. They will use the Codex Nuttall to interact with the symbols used by the Mixtec to document their lives and

focus on Lord Eight Deer's life as depicted in the Codex. This will help the student understand the importance of writers and artists to the cultural heritage of communities, they will be able to use the Codex Nuttall as an example of cultural heritage for their Mexican community, and they will explain why this is significant. These are all important social studies objectives that our students need to master.

In addition to developing the historical and cultural material, critical-thinking skills will be used when analyzing all the hieroglyphs and trying to decipher their meaning. They will have to interpret all that visual material and be able to determine cause and effect situations, compare that time and lifestyle to their own and find the main idea of it all. This brings us to reading and language arts as a big part of this unit. Students need a good foundation when they are getting ready to read and are starting to develop their comprehension skills, as well when they are getting ready to write. Listening and retelling Lord Eight Deer's story will help develop their language arts skills. Being able to look at the pictures and follow the story line will help them practice all the comprehension objectives like making predictions, characterization, plot, sequencing, importance of the setting, summarizing, drawing conclusions, finding facts and details and recognizing the purpose for what it was written. Reading a summary of the Legend of Lord Eight Deer as retold by John Pohl, will give them the opportunity to work with these objectives in an application level. Finally being able to express in writing the narrative of an event using pictographs and then writing it as a composition will finalize the process of producing a creative text which sometimes of so difficult for our students. All these objectives combined help us cultivate and enhance our students personally and academically.

Acquiring another language is another way to enhance our students' lives. All the activities provided to develop their language arts skills are designed for their first language that is not always English. Once again, helping the children understand the importance of artists to the cultural heritage of communities is a great way to support the second language acquisition.

Integrating the arts in the curriculum enriches the lives of the children, helps in the social integration process and promotes a second language acquisition. Including visual arts, drama and music provides opportunities for the students in the process of transition to participate, understand, and demonstrate their special talents and skills. This unit provides activities that develop the children's imagination and let them be creative and express themselves through their writing and presentation of their creation to others.

Many bilingual students in their transition process are able to communicate in pictures and share their understanding better than with words. Creating an opportunity for the students to develop through their art and helping them talk about their work opens the door to their language skills and helps them in the transition process. In this unit when they develop their own story about their lives and create their own symbols to express it, they will explore with language on another level. They will be able to express intensely personal feelings that wouldn't be able to express just by writing. By integrating in their presentation some drama or role play, the students will be able to practice with the language and rehearse phrases and vocabulary that they may use later in real life situations. By being an audience for each other, students will have the opportunity to listen to the language and figure out what the others are saying because their can participate from the nonverbal part of the performance.

## **IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

This unit is designed to be used as part of the reading and language arts and the social studies curriculum during the Hispanic Heritage Month. It will also be used as support for the ESL curriculum providing activities to be developed in the students' level of proficiency in English. The lessons will be designed around the TEKS and Project CLEAR objectives for Third Grade and will be structured in three sections. These sections will give students the opportunity to

acquire background knowledge and participate from activities that explore Mesoamerica and the Mixtec culture through ancient literature and other resources.

### **Section I: Mesoamerica**

This unit is intended to be used during September during the Hispanic Heritage month. Since this happens right at the beginning of the school year, it provides with a great opportunity for the children to explore the Mexican culture as a treasure from the past that most of them share culturally. This provides an opportunity to set that multicultural environment so needed to make them feel comfortable with the learning process and new language. The unit will be introduced in Spanish and reinforced during the ESL instruction.

First, the students will learn about the origin of the Mesoamerican culture. I will use maps and illustrations so the students can see where this took place and how the Mesoamerican territory looks today. They will interact with maps to illustrate and label. Then, the students will discuss the concept of changes through time using themselves as examples. After they grasp these concepts, I will give them basic information about the development of the Mesoamerican culture so they understand how long ago this happened and for them to understand how it relates to them. I will tell them how these periods are divided and their major characteristics. Archaeologists divide Mesoamerican civilization development into three major time periods: the Pre Classic or Formative period extending from 1500 B.C. - A.D. 300, the Classic period extending from A.D. 300-950, and the Post Classic period extending from A.D. 950-1521. (John Pohl/ famsi.org)

During the Pre Classic Period, Mesoamerican developed intensive agricultural techniques and their spiritual leaders evolved into positions of chiefs. It was a time for them to secure their authorities and centralize their power. Simple forms of writing emerged around 500 B.C. During the Classic Period urban state societies like Teotihuacán were formed. Many ceremonial communities evolved from chiefdoms to kingdoms showing a strong development in their social organization. Unfortunately by the year 900 A.D. most of these were abandoned. Then during the Post Classic Period most of the regional governments became segmented and driven by exchange and commerce. The search for exotic materials to increase the value of their gifts used to create alliances and exchange networks ruled the competition between them. By 1450, the México, the most powerful of seven original Aztec groups, joined their former rivals and together they conquered an empire. Later, they gave their name to the nation of México and their city of Tenochtitlán became what we know as México City today.

All this information will set the tone for the unit establishing that they will be traveling back in time to uncover the treasures that the Mixtecs left behind for the rest of the world to find and explore

### ***Student Response***

After the students have been exposed to this information they will explore the concept of creating a timeline using their own lives first. Then, the class will discuss through the use of a class timeline and they will create timelines to illustrate the eras using these basic questions: When and what happened during the Pre Classic Period? When and what happened during the Classic Period? When and what happened during the Post-classic Period? How does this relate to the Spanish conquest? The students will also work with mapping skills locating in maps the territories and countries that formed part of Mesoamerica and that today we name differently. They will understand that even though this happened a long time ago, we can still learn from their written form of communication and be able to know about things that happen in the past as if we were looking at them right now. Then, they will make predictions about what things from the past will they be learning about.

## **Section II: Mixtec Writing in the Codex Nuttall**

After the students learn the background about Mesoamerica they will learn about how the variety in languages there and how Mixtecs expressed their ideas writing. Apparently the development of phonetic writing was not as crucial to the evolution of civilization in Mesoamerica as it had been in other parts of the world. Pictographic communication and narrative art was remarkably effective in facilitating information exchange, especially at the “international” level.

This is the reason why today we can read these codices and make sense of them: because they did not have words. They used symbols that we can learn, decode and understand given the cultural background needed. This provides a lot of support and confidence for the students learning a second language. They can feel comfortable thinking that they can express their ideas in pictures and this is acceptable as a first stage and that spoken and written language will follow according to their readiness and potential.

In this section, students will explore with basic symbols and their categories. *The Codex Nuttall* is our object of study and will be used as a tool for this exploration. The students will learn how this is how the historians recorded every important event that happened. They will see how they used symbols to abbreviate everything in such a compact way that one page has the dates, places and characters involved in events like leaders being born, getting married, going to war, returning from war, making sacrifices to their gods and dying or being killed. They will also learn how they will display these on the walls during councils and retell the stories that had been recorded and memorized. They were used as a script for re-enactment of historical events.

Teachers and students will be able to explore this part of the unit using the manual created for this purpose and included as the Appendix for the whole curriculum unit as well as copies of pages for them to study, cut, paste and categorize grouping symbols in the categories learned. Students will learn how the symbols in the codices are divided into three categories: dates, people and places and how to read them. They will learn how the calendar works, the names of the years and days and how people’s names were directly related to the day they were born. They will see the pattern in the location of these symbols on the pages to be able to identify when the event happened and who are the people. People symbols will be studied in relationship to their stereotyped poses that illustrate particular events as well as in relationship of the main characters of the story portrayed in *The Codex Nuttall*. These symbols represent events that the children can relate to like marriage, war and death and they will identify how they affected the different characters throughout the story. Places symbols have a few categories and they represent the geography of the region and the characteristics that it had. Hills, towns, water and temples can be identified by common characteristics. The students will be able to recognize all these symbols in the pages of *The Codex Nuttall* and by this their understanding of the story will take place. About the strategy to read the hieroglyphics The students will learn that *The Codex Nuttall* is read from right to left following the scenes divided by vertical lines moving up and down in the pages. After cutting and pasting activities that will provide practice the students with practice identifying the symbols they will listen to the story of Lord Eight Deer as portrayed in *The Codex Nuttall* and will be able to understand the plot.

### ***Student Response***

After learning about the importance of these manuscripts and their use, the students will learn the basics of decoding. Using the pages of the manual the students will analyze pages of the Codex and will create tables to sort these symbols by dates, places and characters. They will take notes of what is going on in the scenes as they go and they will discover the first event of the story: Lord Eight Deer’s family lineage. This way the students will engage themselves in the process and are not given all the information at once. After enough practice is provided using the

pages and allowing the children to interact with the text then, listening to the epic, the students will apply their basic knowledge in symbols to decode small sections of the story. They will use laminated copies of *The Codex Nuttall*'s pages and dry erase markers to interact with the different kinds of symbols and explore their meaning working in groups. Each group will review one of the most important events in the story and retell that event to the others so they can apply the learned skills as well as remember the whole story line.

They will be having the same experience as the Mixtecs did when they gathered and retold the stories of their people. They will see first hand how important artists and writers are in our cultural development as well as learning about their history. At the same time they will be working in all the reading objectives that apply to comprehension using the story line in the symbols. They will be able to complete a graphic organizer with a story map of the epic and be able to identify characters, setting, problem and solution as well as sequencing the most important events in the life of Lord Eight Deer as told in *The Codex Nuttall*. Finally they will be able to write facts and the most important events about Lord Eight Deer's life applying their social studies, writing and comprehension skills. All these activities are supported by the use of the hieroglyphs, making it more manageable to understand by students learning a second language. The symbols and the story will be developed in Spanish but when supported in ESL, the students will have their prior knowledge plus the pictures to help them complete the reading activities in English. Last for this section, they will read a summarized version of the story *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer and Epic of Ancient Mexico*, retold and illustrated by John Pohl. Using this story, the students will be assessed in their analysis of the text structure and meaning. They will have active practice breaking down the text and analyzing the story line doing the application level of the comprehension objectives.

As an enrichment activity after all these experiences, the students will participate in a fieldtrip to the Museum of Fine Arts. Here they will visit the Mesoamerican exhibit where they will be able to see in a concrete situation many objects that were used in ancient times and that are represented in *The Codex Nuttall*. For example, clothing and accessories, basic home utensils like cups to drink chocolate and statues representing people from that time. Students will have with them laminated pages of *The Codex Nuttall* to help them identify objects and see them in the story as well. This will help them understand how real daily life was retold in these codices and how even daily use objects were used to tell stories and how different it is today. For example, a plain cup today doesn't have the history of America, contrasted to basic utensils like a cup or a vase in retelling their Legend of Creation. A "hands-on" activity will be a scavenger hunt in which students will find facts and details in their copies of the Codex in relation to the objects in the exhibit following written clues given to them prior to the Museum visit. This will help them see the real relationship between these events and real life. All these activities support their second language development by providing opportunities to use the new vocabulary in a real setting as well as allowing the children to interact and help each other mixing their ability level.

### **Section III: Application of Mixtec Writing**

After the exploration of the Mesoamerican culture and the experiences decoding Mixtec symbols, students will develop a writing project. First, the teacher will review all the basic categories of symbols: dates, people and places and how to identify them, elements that they share in common and a simple way to draw them. Then the teacher will model how to use these symbols to retell a story known by the children. This should be a narrative that has all the components of a plot: beginning, middle, and end, characters, setting, problem and solution. After seeing how a person can retell a common story with symbols, then the teacher will model portraying an important event in her life that children can relate to like a school event, a birthday, or a trip using symbols of dates, people, and places as the students have learned. It is important to choose events that students can relate to so it will make it easier for them to identify the basic

symbols and to open their imagination to what they can develop on their own. After that, the teacher will transcribe the story to a written narrative composition that follows the basic structure the children will use. Last she will present to the class her symbols, retelling the narrative to help students visualize what is expected from them.

### ***Student Response***

Students will have to pick a very important event in their lives and follow the steps modeled by the teacher to complete their project. Students will have to apply their basic knowledge in symbols and their categories and add their own symbols to give personal meaning to the story. Then, they will write a narrative composition to go with it. After that they will retell their pictographic version as well as their conventional written story to the class using their creativity. Here is when the teacher must allow the children to express themselves and let them be creative. This is the part of the unit that supports more the multicultural classroom as a great place to develop a second language. During the development of the activities, the students will work on their first language, but once they finish their story, the students will present it also in their second language. At this point the students will be able to present their work orally or written as a composition according to their level. They will be allowed to present using props, making it into a skit or narrating it using big illustrations for the main events. This way they will use their creativity and apply their knowledge in a new situation. At the same time they will experience how important artists and writers are to their culture by sharing their story with others to remember the same way Mixtecs did, as well as applying all the comprehension objectives needed to understand and develop a narrative.

## **LESSON PLANS**

### **Lesson One: What is Mesoamerica?**

This lesson is the introduction for the whole unit of study. My idea is that this unit and all the activities will take place during the Hispanic Heritage Month in September. Students coming from Hispanic heritage will have an opportunity to learn about the Mexican culture as an example of others. An extension activity for students of other cultures could be that after being introduced to the focus of the unit, they can start working on a research of how their culture compares to the Mixtecs and show similarities and differences by the end of the unit. This can be developed as an independent study activity that will involve the students' families as well.

To begin they will learn basic facts about Mesoamerica by using maps and timelines. First the teacher will present the students with a map of Mesoamerica and a modern map. The students will compare both and realize how much it has changed and how many Mesoamerican countries are now separate countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize and El Salvador. This will be the time to bring in other cultures that might be part of the classroom's population and connect them to the theme. Even though the Mixtec culture ended up becoming what we know as Mexico today, other cultures have the same cultural background as they. Students from other countries, other than Mexico, can take this as the jump-start of their research if they choose to do it. They will focus on how Mexico was a part of it and where the Mixtecs lived. They will use their atlases and paper to draw the shape of the maps and complete them with the name of the countries.

After that they will talk about time and how time brings change. They will compare how they were in the previous years in school and create a whole class timeline with different periods: PK period, K period, etc. They will add basic characteristics to each period that will include the basic behavior and activities they did in those periods of their lives. They can also use examples from their families if they have siblings in those grade levels. The focus of the activity will be in how time passes by and brings change. Using the students' experiences will make it more meaningful and rich for them.

Then the teacher will present how Mesoamerican culture changed through the Pre-Classic or Formative period extending from 1500 B.C.-A.D. 300, the Classic period extending from A.D. 300-950, and the Post-Classic period extending from A.D. 950-1521. Then, the students will complete a timeline that has those periods and the basic major changes that occurred in them.

During the Pre-Classic Period, Mesoamerican developed intensive agricultural techniques and their spiritual leaders evolved into positions of chiefs. It was a time for them to secure their authorities and centralize their power. Simple forms of writing emerged around 500 B.C. During the Classic Period, urban state societies like Teotihuacán were formed. Many ceremonial communities evolved from chiefdoms to kingdoms showing a strong development in their social organization. Unfortunately by the year 900 A.D. most of these were abandoned. Then during the Post-Classic Period most of the regional governments became segmented and driven by exchange and commerce. The search for exotic materials to increase the value of their gifts used to create alliances and exchange networks ruled the competition between them. By 1450, the Méxica, the most powerful of seven original Aztec groups, joined their former rivals and together they conquered an empire. Later they gave their name to the nation of México, and their city of Tenochtitlán became what we know as México City today.

By the end of this lesson the student will be able to name different countries that are now known to being part of Mesoamerica. They will be able to identify these countries on a map and label them. The students will be able to name the three basic periods in this culture development: Pre-Classic, Classic, and Post-Classic, as well as major changes and events of each in a short assessment. They will also talk about different cultural aspects of any culture: clothing, food, sports, language, traditions, family structure, and others and be able to make predictions as a class about the treasures that the Mixtec left us. The students will record their predictions as a class and this will be posted and revisited during the course of the unit. (Appendix A/B)

### **Lesson Two: How Did the Mixtec Write? How Do You Read the Codex?**

This lesson will introduce the background information about the hieroglyphic writing to the students and teach them the basic symbols. The teacher will begin the lesson showing the students different symbols from around their community, such as traffic signs and traffic lights that communicate a message without words. Then the teacher will establish that before writing, as they know it was created, communities like the Mixtec used pictures to record events and create books that kept their history. The teacher can bring resources like history books and illustrations of hieroglyphics made by other cultures to show the students other examples of how these communities created a language to communicate with pictures. The teacher will present *The Codex Nuttall* as an example of these books. The teacher will explain how they were used and will provide time for students to look at some pages to see for themselves.

Then the students will read and use the Manual included as an appendix for the whole curriculum unit with the teacher, to understand the three categories of symbols and how they are read. The students will look at *The Codex Nuttall* and try to predict what is happening on the first page of Lord Eight Deer's life, without knowing his name or any other detail that could help them. Their predictions will be recorded. They will try to identify his name, and the situations being portrayed by the scribe that give you the basic information about the main character and that are shown on this page.

After that, the students will be introduced to the three basic symbols in Mixtec writing: dates, people and places. Each symbol has its own structure. Dates are based on the Mixtec calendar. This calendar consists on the 260 days divided into the numbers 1 to 13 and 20 days named with nature elements inspired by animals, objects and weather. This calendar was used to determine the best dates to celebrate events like weddings, births, war, planting crops and even celebrations. This calendar is also very important because the Mixtec named their people by the day they were

born. This provides us with additional information when we are decoding because when we read the date of the event and the date related to the character, it is at the same time his or her name. Years are also represented by a different symbol, and whenever a big event would take place, the scribes would include the year that it happened. This gave them accuracy in their records of important events, such as the birth of leaders, wars, conquests and others. Once the students get to see the symbols of dates in the Codex and see a pattern, the process of finding the symbol is easier.

Then students will analyze the symbols of people. These have a more simple structure to them based on basic poses that portray different events. Clothing and color are also used to give more meaning to people symbols. Women have skirts; men don't have skirts but wear very elaborate accessories that showed who they were and their position in their society. Priests have their skin black and wear all the accessories that will show their status and role. Poses that show interaction between characters are different. People getting married are facing each other, people talking to each other are seated face to face and their fingers point to each other, people who are dead have their eyes closed and are in poses that do not show movement at all.

Students will also explore the symbols of places. They will observe examples of towns, temples, hills, water, and valleys as the basic symbols used by the scribes to share the setting of the scenes. The name of these was closely related to nature and the geography of the area. The students will be encouraged to find examples of these places and predict its name using the other symbols around them. Other symbols illustrate important places in the course of the events of the story like the ballpark and the steam baths. These symbols will be introduced as the story plot develops.

After having enough time to explore these symbols, the students will have time to practice in small groups using laminated copies from *The Codex Nuttall*. They will learn to identify symbols of dates, people and places using dry erase markers. Then they will use copies of these pages and categorize the symbols in dates, places and characters in a table. They will read the symbols to try to decipher their meaning with teacher's help and record the event. After all groups have processed the meaning of their scenes, they will share with the other groups their page. This will be a recreation of the way the Mixtec shared their history using these hieroglyphs to retell their most important events and their cultural lineage. After they all share, they will try to organize it in sequential order. The teacher will guide the activity as needed. After that, the teacher will read the epic to the students and they will see how accurate their conclusions were.

By the end of the lesson the students will be able to recognize the basic hieroglyphics for dates, people, and places as well as find the main idea of a picture with more than one symbol and arrange pictures in sequential order following the story line from *The Codex Nuttall*. The students will also be able to answer comprehension questions that assess the Reading TAKS Objectives (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) about the story line in *The Codex Nuttall*. Questions about plot, sequence, facts and opinions, cause and effect, drawing conclusions, making inferences, and identifying the author's purpose will be used in the assessment. (Appendix C/D)

As part of this section a fieldtrip to the Museum of Fine Arts could be an opportunity for the children to see the objects portrayed in the Codex. The students will visit the Pre Columbian exhibit and explore all the objects. It should be brought to their attention how people in this era decorated house objects with events of their history and they were looking at them daily reminding them who they were. They should be able to make the comparison between them and us. Today we don't do that, cups don't have the history of America. Only in special occasions like an important anniversary of a date maybe coins and stamps are made to remind us of that but not things we use daily. They will walk in pairs according to their ESL level, so they can read the information provided in the exhibit and share their ideas. After walking through the exhibit, the students will be given a scavenger hunt sheet. This sheet will have clues about objects they have

to identify at the museum remembering what they learned from the pages of *The Codex Nuttall* and be able to describe them. These objects can include clothing, accessories, kitchen objects like cups, home accessories like vases and were either portrayed in the Codex or have some kind of history attached to them. (Appendix E/F)

### **Lesson Three: Can You Write like the Mixtec?**

The purpose of this lesson is provide the opportunity for the students to create their own piece of writing and represent it using symbols for dates, people and places learned as well as original symbols and to retell it and transcribe it into a narrative composition. After that, the students will present their creation to their peers using creative ways to share such as posters, pictures, skits, and props.

The teacher will model the first part of the lesson to give the students the background the need. They will review the concepts learned from *The Codex Nuttall* and the symbols used by the Mixtec. Then the teacher will explain that they will all create an original piece of writing like the Mixtec did. Time will be allowed for the student to think about an important event in their lives that they want to share in their project. They can record ideas in their journals to revisit later when they are ready to start the writing process.

The teacher will model drawing symbols to share a current event. It is important to give the student participation during this part of the lesson so they can relate to the event and are able to decode it more easily. The teacher should pick an event know by all the students such as the first day of school or open house night. Symbols for dates, people, and places will be used. The students and the teacher will work together to create symbols for places not portrayed by the Mixtec, like school, if the event takes place there. After the picture is completed, the event will be narrated by the children and the teacher just as the Mixtec did. This will prepare the students for the next part that would be writing.

The teacher will write a narrative about the event with the help of the children using the symbols as a guide. After that they will all contribute with more details to describe the event completely giving it the shape of a finished composition. After that, students will reenact the events in the story and others will create puppets or a graphic organizer to retell the story among them. This will give them a sense of ownership to the shared story and prepare them to create their own.

Then the teacher will give students options and opportunity to write their own story in pictures first. After that they will share their own ideas as of how to share the story with others. Some ideas could be to present the story in pictures and narrate it, create a skit, use props created by them, record the voice, and then represent the story as read. Time has to be allowed for the students to work on their projects.

By the end of this lesson when the projects are finished, the students will present to their class and the teacher will assess using a rubric. (Appendix G)

### **Conclusion**

We, as teachers, have to accept the fact that in our reality today teaching is difficult. The media and the technology, even though are great resources for us as educators, do not always work on our side in terms of providing the support that we need to get the job done with our students. Our classrooms are competing with the outside world, and the demands on us are more and more every day. Parents are not always there for us, not because they don't want to be, but because they don't know how. Making instruction about the children and their backgrounds can be the key to make the experiences in the classroom more interesting and meaningful and a tool to increase the parental involvement that is so needed today more that ever.

This unit was created with the purpose of connecting the students to their cultural background and creating that multicultural environment in the classroom that makes our children feel welcome and accepted in the safest place for them: school. I hope that my ideas reach out to you as a teacher and maybe a parent, but most of all as a human being that wants the best for our children. Helping them understand where they come from, who they are, and showing them all the possibilities and the things they can accomplish can make a big difference in their future.

## Appendix A

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A. Write the names of the countries that belonged to Mesoamerica.

B. Write the letter in the blank matching the characteristics of the different periods in Mesoamerican evolution to the period name.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Pre-Classic Period
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Classic Period
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Post-Classic Period

- a. 300-950 A.D. Tehotihuacán  
is formed ceremonial  
communities evolved  
showing social organization.
- b. 1500 B.C.-300 A.D. intensive  
agricultural techniques were  
developed as well as simple  
forms of writing.
- c. 950-1521 A.D. most of the  
regional governments became  
segmented and driven by  
exchange and commerce.

C. Make a prediction of what you believe was the “treasure” the Mixtec culture left for the world.

## Appendix B

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

A. Escribe los nombres de los países que formaban parte de Mesoamerica.

B. Escribe la letra de las características de los períodos de evolución de la cultura Mixteca junto a la etapa correspondiente.

- |          |                      |   |
|----------|----------------------|---|
| 1. _____ | Período Pre-Clásico  | a. 300-950 D.C. Teotihuacán se formó. Comunidades ceremoniales se comenzaron a desarrollar pero luego fueron abandonadas. |
| 2. _____ | Período Clásico      | b. 1500 A.C.-300 D.C. Se desarrollan muchas técnicas en la agricultura y formas simples de escritura.                     |
| 3. _____ | Período Post-Clásico | c. 950-1521 D.C. Los gobiernos se dividen por intercambio comercial.  |

C. Haz una predicción de lo que esperas sean esos “tesoros” que la cultura Mixteca le dejó al mundo.

## Appendix C

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

In your own words answer the questions related to *The Codex Nuttall* and Lord Eight Deer.

1. Complete the story map:

Characters	Setting
Problem	Solution

2. In your own words, write the most important events in Lord Eight Deer's life.


3. Answer the questions:

- How can you describe Lord Eight Deer? Make a table using facts and opinions about this character.
- What would you say was his purpose in life?
- What consequences did his conquests bring?
- What do you think would have been different if he hadn't succeeded?
- What was the purpose of recording his life in *The Codex Nuttall*?

## Appendix D

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

En tus propias palabras contest a las preguntas relacionadas con el Codex Nuttall y el Señor 8 Venado.

1. Completa el mapa de la historia:

Personajes	Ambiente
Problema	Solución

2. En tus palabras, escribe los eventos más importantes en la vida del Señor 8 Venado


3. Contesta las preguntas:

- f. ¿Cómo describirías al Señor 8 Venado? Haz una tabla de hechos y opiniones sobre el personaje.
- g. ¿Cuál dirías tu que era su propósito en la vida?
- h. ¿Qué consecuencias trajeron sus conquistas?
- i. ¿Qué piensas que hubiera sido diferente si no hubiera tenido éxito?
- j. ¿Cuál fue el propósito de escribir sobre su vida en el Codex Nuttall?

## Appendix E

### Museum of Fine Arts Scavenger Hunt Activity

Names of partners: \_\_\_\_\_

Today you will be visiting the Pre-Columbian exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts. In this area of the museum we will see objects that will be familiar to you after reading *The Codex Nuttall* and *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer*. With your partner, you will take turns to read the clues and find the objects. Then you will describe them in the space provided.

What women wore.  
C.N. page 42

What Lord Eight Deer might have worn during the ball game.  
C.N. page 45

What Lord Eight Deer wore on his nose.  
C.N. Page 52

## Appendix F

### Actividad de Observación en el Museo de Arte

Nombre del equipo: \_\_\_\_\_

Hoy van a visitar la exhibición de arte Precolombina en el Museo. En esta área del museo vamos a ver objetos que nos serán familiares después de haber leído la Leyenda del Señor 8 Venado y el Codex Nuttall. Con tu pareja, van a tomar turnos para leer las claves y encontrar los objetos. Luego los van a describir en el espacio provisto.

Lo que usan las mujeres.  
C.N. pág. 42

Lo que podría haber usado el Señor 8 Venado durante el juego de pelota.  
C.N. pág.45

Lo que usaba el Señor 8 Venado en la nariz.  
C.N. pág. 52

## Appendix G

### Grading Rubric

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of the Project: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>A. WRITTEN PROJECT</b>  1. Understanding and use of Mixtec symbols	Project has all three categories of symbols used correctly.  5 pts.	Project has two categories of symbols used correctly.  3 pts.	Project has one category of symbols used correctly.  1 pt.
2. Story line	Story has sequence. Plot is complete. A lot of details are provided.  5 pts.	Story has a weak sequence. Plot has some coherence. Some details are provided.  3 pts.	Story has no sequence. Plot lacks coherence. Few details are provided.  1 pt.
<b>B. ORAL PROJECT</b>  1. Presentation	Presentation was well planned and organized. All the audience was engaged.  5 pts.	Presentation was interrupted for lack of organization. Half the audience was engaged.  3 pts.	Presentation was disorganized and showed no planning. The audience was disengaged.  1 pt.
2. Creativity	Use of resources in an original way. Well-planned ideas are shown.  5 pts.	Use of resources in a standard way. Some planning was shown.  3pts.	Lack of originality and planning was shown.  1 pt.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Works Cited

Nuttall, Zelia. *The Codex Nuttall: A Picture Manuscript from Ancient Mexico*. New York: Dover Publications, 1975.  
This book is a reproduction of the Ancient Mexican manuscript that provides full color illustrations showing the codices.

Pohl, John M.D. *Ancient Books: Mixtec Group Codices*. Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc. 1993.  
<<http://www.famsi.org/research/pohl/jpcodices/index.html>>.

---. *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer: An Epic of Ancient Mexico*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.  
This book was written for students from nine to twelve years old and is a retelling of the most important Mexican historical epic.

### Supplemental Resources

Carmack, Robert, Janine Gasco and Garry H. Gossen. *The Legacy of Mesoamerica History and Culture of a Native American Civilization*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996.  
This book provides an overview of origins and development of Mesoamerican culture as well as the development of language and languages in Mesoamerica and also indigenous literature.

Cohelo, Elizabeth. *Adding English*. Toronto: Pippin Publishing Corporation, 2004.  
This book has ideas about how to create an appropriate environment in a classroom by promoting multiculturalism as the right atmosphere for a second language acquisition.

Byland, Bruce & John M.D. Pohl. *In the Realm of Eight Deer*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1994.  
This book provides information about the process of interpretation of the codices and provides evidence that the codices retell real events.

Coe, Michael & Rex Koontz. *Mexico from the Olmecs to the Aztec*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002.  
This book provides information about the Ancient Mexican cultures with a standard overview of Ancient Mexican history.

### Books for Students

Forbes, Claire. *Pueblos del Pasado*. New Jersey: Two-Can Publishing LLC, 2002.  
This is an expository children's book that illustrates and gives information about ancient cultures including the Maya culture which can bring pictorial examples and useful information when talking about how symbols illustrate real life objects.

Pohl, John M. D. *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer: An Epic of Ancient Mexico*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.  
This book was written for students from nine to twelve years old and is a retelling of the most important Mexican historical epic.