

Cortes and the Aztecs: A Lesson in Leadership

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two to three class periods

Student Objectives

- Research the accomplishments of Hernán Cortés and the characteristics of effective leaders.
- Conduct a debate about his leadership skill.

Materials

- Video on *unitedstreaming: Conquistadors: Hernán Cortés*

Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- The Aztec First Encounter Cortes
 - The Aztec Empire
 - Cortes's First Meeting With The Aztecs
 - Cortes Makes Allies and Marches on the Aztecs
 - The Aztecs Make Enemies of Their Own
 - Cortes Allies with the Tlaxcalans
 - Moctezuma Submits to Cortes
 - Cortes Rules over Mexico
 - Cortes Rules the Aztec Empire
 - The Aztecs Succumb to Disease and Cortes
 - Aztec Rebellion in Tenochtitlan
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- Computer with Internet access
 - Paper, pens, pencils
 - Newsprint and markers

Procedures

1. In a class discussion, encourage students to think about and discuss the personal qualities of Hernán Cortés and his motivations as a conquistador.
2. Then ask students to take a more general view and brainstorm universal qualities of an effective leader. Write students' ideas on a sheet of newsprint. To spur suggestions and discussion, suggest the following leadership qualities:
 - Having a vision and a plan for making that vision a reality
 - Being knowledgeable, having direction, and believing in what you are doing
 - Being charismatic, or having a dynamic personality that attracts others (Leaders usually have a loyal following.)
 - Having the ability to make decisions and take action
3. Tell students that they are going to hold a debate on whether Cortés's leadership skills ultimately let him conquer the Aztecs.
4. Divide students into two groups. Have one group take the position that Cortés's personal qualities and leadership skills helped him conquer the Aztecs. Have the second group take the position that his leadership skills did not help him conquer the Aztecs.
5. Tell students to use both library resources and the Internet in their research and to take notes for use in the debate.
6. Suggest that students look at these Web sites for information about Cortés:
 - <http://www.tcr.org/mexico.html>
 - http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/PRESCOTT/bk02_ch03.html
 - http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/PRESCOTT/bk02_ch08.html
 - <http://www.millersv.edu/~columbus/papers/richart.html>
7. Suggest that students look at these Web sites, which describe qualities of a leader:
 - http://www.eaglesflight.com/leadership/10_qualities.html
 - <http://www.lisn.org/leadership.htm>
 - http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/TM/WS_leadership_qualities.shtml
8. When the two groups have completed their research, conduct the debate. Give each side a chance to present an opening argument, followed by a rebuttal. Continue the debate for as long as students have information to add.
9. Conclude the lesson by bringing the class back together and discussing the debate. Which side does the class think made stronger arguments? What is the class consensus? Do the majority of students think that Cortés's leadership skills resulted in his conquest of Mexico? What other factors, such as superior military strength, do students think helped seal Cortés's victory and the fate of the Aztecs?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.



- **3 points:** Students contributed enthusiastically to class discussions; actively and competently contributed to their group's research; helped present a strong argument at the outset of the debate; spoke clearly and forcefully during the debate.
- **2 points:** Students contributed somewhat to class discussions; contributed to their group's research; helped present a reasonably strong argument at the outset of the debate; spoke somewhat clearly and forcefully during the debate.
- **1 point:** Students did not contribute to class discussions; did not contribute meaningfully to their group's research; participated only minimally in the presentation of an argument at the outset of the debate; spoke little, if at all, during the debate.

Vocabulary

Aztecs

Definition: A Native American people who built an empire in Mexico that thrived during the 1400s and early 1500s

Context: Moctezuma was the Aztec emperor in power when Hernán Cortés arrived in 1519.

charisma

Definition: A quality that inspires exceptional loyalty and enthusiasm; personal magnetism or charm

Context: Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy are two American presidents considered to have had charisma.

conquistador

Definition: The Spanish word for conqueror; it generally refers to the first Europeans to enter a region in the New World for the purpose of conquering the native peoples and settling in the area.

Context: Hernán Cortés is considered one of the great conquistadors of the 16th century.

Hernán Cortés

Definition: A Spanish conquistador who defeated the Aztecs in 1521

Context: Through a combination of skill and luck, Hernán Cortés defeated the Aztecs in 1521, two years after he arrived in Mexico.

Moctezuma

Definition: The emperor of the Aztecs from 1502 to 1519

Context: Moctezuma had a reputation as a valiant soldier, but he was unable to unite his vast empire during his 17-year rule.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – World History: Understands the economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the Americas between 1500 and 1750
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts; Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>