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Hernán Cortés

Hernán Cortés was a Spanish conquistador (conqueror). He is famous for

conquering the Aztec Empire in Mexico from 1519 to 1521. The Spanish

settled this area of Mexico after their victory. The next 300 years, the Spanish stay in Mexico.

In 1485, Cortés was born in the country of Spain. As a young boy, Cortés heard stories of Christopher Columbus’s voyages. When Cortés was 19, he sailed to the New World. He got a job as a clerk. He learned how colonies were governed (run). Cortés had many friends who were Spanish explorers. Cortés was made the mayor of one of the towns in Cuba after it was conquered.

Cortés was to take a group of ships to Mexico in 1518. He was ordered to conquer the Aztec civilization. In1519, he landed in Mexico with 11 ships, 500 soldiers and 100 sailors. Cortés was worried that some of the men would be frightened by the Aztec warriors, so he burned all the ships. The only option was success or death.

Cortés trained his men for several months. He made friends with other tribes that were enemies of the Aztecs. When he marched to the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, Cortés has over 1,500 fighters; 1,000 were native people who wanted to fight against the Aztecs.

The ruler of the Aztecs was Montezuma II. Montezuma II welcomed Cortés into the city. His reasons for the welcome are unknown. Cortés took Montezuma II hostage. Cortés believed that he could control the Aztec by keeping their leader captive. Cortés was able to rule the lands of central Mexico for some months before problems started to occur.



A fight broke out between Cortés’s men and the Aztec while Cortés was away. When he returned, Cortés had to win back Tenochtitlan. Cortés led a battle in 1521 to defeat the Aztecs. The Spanish sent more troops to Mexico and tore down the building of the Aztecs. They destroyed Tenochtitlan and settled in the city. The built new buildings, renamed the city to Mexico City, and ruled the land for over 300 years.

Hernán Cortés

Directions: Complete the questions below referring back to the text on the other side of this page.

1. Cortés is most famous for which deed?

A. conquering the Aztec empire

B. becoming the mayor of a Cuban town

C. starting construction of Mexico City

D. becoming friends with native people

2. What did Montezuma II do to Cortés and his men as they approached Tenochtitlan?

A. welcomed them

B. killed them all

C. captured them for human sacrifice

D. took the Spanish troops as hostage

3. Which was a result of the defeat of the Aztec?

A. Mexico City was burned

B. Tenochtitlan was destroyed

C. Aztec artwork was collected

D. The Spanish left Mexico and did not return.

4. What did Cortés do to Montezuma after the two met?

A. killed them

B. took him hostage

C. invited him to visit Cuba

D. offered a sacrifice to the Aztec gods

5. About how long was Spanish rule in Mexico after Cortés conquered the Aztec?

A. 3 years

B. 30 years

C. 3 months

D. 300 years