

CHAPTER  
**6**  
SECTION 1

# Note Taking Study Guide

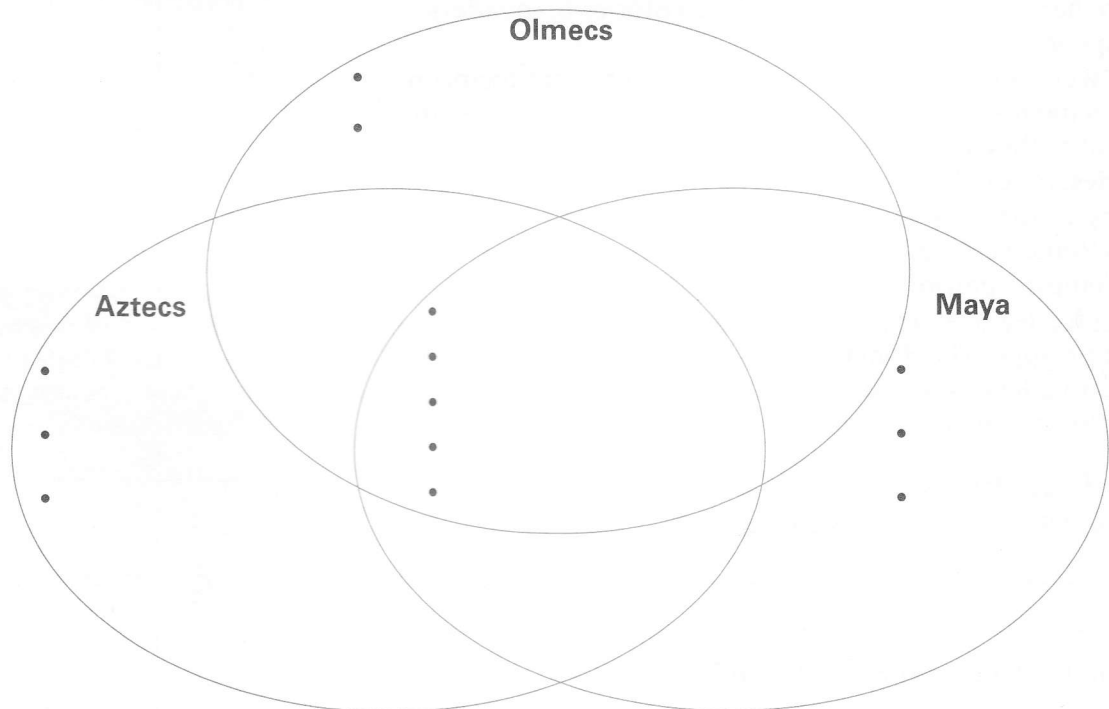
## CIVILIZATIONS OF MESOAMERICA

**Focus Question:** What factors encouraged the rise of powerful civilizations in Mesoamerica?

**A.** As you read "People Settle in the Americas," complete the following chart to record the similarities and differences in how early people adapted to climate and geography in different parts of the Americas.

Adapting to the Americas	
Climate	Geography
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____

**B.** As you read this section in your textbook, complete the following Venn diagram in order to recognize the similarities and differences among the cultures of Mesoamerica.



## CHAPTER

## 6

## SECTION 1

## Section Summary

## CIVILIZATIONS OF MESOAMERICA

People first came to the Americas from Asia between 60,000 B.C. and 18,000 B.C. They may have walked across a land bridge or come by boat. In **Mesoamerica**, a cultural region including Mexico and Central America, people grew **maize** and other crops. They raised animals and settled into villages by about 1500 B.C. As populations grew, some of the villages developed into the early, great cities of the Americas.

The earliest American civilization, that of the **Olmecs**, developed along the Gulf Coast of Mexico. That civilization lasted from about 1500 B.C. to 400 B.C. A class of priests and nobles led it. Later Mesoamerican peoples, including the Maya and Aztecs, adopted elements of Olmec culture, such as carved stone, hieroglyphs, and the calendar.

Around 300 B.C., the Maya were building large cities in present-day Guatemala. By the time the Mayan golden age began, about A.D. 250, Mayan civilization included large, independent city-states throughout southern Mexico and Central America. The Maya were not united politically as an empire. Instead, cities maintained contact through trade and, sometimes, warfare. Mayan cities included temples, palaces, and **stelae**, which were tall stone monuments decorated with carvings. Scribes carved each stela with historical information, such as the names of rulers and dates. They also wrote about astronomy and religion in books made of bark paper. However, around A.D. 900, the Maya abandoned most of their cities, possibly because of frequent warfare or over-farming.

Aztec civilization began in the **Valley of Mexico**. The Aztecs founded **Tenochtitlán**, their capital city, in A.D. 1325. Because it was located on an island in a lake, they found ingenious ways to create more farmland. They built **chinampas**, which were artificial islands made from mud and reeds.

Unlike the Maya, the Aztecs built an empire. They also fought wars continuously. War brought wealth and power. As their empire grew, the Aztecs used **tribute**, or payment from conquered peoples, to make Tenochtitlán magnificent. They also sacrificed war prisoners to the sun god. Among the gods they worshipped were powerful gods from an earlier culture centered at the city of **Teotihuacán**. Although the city fell, its culture influenced later peoples of Mesoamerica.

## Review Questions

1. How were Mayan city-states connected?

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2. How did the Aztecs benefit from war?

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## READING CHECK

Where was the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán?

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## VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *ingenious* mean in the underlined sentence? It comes from a Latin word meaning "natural talent." Use this word-origins clue to help you figure out the meaning of *ingenious*.

## READING SKILL

**Compare and Contrast** Compare and contrast the culture of the Maya with the culture of the Aztecs, including their types of governments and achievements.

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