**Aim: How can we judge if a civilization is advanced?**

**Topic: MesoAmeriacn Civilizations**

**Watch these helpful links first:**

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/civilizations-in-the-americas/v/mayans-and-teotihuacan>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/medieval-times/maya-aztec-and-inca/v/aztec-empire>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/medieval-times/maya-aztec-and-inca/v/inca-empire-overview>

**Introduction: Latin American Geography**

Human beings originated in Africa. However, During the last ice age, large amounts of ocean water froze into thick ice sheets. A land bridge between Siberia and Alaska was created as the ocean levels dropped. Across this bridge, groups of Paleolithic hunters in Asia followed herds of bison and mammoths into North America. Over the following centuries, the nomadic hunter-gatherers in North America migrated eastward and southward. These first Americans settled in many different regions and had to adapt to a variety of climates and landforms such as woodlands, fertile plains, mountain ranges and thick rain forests. This geography divided the people into different tribes, some of which would become powerful empires.

1. **How did humans get from Africa to North and South America?**

**2) How did the geography of the Americas affect the tribes?**

**Task: An advanced civilization has a centralized government, organized religion, social classes, different jobs, system of writing, art and architecture, infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc) and public works** **(government buildings) and cities.**

**You and your partner will read about each civilization and answer the following question underneath each civilization:**

1. **Based on the criteria above, is the civilization advanced? Why/why not? Explain in 3-4 sentences EACH using specifics.**

**Document #1: Aztecs**

The Aztecs lived in present day Mexico. The Aztecs were a warrior people. They had a great capitol city known as **Tenochtitlan** which was actually built in an island on a lake. The city had palaces, temples, markets, all of which were linked by streets and avenues. Aqueducts (sewer systems) (like the Romans) funneled fresh water in from the mainland. The Aztecs controlled an extensive trade network that brought many products from faraway regions to the capital. Aztec religious practices centered on public ceremonies designed to communicate with the gods. Priests made offerings with ritual dramas, songs and dances using masks. The most important ritual involved the sun god known as Huitzilopochtili. According to Aztec belief, Huitzilopochtli made the sun rise every day, but only when he was nourished by blood. Without regular offerings of blood, the sun would fall and all life would perish. The Aztecs used prisoners they captured from war for their victims. Victims would be taken to the altar atop the Great Temple, where priests carved out their hearts. Wars were fought to get prisoners for the massive human sacrifices. Society based its power on military conquest. They often let local rulers govern their regions. The Aztecs demanded tribute such as gold, maize (corn), cocoa bean, jade, cotton and other products. If they failed to pay tribute, the Aztec warriors would responds brutally. In Aztec society, the nobles were warriors; priests came from the best families; merchants formed a separate class; artisans did skilled work with precious metals and made elaborate weapons; the farmers and laborers were the lowest classes.

**Is the Civilization advanced? Explain:**

**Document #2: Mayans**

The Maya homeland stretched from Southern Mexico into Northern Central America. The Mayans developed independent city-states, ruled by a god-king (a leader they believed to also be a god). These cities were centers for religious ceremony and trade. The Mana cities (such as Tikal and Chicen Itza) featured giant stone pyramids with stone stairways, temples, palaces and stone carvings dedicated to the gods and important rulers. They invented two calendars to calculate time (a 260 day religious calendar and a 365 day solar one). They also invented a system of counting using zero. The Mayan system of picture writing consisted of 800 hieroglyphics (pictures). The Mayans worshiped nature gods and practiced human sacrificing to appease the gods. The Mayans were also very good farmers and learned to terrace farm (farm in the mountains by creating steps). Their farming led to an accumulation of wealth and development of social classes. At the top was the king, then the noble class (priests and warriors), then the merchants, master craftsmen (artisans) and finally the peasant majority was the lowest class.

**Is the civilization advanced? Explain:**

**Document #3: Incas**

The Inca established their empire in South America (centered around modern day Peru). The Capital, Cuzco, was the heart of the empire with grand temples and palaces. The Incas focused on nature spirits. The main god was the creator god, and then came the sun god, Inti. Since the Incan ruler was considered a descendent of Inti, sun worship was also king worship. This rarely involved human sacrifices, though. To control the huge empire, rulers divided their territory and people into units, governed by a central bureaucracy (government organization). Citizens worked for the state. The state controlled the economy, regulating production and distribution of goods. Land was organized into upper and lower geographical units, each producing goods the other could not. An extensive road and bridge system tied the empire together, with all roads leading to the capital. The Incas made everyone speak the same language and founded schools to teach the Incan ways. Unmarried women were trained as teachers, spinners and beer makers. Land ownership was divided in three: state lands, religious lands, and community lands. Farmers worked on all three types of land. They grew barley, corn, wheat, and potatoes. They also used terrace farming to farm on the mountains. History and literature were memorized as part of an oral tradition. For numerical information, they created a counting device (quipu), a set of knotted strings used to record data. They also developed two types of calendars, one for night and day.

**Is the civilization advanced? Explain:**

**Which of the civilizations do you believe is the most advanced? Explain in one full paragraph.**