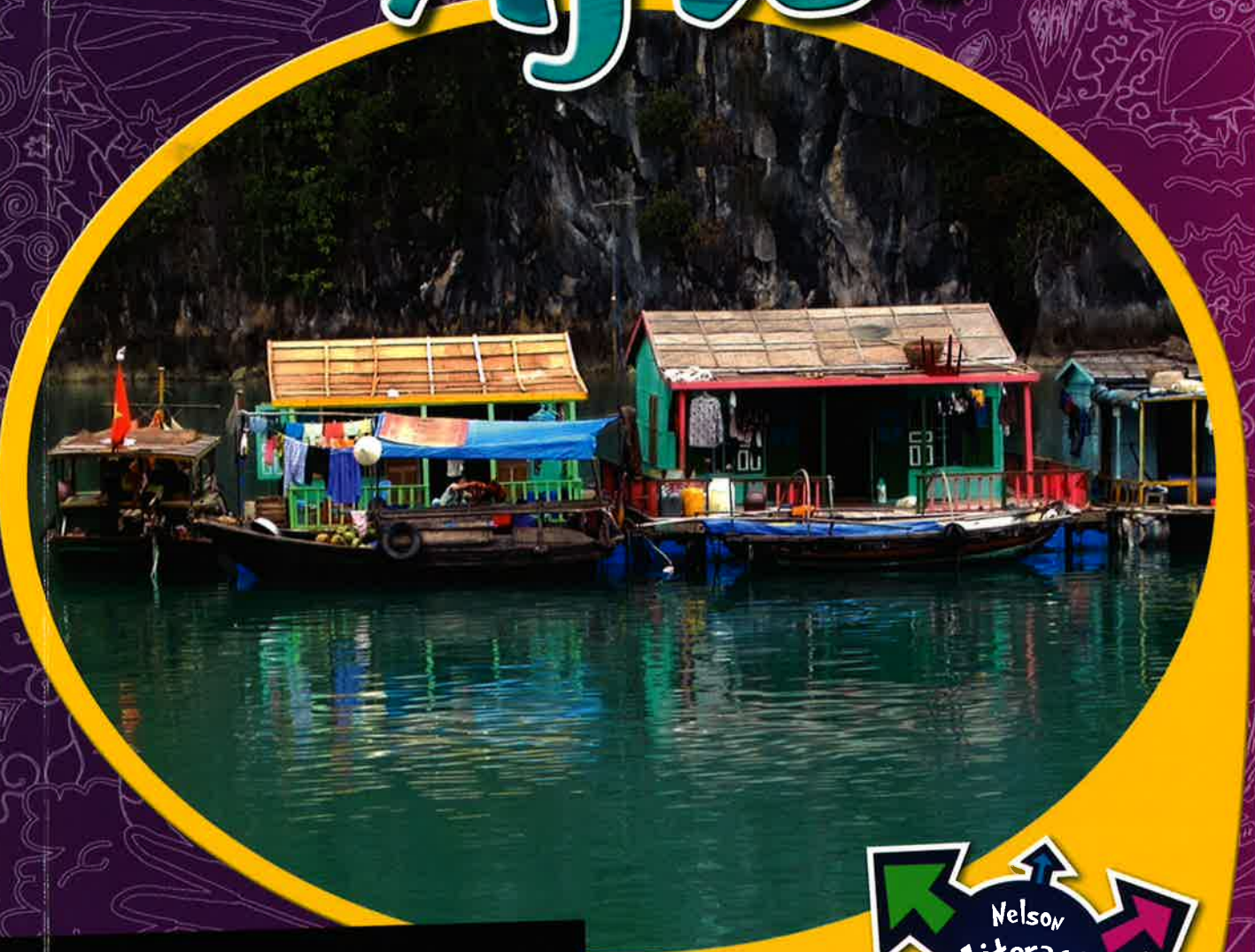
Homes Afloat



Communities on the water

Sharon Parsons

Nelson Literacy Directions

HOMES Afloat

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Dear Reader

While researching this book, I found out about many interesting and varied cultures that have adapted to life on and around bodies of water. Part 1 is devoted to the Aztecs, who had one of the world's oldest and most ingenious "floating" agricultural systems. In Chapter 4, there's an easy chocolate drink for you to make, based on an Aztec recipe. In Part 2, go on a virtual voyage to other communities living and working on canals, rivers and lakes around the world.

> "A WONDER OF THE *CHINAMPAS* IS HOW THE AZTECS FARMED A WETLAND ENVIRONMENT PRODUCTIVELY AND SUSTAINABLY."
>
> **PROFESSOR PHILIP CROSSLEY**

It's not just people who live on or around water, of course. In Chapter 12, you will read about the plight of polar bears that hunt from floating sheets of sea ice. You'll find out about how their seasonal floating "homes" are melting earlier than usual as a result of changing climatic conditions in the Arctic region.

My sincere thanks to the following people for their time, information, images and enthusiasm for this book:

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1 The Aztecs



PART ONE: AN ANCIENT FLOATING EMPIRE

The Aztec Empire was an ancient Central American culture that is revered for its ingenuity in many areas of life, such as architecture, agriculture, engineering and empire building. The Aztec Empire, which thrived from the early 1400s, made its capital at Tenochtitlán (say *te-noch-tee-tlahn*), the site of modern-day Mexico City. Aztec legends relate how the early Aztecs saw a vision of a place where an eagle was perched on a cactus, eating a snake. They believed that, even though the land was a marshy lake, this was the place where they should build their city.

Today, the coat of arms of modern-day Mexico features an eagle eating a snake on top of a cactus.



Mexico's coat of arms



a seventeenth-century map of Tenochtitlán (left), drawn by Spanish conquistadors

The Kukulcàn pyramid in Chichén Itzá (above) is among the most visited archaeological sites in Mexico.

The **Amazing** Aztecs

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People

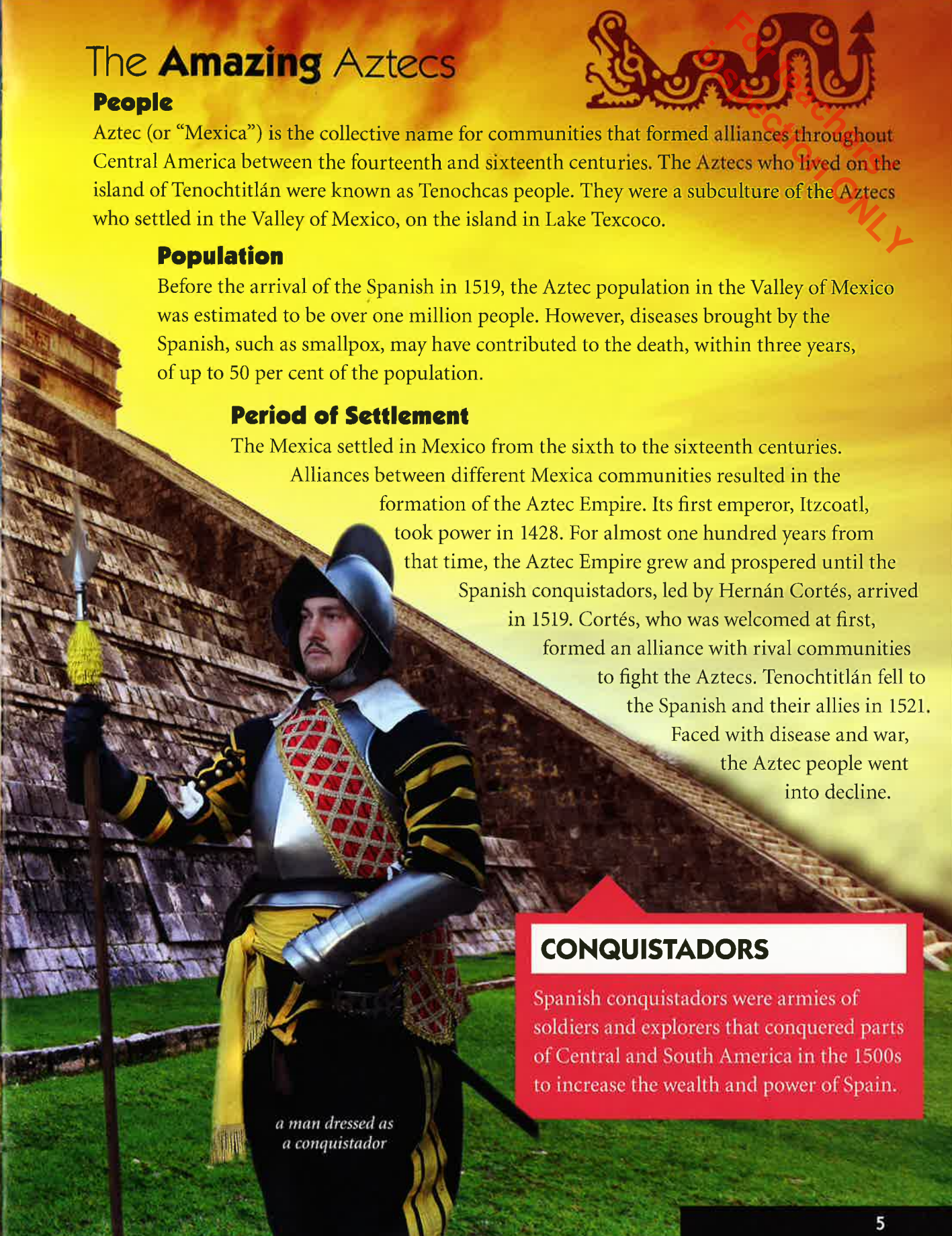
Aztec (or "Mexica") is the collective name for communities that formed alliances throughout Central America between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Aztecs who lived on the island of Tenochtitlán were known as Tenochcas people. They were a subculture of the Aztecs who settled in the Valley of Mexico, on the island in Lake Texcoco.

Population

Before the arrival of the Spanish in 1519, the Aztec population in the Valley of Mexico was estimated to be over one million people. However, diseases brought by the Spanish, such as smallpox, may have contributed to the death, within three years, of up to 50 per cent of the population.

Period of Settlement

The Mexica settled in Mexico from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries. Alliances between different Mexica communities resulted in the formation of the Aztec Empire. Its first emperor, Itzcoatl, took power in 1428. For almost one hundred years from that time, the Aztec Empire grew and prospered until the Spanish conquistadors, led by Hernán Cortés, arrived in 1519. Cortés, who was welcomed at first, formed an alliance with rival communities to fight the Aztecs. Tenochtitlán fell to the Spanish and their allies in 1521. Faced with disease and war, the Aztec people went into decline.



a man dressed as a conquistador

CONQUISTADORS

Spanish conquistadors were armies of soldiers and explorers that conquered parts of Central and South America in the 1500s to increase the wealth and power of Spain.

Aztec **Ingenuity**

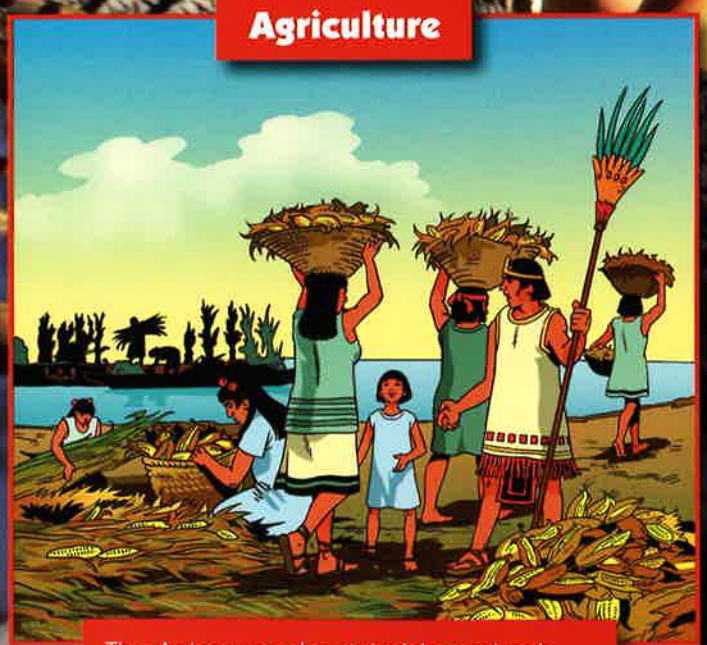
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Architecture

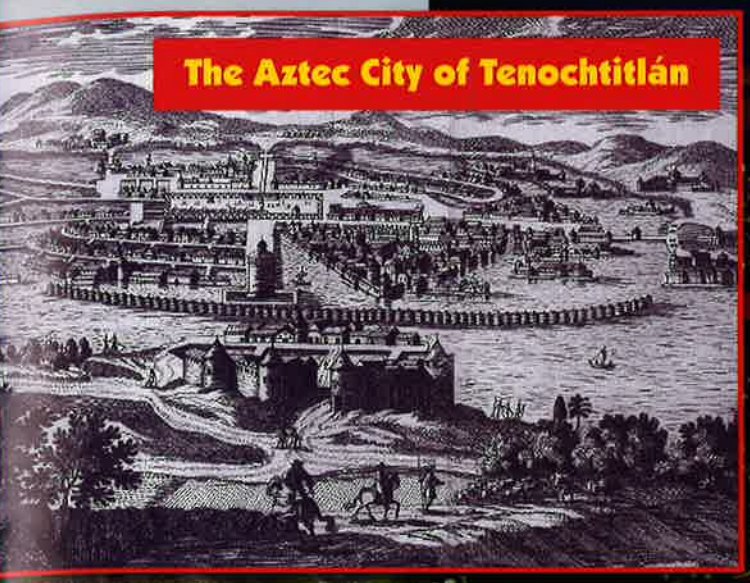
The Aztecs built the city of Tenochtitlán using materials from abandoned cities. The city was divided into four equal areas leading to a twin-staircase pyramid, stone temples and a royal palace.

Agriculture



The Aztecs used sustainable methods to build self-contained islands on which they could grow a range of crops, capable of producing food all year round.

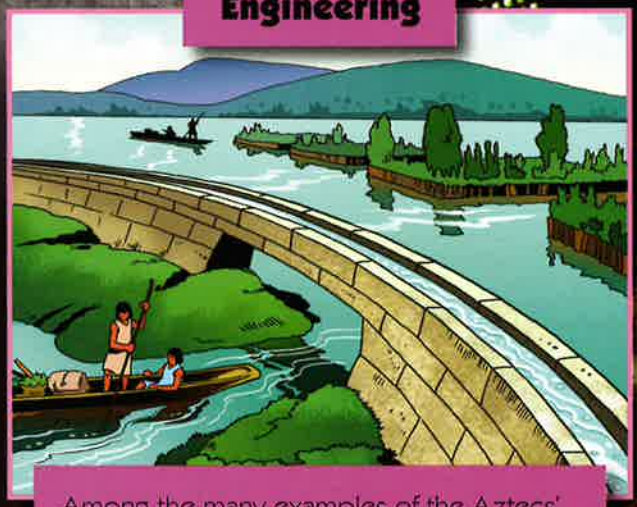
The Aztec City of Tenochtitlán



Reclaimed Land

Tenochtitlán was only about 14 square kilometres in area, but the city needed to house over 250 000 people. Land reclamation enabled the growing population to create small islands for settlement and for growing crops.

Engineering



Among the many examples of the Aztecs' engineering ingenuity were dams that filtered out drinkable water from Lake Texcoco's salty water, and aqueducts that channelled water from nearby springs to the settlements.

The Aztec Site Today



Mexico City is built on the site of the Aztec captital and, after land reclamation, the city is now about 1 500 square kilometres, with a population of around 19 million people.