Conquistadors: Hernán Cortés: Teacher’s Guide

**Program Description**
In search of gold, 500 Spanish adventurers landed in the Americas in 1519. Hernán Cortés and his conquistadors took control of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Learn how Aztec prophesies, disease, and a Maya woman played pivotal roles that helped the conquistadors.

**Onscreen Questions**
Part I—Before watching the video
- The first Europeans who came to America were called explorers. Think about why Spain sent explorers to the New World.
- As you watch the program, pay attention to how these explorers became known as conquistadors. What did it mean to be a conquistador?

Part I—After watching the video
- The Aztecs were loathed and feared by the Totonaca and Tlascalans. In what ways did the Aztecs alienate their neighbors?
- How did Cortés use other groups’ distrust of the Aztecs to his own advantage? Discuss the merits and the risks of this military strategy.

Part II—Before watching the video
- As you watch the program, think about the dangers that sailors faced while traveling to the New World in the sixteenth century. What perils would they have faced on sea and land?
- Think about what motivated Hernán Cortés and other explorers to make dangerous and financially risky voyages to the New World.

Part II—After watching the video
- Moctezuma decided to send gifts to the Spanish after learning of their alliance with neighboring peoples.
- What did he hope to accomplish by sending gifts?
- Why was his choice of gifts a fatal error?
- Discuss the Spanish soldiers’ reactions to the gifts?
Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

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

Materials

- Conquistadors: Hernán Cortés video and VCR
- 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
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

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](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](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
Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the 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](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)