Maya, Aztec, and Inca Civilizations

Timeline Cards
Subject Matter Expert
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Illustration and Photo Credits

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CHAPTER 1: The Maya: People of Mystery

Archaeologists believe that the Maya culture had begun to appear as long ago as 1500 BCE.

Big Question: What do the ruins of the Maya tell you about the importance of religion to their civilization?
Between 200 and 900 CE, the Maya civilization reached its peak, building great cities with enormous pyramids and temples for the celebration of complex religious beliefs.

**Big Question:** Why is the 365-day solar calendar developed by the Maya particularly impressive?
CHAPTER 3: The Aztec: Soldiers of Blood

Big Question: Why did the Aztec make human sacrifices?

1300s: According to legend, the Aztec built their great city Tenochtitlán after receiving a sign from the sun god—an eagle sitting on a cactus, holding a snake in its beak.
Big Question: Why were llamas so important to the Inca?

1300s: The Inca believed that their emperor was the child of Inti, the sun god. Under his leadership, the Inca built a great and powerful civilization and empire.
In 1492, an expedition led by Christopher Columbus reached the Americas. His journey was the first European encounter with the New World during the Age of Exploration.

**Big Question:** What were the factors that contributed to the end of the Aztec and Inca empires?
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In 1534, Pizarro and his soldiers tricked Inca ruler Atahualpa into paying a huge ransom for his freedom. The Spaniards then put Atahualpa to death and quickly toppled his empire.

Big Question: What were the factors that contributed to the end of the Aztec and Inca empires?
CHAPTER 7: The End of Two Empires

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By 1535, the Spanish had destroyed the Aztec Empire and controlled most of present-day central Mexico.
Big Question: What were the factors that contributed to the end of the Aztec and Inca empires?