



**Big Era Four**  
**Expanding Networks of Exchange and Encounter**  
**1200 BCE-500 CE**



**Landscape Teaching Unit 4.6**  
**Empires and city-states of the Americas**  
**800 BCE to 500 CE**

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## Why this unit?

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Although current historical evidence shows that complex societies in the Americas developed independently of those in Afroeurasia, empires and city-states in the Western Hemisphere (800 BCE to 500 CE) shared many common elements with other complex societies of the same period. Comparing developments in the Western and Eastern Hemispheres helps us understand the fundamental characteristics of complex societies in both regions.

## Unit objectives

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*Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:*

1. Describe the characteristics of the empires and city-states of the Americas, 800 BCE to 500 CE.
2. Make analytical comparisons between complex societies in the Americas and Afroeurasia.
3. Make analytical comparisons between mathematical notation and calendar systems in the world.

## Time and materials

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This unit requires about a week to do all the lessons. Teachers with limited time might do the first lesson to give students the landscape view of the empires and city-states of the Americas, 800 BCE to 500 CE.

## Author

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## The historical context

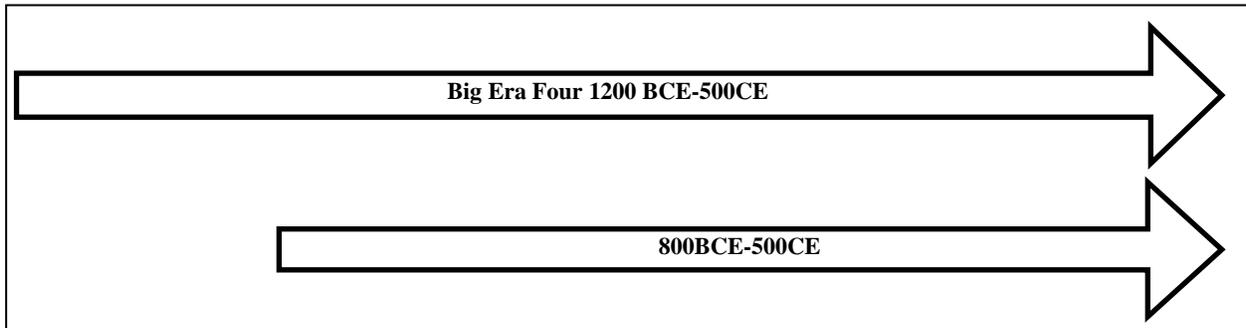
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This unit addresses all Three Essential Questions, because by their nature the earliest complex societies are rooted in a specific environment that enabled the growth of settled agricultural communities and the increasing complexity of the political, religious, and economic systems developed in the Americas are part of what made it unique.

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**This unit in the Big Era time line**

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***Lesson One***  
***Characteristics of Empires and City-States in the Americas,  
800 BCE to 500 CE***

Students will come to the study of the Americas having already looked at characteristics of empires and city-states in Afroeurasia. They should already know that by 800 BCE human sedentary societies developed some common social, political, and economic complexities including social hierarchies, occupational specialization, state religions, and trading networks. Teachers should help students to look for similar complexities in the Americas during the same period.

Many world history textbooks explain well the characteristics of the empires and city-states of the Americas. New research is always being made available from archaeologists that may raise students' interest in early American civilizations. Students should use their textbooks, other books, and online resources listed in the resource section to complete the chart (Student Handout 1.2) cataloging the key characteristics of empires and city-states in the Americas, 800 BCE to 500 CE.

**Preparation**

- Students use their textbooks or a historical atlas to identify empires and city-states of the Americas, 800 BCE to 500 CE. Those in Mesoamerica are: Mayan, Teotihuacan, and Zapotec. Those in the Andean highlands are Moche, Chavin, and Wari.
  
- Students mark key topographical features on their maps: large bodies of water, mountains, rainforests, and deserts.

## Lesson 1

### *Student Handout 1.1—Blank Map of the Americas*



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**Lesson 1*****Student Handout 1.2—Chart of the characteristics of empires and city-states of the Americas, 800 BCE to 500 CE***

	<u>Maya</u>	<u>Teotihuacan</u>	<u>Zapotec</u>	<u>Moche</u>	<u>Chavin</u>	<u>Wari</u>
dates when group was dominant						
political structure						
core religious beliefs						
main agricultural practices						
trade networks						
major strength						
major weakness (cause of decline)						

**Extension Activity**

Students read archaeologists' versions of what life might have been like in one of these complex societies. One of the best is *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya* by Linda Schele and David Freidel. Then, students create a story or skit that shows daily life in an empire or city-states of the Americas, 800 BCE to 500 CE.

***Lesson Two***  
***Compare characteristics of empires and city-states***  
***of the Americas (800 BCE to 500 CE) with those***  
***of empires and city-states in Afroeurasia***

Students should compile a chart like the one below based on the information in their textbooks or from material previously discussed in class.

Comparison of empires and city-states in the Americas with those in Afroeurasia, 800 BCE - 500 CE			
	Similarities	Differences	Conclusions
Agricultural practices	Domesticated plants and animals	Domesticated animals more commonly eaten and used for labor in Afroeurasia	Domesticated plants in the Americas provided all necessary calories, vitamins, and proteins. Farmers planted maize, beans, and squashes together to make a stake for the vines and to retain nitrogen in the soil.
Trade	Trade between regions supplied unique items.	Trade was most common between the urbanized centers in Mesoamerica and along the coast of the Andean region making a north-south axis. In the eastern hemisphere, more trade followed routes going horizontally from east to west, and west to east.	Trade was common in both regions, but the scarceness of urban areas in North America in this period may have limited the expansion of trade networks in the Americas.
Political Structures	Political structures included a ruler, a ruling family, and a land-controlling aristocracy. Governments tried to control trade routes.	In this period, states in the Americas were relatively smaller.	Rulers often created empires to control extensions of trade routes.
Religious Beliefs and Practices	Religious beliefs and practices linked rulers to gods and goddesses	Although the names of some of the deities varied, similar beliefs and practices existed in Mesoamerica and the Andean highlands. In Afroeurasia, belief systems and practices in the various centers of civilization developed in different ways.	While cultural continuity was the norm in Mesoamerica and in the Andean highlands, the cultural differences in Afroeurasia led to syncretism and cultural blending as empires grew and took over peoples with different religious beliefs and practices.
Social and Gender Systems	Patriarchy developed.	The key deity was the goddess of the sun; corn mother	Although rulers were typically male in both hemispheres, the role of women as creators of life was emphasized in both regions.

## ***Lesson Three***

### ***Compare calendars***

This lesson will take at least two days. Students will need to collect information on calendar systems in the period 800 BCE to 500 CE for at least one class session along with time outside of the classroom. On the second day of the lesson, students will compare calendar systems in at least two city-state or empire. Students will then draw conclusions about the creation of calendars.

#### **Preparation**

This lesson may take three days depending on how much research students have to do not provided by their textbooks.

On the first day, the teacher helps students understand how the calendars they use are constructed. For homework or on the second day, students research the characteristics of Mayan calendars. They should discover the following basic facts:

- solar calendar with 365 days
- base 20
- part of long count
- used to keep track of deity days
- marked days of important sacrifices

On the third day, students research characteristics of calendars for city-states and empires in Afroeurasia, 800 BCE to 500 CE: Greek, Roman, Jewish, Chinese, Parthian, Hindu, Christian. Students compare the purposes of calendars in the eastern and western hemispheres. What similarities show global human concerns and what differences show unique cultural characteristics?

#### **Extension Activity**

Use pen pals in other parts of the world to compare the answers to these questions with students whose school systems or governments use a different calendar system.

- Is it a solar or lunar calendar?
- How many months in a year?
- How many days in a month? How many days in a week?
- Does the calendar indicate the number of hours in a day? Why or why not?
- What names are given for the days of the week? Who created those names?
- What kind of days are “holidays”? How many are identified in the calendar? Do you celebrate other “holidays” that are not listed on the calendar? Why do you think they are not listed?

- What other kinds of information are included in the calendar? Are celestial events listed such as equinoxes, moon phases, or predicted eclipses? Why or why not?
- Analyze a national holiday whose history is well known in your country. Was the date ever changed? Why or why not? How do people in your country or region honor that day? Do some people not care? Why or why not?

## This unit and the Three Essential Questions

 <p>HUMANS &amp; the ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>In Egypt complex society developed in a single river valley hemmed in on both sides by mostly flat desert. In the Andes Mountains complex society emerged on the western slopes of the Andes Mountains, where the range of altitudes and climates was extreme. How might these contrasting physical and natural environments have contributed to differences in these two areas of civilization?</p>
 <p>HUMANS &amp; other HUMANS</p>	<p>When large, dense populations developed in region such as central Mexico, Andean Peru, the Tigris-Euphrates valley, Egypt, or China, was it inevitable that society became divided between a small but rich and powerful ruling class and the rest of the population? Can you imagine a complex society emerging in the premodern era without most power and wealth being held by a small group?</p>
 <p>HUMANS &amp; IDEAS</p>	<p>Read excerpts the <i>Popul Vuh</i>, the Maya creation story. Compare this narrative of creation with the first two chapters of <i>Genesis</i> in the Bible. What are differences and similarities in the way these sacred texts account for the creation of the world and humankind? (See Resources.)</p>

## This unit and the seven Key Themes

This unit emphasizes:

Key Theme 2: Economic Networks and Exchange

Key Theme 3: Uses and Abuses of Power

Key Theme 4: Haves and Have-Nots

Key Theme 6: Science, Technology, and the Environment

Key Theme 7: Spiritual Life and Moral Codes

## This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

The student is able to (D) measure and calculate calendar time by days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, and millennia, from fixed points of the calendar system.

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

The student is able to (G) draw upon data in historical maps in order to obtain or clarify information on the geographic setting in which the historical event occurred, its relative and absolute location, the distances and directions involved, the natural and man-made features of the place, and critical relationships in the spatial distributions of those features and historical event occurring there.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student is able to (D) draw comparisons across eras and regions in order to define enduring issues as well as large-scale or long-term developments that transcend regional and temporal boundaries.

#### Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

The student is able to (F) support interpretations with historical evidence in order to construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

## Resources

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### *Instructional resources for teachers*

Adams, Richard E. *Ancient Civilizations of the New World*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

A lively survey of Mesoamerican and South American civilizations, including comparisons with ancient societies of Afroeurasia

Schele, Linda, and David Freidel. *A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*.

New York: William Morrow, 1990. A beautifully illustrated history of the Maya based partly on recent interpretations of Maya hieroglyphs.

Tedlock, Dennis, trans. and ed. *Popul Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*. Rev. ed. New York: Touchstone Books, 1996. The great Maya epic of creation and history.

[Http://www.ku.edu/~mayan/resources/Syllabus.html](http://www.ku.edu/~mayan/resources/Syllabus.html). University of Kansas. Kaqchikel Mayan Resource Center. A college-level course in Mayan language.

[Http://www.utexas.edu/cola/lilas/centers/outreach/resources/topic/maya.html](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/lilas/centers/outreach/resources/topic/maya.html). Resource Library: The Maya. Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies. University of Texas at Austin. An annotated bibliography.

### *Instructional resources for students*

“The Ancient Maya.” *Calliope*. 1999. This magazine for young people is devoted to exploring world history. This issue focuses on Maya civilization.

[http://www.usu.edu/anthro/origins\\_of\\_writing/mayan\\_calendar/](http://www.usu.edu/anthro/origins_of_writing/mayan_calendar/)

<http://www.civilization.ca/civil/maya/mminteng.html>

full descriptions with photographs of historical and contemporary Maya

<http://www.eecis.udel.edu/~mills/maya.html>

<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/med/> The Mayan Epigraphic Database Project

<http://www.halfmoon.org/> -- Rabbit in the Moon site has activities including a talking syllabary, and a memorial to Linda Schele

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## **Correlations to National and State Standards and to Textbooks**

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### ***National Standards for World History***

Era Four: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 6A: The student understands the origins, expansion, and achievements of Maya civilization; 6B: The student understands the rise of Teotihuacán, Zapotec/Mixtec, and Moche civilizations.

### ***California: History-Social Science Content Standards***

Grade Six, 7.7.5: Describe the Meso-American achievements in astronomy and mathematics, including the development of the calendar and the Meso-American knowledge of seasonal changes to the civilizations' agricultural systems.

### ***New York: Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum***

Unit One: Ancient World – Civilizations and Religions (4000 BC – 500 AD), C. Classical civilizations, 5. Rise of agrarian civilizations in Mesoamerica—Mayan (200 BC-900 AD).

### ***Virginia Standards of Learning***

World History and Geography to 1500 AD. Era IV: Regional Interactions, 1000 to 1500 A.D. WHI.11. The student will demonstrate knowledge of major civilizations in the Western Hemisphere, including the Mayan, Aztec, and Incan.

### ***Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies.***

113.33 World History Studies. (c) Knowledge and Skills. 6) History. The student understands the major developments of civilizations of sub-Saharan Africa, Mesoamerica, Andean South America, and Asia. The student is expected to (B) Summarize the major political, economic, and cultural developments of civilizations in Mesoamerica and Andean South America.

### ***Textbooks***

*Across the Centuries* (Houghton Mifflin). Chapter 15: Early American Civilizations. Lesson 3: The Maya. Lesson 4: The Tiwanakans and the Moche.

*Ancient World: Adventures in Time and Place* (Macmillan/McGraw-Hill). Chapter 10: Ancient Americas. Lesson 1: The Geography of the Americas. Lesson 3: Ancient North America.

*World History: The Human Experience* (Glencoe McGraw-Hill). Chapter 15: The Americas.  
Section 2: Early Mesoamerican Cultures.

### **Conceptual links to other teaching units**

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The empires and city-states of the Americas shared many common elements with other complex societies of the same period. The next Landscape Teaching Unit (4.7) is titled “Long-distance Migrations in Tropical Seas.” This final Landscape unit in Big Era Four asks students to investigate the variety of types of societies that emerged in the vast Pacific Ocean basin. Like the Americas before 1492, this region had little or no contact with Afroeurasia before modern times.