Account of Cortés’s First Meeting with Moctezuma (1519) by Miguel Leon-Portilla

ABOUT THE READING The meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma II in 1519 was a momentous one that led to the death of the Aztec emperor and eventually to the fall of his empire. Soon after their first meeting, Cortés would take Moctezuma prisoner and begin to carry out his plan to subdue the Aztecs and take their wealth and land. This account shows the hospitality and humility with which Moctezuma greeted the conquistadores.

As you read, consider why Moctezuma might have received Cortés so cordially. Consider also whether, in light of his motives and his subsequent actions, Cortés’s words to Moctezuma were sincere.

When Motecuhzoma [Moctezuma] had given necklaces to each one, Cortés asked him: “Are you Motecuhzoma? Are you the king? Is it true that you are the king Motecuhzoma?”

And the king said: “Yes, I am Motecuhzoma.” Then he stood up to welcome Cortés; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: “Our lord you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy...”

Cortés replied in his strange and savage tongue, speaking first to La Malinche [Marina]:

From Cortés and the Conquest of the Aztec Empire

Marina was a young Mayan woman who had been enslaved and given to the Spaniards as a gift and who acted as a translator for Cortés.
“Tell Motecuhzoma that we are his friends. There is nothing to fear. We have wanted to see him for a long time, and now we have seen his face and heard his words. Tell him that we love him well and that our hearts are contented.”

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Why do you think Cortés asked three times whether the man he saw before him was in fact Moctezuma?

2. Moctezuma believed that Cortés was the legendary god Quetzalcoatl who had left Mexico but promised to return in 1519. Do you see evidence of this belief in Moctezuma’s behavior and words, as described in Leon-Portilla’s account? Give examples from the reading to support your response.

3. Based on what you know about Cortés’s conquest of the Aztecs, do you think his reassurance to Moctezuma that “There is nothing to fear” is sincere? Why or why not?

4. In his account, Leon-Portilla notes that Cortés speaks first to Marina, rather than directly to Moctezuma. Why do you think this is so? Explain.
Eagle and Jaguar Warriors

ABOUT THE SOURCE Two elite classes of warriors—the eagle and the jaguar—protected the mighty Aztec Empire from its enemies. To the Aztec people, these two animals represented powerful rulers of separate but interconnected kingdoms; eagles were lords of the day, and jaguars, of the night. The eagle-warrior sculpture shown here is nearly life-size.

As you examine the image, think about which characteristics of the eagle are emphasized and why the artist may have done so.
WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Think about the reasons why the Aztecs might have chosen the eagle as the lord of the day and the jaguar as the lord of the night. What particular skill or talent do you think each of the two classes of warriors might have? What might they have in common?

2. What details in this image suggest why Aztec warriors might have worn these costumes?
**Biography Bishop Diego de Landa**

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**
1. Possible response: The friars may have thought that the texts were used to keep Maya from converting to Catholicism.
2. Possible response: The Maya might have negative feelings about Landa. He destroyed many of the records of their culture, and his book couldn’t replace everything that he destroyed.

**Literature Aztec Poetry**

**CALL-OUT BOXES**
The last three lines of the poem: “Have you grown weary of your servants? / Are you angry with your servants, / O giver of Life?”

**ANALYZING LITERATURE**
1. They are very sad and resigned to the fact that they have lost everything.
2. Both poems talk about the loss of Tenochtitlán. They both also refer to the “Giver of Life.”

**Literature Popul Vuh: The Hero Twins**

**CALL-OUT BOXES**
1. Cold House, Jaguar House, and house of fire
2. Use your mind to outwit a stronger opponent.
3. They think that jaguars ate the twins; they wish to harm the twins.

**ANALYZING LITERATURE**
1. The struggle between the powers of good and evil
2. Answers will vary, but should include that the twins trick or outsmart Xibalba.

**Primary Source Account of Cortés’s First Meeting with Moctezuma**

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**
1. Moctezuma must have appeared very humble and not terribly king-like.
2. The humility and graciousness with which Moctezuma welcomes Cortés suggests he believes Cortés is someone who deserves reverence, such as a god. For instance, he bows low and says that Cortés has come to “sit on [his] throne.” Also, Moctezuma seems to think that Cortés came from another world because he says, “Now you have arrived on the earth.”
3. Since Cortés planned to conquer the Aztecs and since he imprisoned Moctezuma and slaughtered his people, it is reasonable to assume that Cortés’s words were not sincere.
4. Cortés speaks first to Marina because he needs her to translate his words so that Moctezuma can understand.

**Primary Source Eagle and Jaguar Warriors**

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**
1. Answers will vary. Students may say eagles would be good at fighting during the day. They might also say that eagles are good at seeing distant targets. Jaguars would be good at prowling during the night and seeing in the dark. Both types are swift and would be powerful, fierce fighters.
2. Answers will vary, but should include the idea that the costume created a fearsome appearance that would scare enemies. They might also point out elements of the warrior’s outfit that would offer physical protection.