ACTIVITIES

Codex
National Museum of anthropology in Mexico City

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Lilian A. Bell in her book *Papyrus, Tapa, Amate and Rice Paper: Papermaking in Africa, the Pacific, Latin America and Southeast Asia*, reports that sometime between A.D. 500 and 899 the Aztec and Mayas developed their earliest books. The books were stored in libraries housed in stone buildings and included the topics of religion, rituals, astronomy, geography, history, genealogy, and customs. The remaining codices are: the Dresden, Paris, Madrid, and Grolier. They are now housed in the cities by which they are named.

Codex Borgia Mixteca-Puebal Culture, 15th century codices, or hand-painted books, made by Aztecs, Mixtecs and other indigenous Mexicans were originally filled with pictures that conveyed a rich variety of local information, including histories, cosmogonies, tax records and family genealogies.

With the 16th century Spanish invasion came the introduction of alphabetic writing, which increasingly influenced indigenous manuscripts and eventually supplanted traditional pictographic systems of communication.

Imagery derived from the codices can now be found in everything from tourist art to tattoos; as such symbolism evokes a popular nationalist idea that Mexico’s modern identity lies in the country’s ancient past. Today, pictorial codices, as well as those demonstrating early European influence, are celebrated and reproduced in facsimile form because they serve as windows onto the complex artistic and cultural heritage that makes Mexico unique.

These books now referred to as painted books, pictorial manuscripts, or codices were made in a screen fold format. The paper was made from beaten bark and the finished strip was between six inches and eight inches wide and between twenty inches and thirty-five inches long. The prepared sheet was coated with a white substance of some kind of plaster. When the coating dried, it was a smooth surface for painting on.

Using the Internet to research the history of early books and codices (plural of codex), have students create their own codex, you can use construction paper and any writing tool. They used a brush. You will need two pieces of blank paper. Start at either end. Fold the paper into pleats. Using the photograph as an example, start from the left and number each page and then continue numbering the back pages.

Mark one page the front cover. The covers can be decorated and/or made with a heavy cardboard. In most cases, reading was from left to right. The book should be held folded in your hands and opened one section at a time. Read the two pages that are exposed and then turn the next pleat to read the next two pages.

Art
The codex that students created can be used when they go to the exhibition: Reconstructing the Pre-Columbian World. The handout entitled Codices can be used as a model for inspiration of using the codex as a journal or writing surface for a sketchbook. An Internet site with Aztec art and mythology: [http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/azt_stor.htm](http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/azt_stor.htm)

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Use the codex or create a three-dimensional art and artifact timeline. Through the creation of a three-dimensional timeline, students are asked to bring together information from the art and artifacts that covers people, places, events, and cultural landmarks.
Another way of creating a three-dimension art and artifact timeline is the development of a pop-up book. An excellent model for the pop-up book is: *Splendor of Ancient America*, by Francisco Serrano and the Internet sites:

**Ancient Mexico: The Art, Culture and History of Ancient Mesoamerica:**
http://www.ancientmexico.com/

**Mesoamerican Timeline:**
http://www.ancientmexico.com/content/timeline/index.html

**Historical Documents from Mexico:**
http://www.ancientmexico.com/content/documents/index.html

Using the art and artifacts highlighted in the exhibition paintings for this activity; students are encouraged to combine written information with visual images. It may be easier to conduct this activity after students have read and studied about the history, culture, people, and art of Christiane Clados. Artifact timelines provide the students with the opportunity to develop their skills in sequencing, writing, creating models.

**RESOURCES**


Royal Academy Aztec Children’s Guide PDF File.


**INTERNET LINKS**

*Great Tenochtitlan History for Kids*  

*The Aztecs*  

*Mesoamerican Manuscript Facsimiles*  
http://www.lib.utah.edu/digital/aztec/
Images of Everyday Life Drawn from Codices
http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/azt_lif.htm

Mundo Maya: Maya Codices
http://www.mayadiscovery.com/ing/history/default.htm

Ancient Scripts
http://www.ancientscripts.com/aztec.html

The Organization of the Aztec Empire

National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City
http://www.islc.net/~lesteyl/nationalmuseum.html

Glossary With Words Sounded Out
http://library.thinkquest.org/27981/glossary.html

Tempus Fugit: Time Flies
http://www.nelson-atkins.org/tempusfugit/