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We don't know much about the Aztec before they came to the region that is now central Mexico. They didn't keep written records at that time, but they did pass along stories to one another. Much of what we know about the Aztec comes from these stories, called legends.

According to legend, the Aztec came from a place called Aztlan. No one knows for sure where Aztlan was. It might have been in northern Mexico, or it might have been much further north.

From their stories, historians know that the Aztec people wandered for many years in search of a new home. They came to central Mexico in the 1200's. However, other groups of people had already settled there, and most of the good land for farming was already taken.

The Aztec had a hard time finding a place to live. Finally, in 1325, the Aztec found a small island in Lake Texcoco. There, according to legend, they saw an eagle with a snake in its mouth. The eagle was sitting on a cactus. The Aztec believed this was a sign from one of their gods, Huitzilopochtli, and decided to build their new home there. They built a city called Tenochtitlan on an island in Lake Texcoco. Tenochtitlan eventually became one of the largest cities in the world at that time!

WHO WERE THE AZTEC? QUESTIONS

1. During what years was the Aztec empire around?

1300s - 1500's

2. How do we know about the Aztec empire from written records?

written records

3. Where did the Aztecs originate?

North of Mexico City
Atzlan

4. Why did the Aztecs settle on Lake Texcoco?

on an island

Tenochtitlan

5. What was Tenochtitlan?

Capital of Aztec Empire
(Modern day Mexico City)