

## The Aztec and the Inca

**KEY QUESTION** How did the Aztec and the Inca use their environments to develop their empires?

Two great civilizations, the Aztec and the Inca, developed vast **empires**, political systems in which people or lands are controlled by one ruler. Both civilizations were very powerful in their regions until the Spanish conquered them in the 1500s.

**The Aztec, a Military Culture** The **Aztec** moved from northern Mexico into the Valley of Mexico and what is now Mexico City in about the A.D. 1300s. They took control of the valley in about 1428 and ruled their empire until 1521. The Aztec built a strong military empire through warfare and by collecting tribute—money, goods, or crops—from the people they defeated.

The Aztec built Tenochtitlán (teh•NOHCH•tee•TLAHN), their capital city, on an island in Lake Texcoco. The city included houses and causeways, or roads made of earth. At its height, the population reached around 300,000. A great pyramid dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, the sun and war god, stood in the center of the city. The Aztec used the watery environment around Tenochtitlán to create **chinampas**, or island gardens, to grow food and flowers.

**ONLINE PRIMARY SOURCE** To read more legends of the Aztec and Inca, go to **Research & Writing Center @ ClassZone.com**

### ANALYZING Primary Sources

**The Eagle on the Prickly Pear** Why would the Aztec build a city in the middle of a swampy lake? According to legend, one of their gods predicted that they would see a prickly pear cactus with an eagle sitting on top of it. The Aztec wandered until they saw this sign. There they built Tenochtitlán, which is now Mexico City.

[A]s they passed through the reeds, there in front of them was the prickly pear with the eagle perched on top, . . . his claws punching holes in his prey. When he saw the Mexicans in the distance, he bowed to them. . . . The . . . spirit said, 'Mexicans, this is the place.' And with that they all wept. 'We are favored,' they said. 'We are blessed. We have seen where our city will be. Now let us go rest.'

Source: *The Eagle on the Prickly Pear*, retold by John Bierhorst

#### DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

How did the Aztec know where to stop to build their capital city?



# Animated GEOGRAPHY

## Chinampas

[Click here](#) to enter the *chinampas* @ ClassZone.com

### ISLAND GARDENS

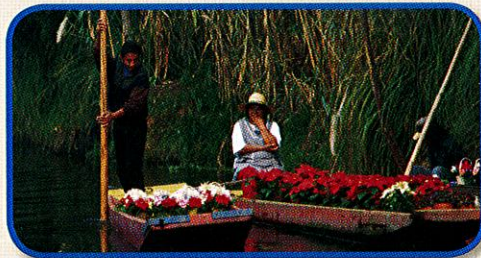
Much of the land around Tenochtitlán, where the Aztec settled, was swampy, posing a challenge for farming. The Aztec were resourceful at adapting to their environment. They built *chinampas*, human-made islands created for planting. The rich soil allowed the Aztec to grow crops and flowers.



[Click here](#) to see how the Aztec built the *chinampas*. Learn how the Aztec used woven mats and mud from the lake to build the *chinampas*.



[Click here](#) to see how the Aztec lived on the *chinampas*. Learn where they lived, what they wore, and what they ate.



[Click here](#) to see how *chinampas* are used today and the problems they face.



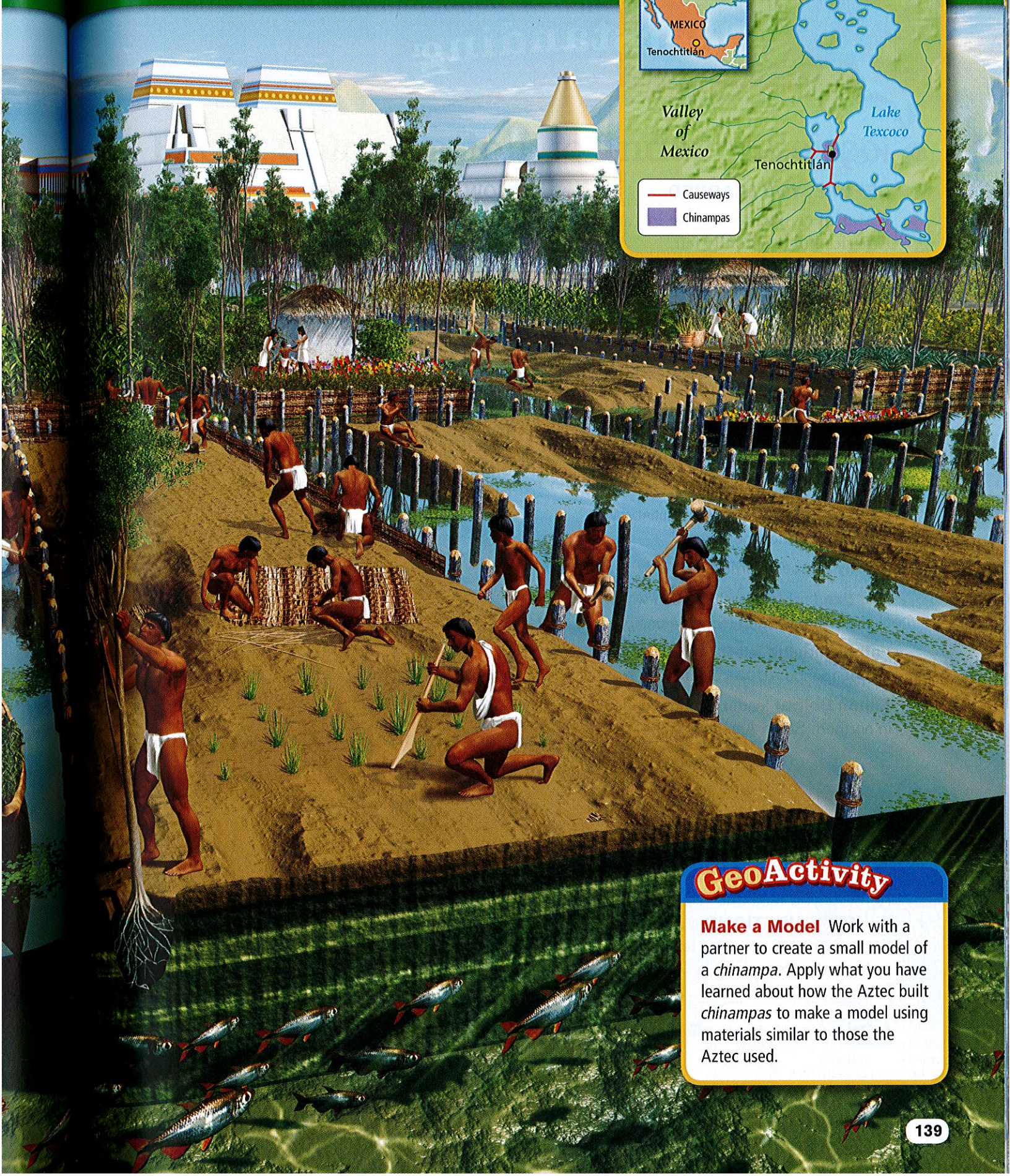
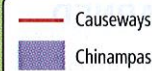
## Tenochtitlán



Valley  
of  
Mexico

Lake  
Texcoco

Tenochtitlán



## GeoActivity

**Make a Model** Work with a partner to create a small model of a *chinampa*. Apply what you have learned about how the Aztec built *chinampas* to make a model using materials similar to those the Aztec used.