

GCSE (9–1)
Candidate Style Answers

HISTORY B

(SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

J411
For first teaching in 2016

J411 - Aztecs and the Spanish conquest, 1519 - 1535

Version 1



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Introduction

This resource has been produced by a senior member of the GCSE History examining team to offer teachers an insight into how the assessment objectives are applied. It illustrates how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provides some commentary on what factors contribute to overall levels.

As these responses have not been through full moderation, they have not been graded and are instead, banded to give an indication of the level of each response.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

See <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/207091-unit-j411-32-viking-expansion-c.-750-c.1050-with-aztecs-and-the-spanish-conquest-1519-1535-sample-assessment-material.pdf> for the sources referenced.

Question 6

What can Source A tell us about the way the Spanish treated the Aztecs after conquering Mexico in 1521? Use the source and your own knowledge to support your answer. [7]

High level response

Source A, a letter from a Spanish bishop, tells us that the Indians were treated badly because of Spanish greed for gold. The bishop tells us that this ill treatment was carried out by government officials and there were many complaints by the Indians who were robbed of their gold. If they refused to give the officials what they demanded, they were murdered. Some were hanged and one was even crucified.

The fact that the bishop was appointed to be official Protector of the Indians tells us that attempts were made to protect the Indians. It suggests that the ill treatment of the Indians was down to the Spanish in Mexico rather than the government in Spain which was worried about their treatment. However, attempts to help the Indians were not effective. When the bishop complained to the Audiencia he was ignored. Of course, the bishop might be exaggerating the problem as an excuse for why he was not being successful in protecting the Indians. But what he tells us is not surprising because under Nuno de Guzman, the Audiencia's president, corruption and violence against the Indians got worse. He shipped thousands of Indians to the Caribbean as slaves. This confirms what the source tells us about the bishop being powerless. The fact that the bishop had been appointed to protect the Indians suggests that the problem was a widespread one. My knowledge confirms what the source tells us. The Indians were badly treated in the encomienda system where they had to give Spaniards their labour and tribute. In return they were meant to educate and convert the Indians. In reality, the Indians were little more than slaves and were often worked to death with the tribute being demanded being impossible to achieve.

Examiner commentary

Level 3

This is a very good answer. Its strengths include (i) explaining a wide range of features that the source tells us about, (ii) making inferences from the source, (iii) the relevant use of knowledge to explain what can be learned from the source, and (iii) the relevant use of knowledge to confirm what the source says. These are all requirements for Level 3 in the mark scheme.

Much has been learned from the source by this candidate. What the source directly tells about Spanish treatment of the Indians is explained. But importantly, valid inferences have been made from the source to learn more. These include inferences about the bishop's appointment being evidence that attempts were made to look after the Indians and about the fact that it must have been a widespread problem. Other inferences include the Spanish in Mexico rather than the Spanish government being responsible for the ill treatment, and the fact that attempts to help the Indians were ineffective. The candidate also uses relevant and accurate knowledge of the Audiencia and its president to develop what the source says about the ineffectiveness of attempts to help the Indians, and knowledge of the encomienda to confirm the source's claims about ill treatment. This is relevant use of knowledge because it is used to help explain what the source tells us. A possible limitation of the source is also suggested (about the bishop's motivation), and although this is not necessary for the top level, it does add something extra to the answer.

This answer belongs at the top of the top level because it uses the source constructively and critically, it makes valid inferences, identifies a wide range of features and makes relevant use of knowledge. The whole answer is focused on explaining what the source tells us about Spanish treatment of the Indians. The source has been used critically e.g. through the use of knowledge to confirm claims in the source and by explaining a possible limitation.

Medium level response

Source A tells us a lot about the Aztecs being treated badly. The bishop tells us there were many complaints by the Indians. They were robbed of their gold by the Spanish and some were even hanged and crucified. The bishop tells us that when he complained to the Audiencia which ruled Spain, he was ignored. This tells us that the problem was a big one and that the treatment of the Indians continued. The bishop had been appointed by the emperor and yet could do little to help the Indians. I think the poor treatment of the Indians described in the source must have been true otherwise the emperor in Spain would not have bothered sending the bishop to protect the Indians. What the source tells us is true because I know that the Indians were badly treated. Some were made into slaves while others were badly treated in the encomienda system where they had to give Spaniards their labour and tribute which consisted of the crops they grew. They were often badly treated some were worked to death.

Examiner commentary

Level 2

This answer is focused on the question. It shows some awareness of how sources can be used constructively by accurately explaining what the source tells about Spanish treatment of the Indians. Much of this is based on what the source says but there are also some useful inferences. There is also some awareness of how sources can be used critically - the candidate has used relevant knowledge to confirm what the source says.

The answer could be improved by making more inferences from the source about the treatment of the Indians and by using more detailed knowledge of the context to confirm what the source says. Questions could have been raised about what the source says.

Question 7

How useful are Sources B and C and Interpretation D for a historian studying the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma? In your answer, refer to the two sources and interpretation as well as your own knowledge.

[15]

High level response

Sources B and C are both very useful about Moctezuma but in different ways. Source B is useful about Moctezuma's physical qualities - he sounds very fit and in good condition - lean and well built. It also tells us something about his character - he paid attention to his appearance, looked merry but could be serious. However, although Source B was written by a soldier who fought with Cortés and saw Moctezuma, he was writing the description 50 years later when his memory might be weak and coloured by everything that had happened. Source C is more useful for telling us about Moctezuma's power and status and the fact that he wanted these to be recognised. It tells us that Moctezuma sent Cortés lots of valuable gifts such as gold necklaces, feather head-dresses and shields. Feathers were greatly valued by the Aztecs. They were only worn by the ruling class, warriors and gods and showed their status. The Aztecs worshipped feathers and believed that wearing them raised them above ordinary humans. Moctezuma therefore sent the feathers to show his status. The shields were to show his military power.

Source C is useful in telling us that these gifts were to demonstrate Moctezuma's wealth, status and power and to show everybody that he was as at least equal to Cortés. The usefulness of Sources B and C might be increased by the fact that Interpretation D supports them. The items listed in Source C like the feathers and the coloured robes are in the painting where Moctezuma is also shown to be lean and powerful. We do not know who painted Interpretation D so we do not know if they saw Moctezuma but this is unlikely because it comes from many years later. We do not know where the artist got his information from. He might have used Sources like B and C and so it is not surprising they are similar. He might have used Aztec sources for the features suggesting his power like the feathers, the shield and the coloured robes. This does reflect how Aztec emperors were generally portrayed in Aztec sculptors but they did not draw portraits of rulers showing individual and personal qualities and so the artist must have used Spanish sources for Moctezuma's personal qualities.

Overall, Source C is most useful for showing us Moctezuma's status and power and for the fact that Moctezuma wanted to make these clear to the Spanish. Source B and Interpretation D are also useful for showing Moctezuma's status but also how the Spanish saw him and suggest that the Spanish made him look such a powerful figure to increase their achievements in defeating him. Only Source B is useful about his personality.

Examiner commentary

Top Level 5

This answer meets the requirements of Level 5 because it analyses the sources to explain how they are useful. The candidate does not just use the sources for their surface information but also makes good inferences about power and status. The answer addresses the issue of usefulness well by explaining how the sources are useful in different ways - Source B as evidence about Moctezuma's physique and personality, while Source C is more useful about his power and status and his projection of these. Good use made of knowledge in the analysis of Source C. The possible limitations of the sources are also discussed.

Interpretation D is analysed as an interpretation with the focus on an informed discussion of the possible sources used by the artist. The usefulness of Source D is evaluated well, especially the suggestion that one use might be as evidence that the Spanish wanted to portray him as powerful to emphasise their own achievements.

The different ways in which the sources and the interpretation are useful is consistently evaluated with judgements being reached and substantiated. Details of the sources, as well as provenance, have been used. Inferences are made. Relevant knowledge has been used to inform the analysis and evaluation of both sources and interpretation.

Medium level response

Sources B and C are useful as evidence about Moctezuma. Source B tells us what he looked like - he was about forty and well built and lean. It tells us that he was dark skinned but not very dark. He also had a small dark beard. The source also tells us about his personality - he was merry looking but could be serious. The author was a soldier who served under Cortés and so had probably seen Moctezuma. This makes the source very useful, although it was written a long time later. Source C is useful for telling us how wealthy he was. He sent the Spanish gold necklaces, robes and decorated head-dresses. This shows us he was wealthy and a very important person. Interpretation D is also useful because it agrees with the sources. It shows him wearing a head-dress and a robe. He is wearing gold and has a shield.

This is useful because it also shows how powerful and rich he was. We do not know who the artist was and so we do not know where he got his information from. This makes the painting less useful because he cannot check where he got his information from.

Overall, the sources and interpretation tell us that Moctezuma was rich, powerful and very important. They agree with each other about this and this makes them useful. As emperor of a large empire like that of the Aztecs we would expect him to be powerful. However their usefulness is limited by the fact that Source B was a memory from 50 years later and we do not know who the artist of Interpretation D was. He may never have seen Moctezuma.

Examiner commentary

Level 3

This answer makes good use of the surface information of the sources and the interpretation to explain how they are useful evidence about Moctezuma. Plenty of details are picked out and supported judgements about usefulness are reached. The candidate also makes some valid and supported inferences e.g. about wealth and power, although these are fairly limited. There is some attempt to evaluate sources and interpretation with some use of the provenance of the sources and the interpretation and they are cross-referenced. The answer stays focused on the issue of usefulness.

The answer could be improved by more developed evaluation, especially the limitations of the sources and interpretation. No attempt is made to treat the interpretation differently from the sources. Importantly, much more use could have been made of relevant knowledge of the context e.g. the significance of the feathers, Moctezuma's actual power and authority. This could have been used to explain in more detail the significance of the features in the sources and the interpretation and to evaluate usefulness.

Question 8

* "More than anything else, it was the support given by Native American people which led to Cortés' victory over the Aztecs". How far do you agree with this view?

[18]

High level response

Support from the Native American people the crucial factor in Cortés' victory over the Aztecs. There were other factors such as smallpox and the prophecies about a returning god but these were not so important. The alliance between the Spanish and the Tlaxcalans was important because it came to the aid of the Spanish at crucial moments and meant that Cortés' few hundred were strengthened by thousands of Tlaxcalans. The Tlaxcalans were often at war with the Aztecs and were losing territory to them. They also hated the Aztecs because many Tlaxcalans were sacrificed by the Aztecs. At first Cortés fought the Tlaxcalans but soon they realised that the Spanish could be an ally against the Aztecs. This meant that Cortés did not have to lose men fighting them and gave him and his army time to recover before they moved towards the Aztecs. When they did their army was greatly strengthened by the Tlaxcalan warriors that went with them. This alliance was only able to take place because of the help of Malinche - a native woman who acted as interpreter between the Spanish and the Tlaxcalans. So this is another example of the importance of help from Native Americans. The Tlaxcalans were also crucial to the Spanish in 1520 after the Night of Sadness when the Aztecs rose up and massacred many of the Spanish and Tlaxcalan troops. Cortés and his men had to flee but were continually attacked and might have been wiped out were they not given refuge by the Tlaxcalans. This enabled the Spanish to survive and recover. The Tlaxcalans were then crucial to the Spanish in the planning and preparation of the attack on Tenochtitlan. When the attack took place 90 percent of the army was made up of Tlaxcalan and other Native American warriors who were crucial in the defeat of the Aztecs.

However, there were other factors. The Aztecs identified Cortés as the returning man-god Quetzalcoatl. This explains why they welcomed him into their city and gave him a foothold there. If they had opposed him from the start he would have found it much more difficult to defeat them but the story is only of Spanish origin. However, some historians believe this was added to the story later to make the Aztecs look stupid, while others, even if they accept the story believe that it did not alter Aztec behaviour towards Cortés. Another possible factor was the smallpox that the Spanish brought with them. This quickly spread among Aztecs whose bodies had no resistance to it and they had no idea how to treat it. 25 percent of people in the empire were killed. This weakened it at the time when Cortés attacked in December 1520. Of especial importance was the fact that it killed the emperor Cuitahuac and many of the Aztec army leaders. This destroyed the chain of command and weakened the Aztec resistance.

I agree with the statement that support from Native Americans was the most important reason. In his march on Tenochtitlan Cortés had only 600 soldiers and 15 horsemen a few cannon. This was not enough to defeat the Aztecs. Even when their numbers were reduced by smallpox they still had overwhelming superiority of numbers. Cortés' army was enormously strengthened by thousands of Tlaxcalteca and other Indian communities. They saved Cortés' army from being wiped out after the Night of Sadness and in Cortés' final attack in 1520 90% of the soldiers were Native Americans. It should be remembered that the Aztecs had upset many of their neighbours and that their final defeat was as much the result of a native civil war as of a Spanish invasion.

Examiner commentary

Mid Level 6

This well-organised answer demonstrates detailed knowledge and deep understanding of the factor named in the question, the support given by Native Americans, and of two other factors. The answer begins by explaining how the support from the Tlaxcalans was so crucial to Cortés. Its importance is explained in several different ways thus demonstrating sophisticated understanding of causation. There is much focus on tight explanation of precisely how the support of the Tlaxcalans was crucial on several occasions. It is also good to see a second example of support by Native Americans (Malinche) being connected to the main explanation about the Tlaxcalans. The answer then moves on to two other factors, Cortés as a returning Aztec god and the role of smallpox. The roles in Cortés' victory are explained and the story about Cortés as a returning god is dismissed through argument.

There is a consistent and sustained line of reasoning throughout the answer - that support from Native American people was the most important factor. This is driven home in the first half of the answer where its crucial role is explained, then with the argument against the story of Cortés as a returning god and is finally clinched in the conclusion where the candidate compares the importance of smallpox and Native American support.

Medium level response

The support given by Native American people to Cortés was very important for his victory. Cortés only had several hundred men of his own and they alone could not have defeated the great Aztec empire. The Aztecs were warriors and had a powerful army that had conquered an enormous empire for them. Just before Cortés arrived one Aztec emperor had conquered thirty-seven towns. In fact, Aztec society as was based on warfare and all the young men were given a military training. The Aztec army could be as big as 400,000. Cortés' few men stood no chance without extra support. This was provided by the Tlaxcalans who were one of the rival kingdoms and were often at war with the Aztecs. When Cortés was driven from Tenochtitlan in 1520 the reason he was able to later defeat the Aztecs was the help from the Tlaxcalans. They and other city states wanted to see the Aztecs defeated and their experienced warriors made up most of Cortés' army. Without their support Cortés would not have succeeded.

There were other reasons for Cortés' victory. The Spanish had superior weapons and tactics which allowed them to lay siege to, and then attack, the Aztec capital. They used ships to take troops and cannon across the lakes surrounding the city. They destroyed the bridges so that the Aztecs could not get food and water. The Spanish also had gunpowder and cannon which could fire over a mile. Just the sound of their guns and cannon frightened the Aztecs who were fighting with wooden swords, spears and clubs. The Spanish also had horses and their cavalry attacks could be devastating.

Overall, I think the support from Native Americans like the Tlaxcalans was the most important reason for the Spanish victory. The superior Spanish weapons did not make up for the fact that they were outnumbered and the Aztecs soon got used to the Spanish weapons. The Spanish needed more men and the Native Americans supplied these.

Examiner commentary

Mid Level 4

This answer demonstrates sound knowledge and understanding of key features. Sound knowledge is shown of the relative size and strength of the two sides and there is some explanation of the importance of the support from the Native Americans demonstrating sound understanding of causation. Another factor, Spanish weapons and tactics, is explained and there is some attempt to compare the importance of the two factors. There is some developed of reasoning and the final conclusion is logical.

The answer could have been improved with sharper and more focused explanation of how the Native Americans were crucial to the Spanish victory. There are several aspects to this and only one is covered here. The section on Spanish weapons and tactics is descriptive. There could have been better explanation of their role in the Spanish victory. The comparison of the relative importance of support from Native Americans and Spanish weapons and tactics is not totally convincing. The final judgement needed more support.

Question 9

* "Aztec civilization was harsh, brutal and unattractive". How far do you agree with this view?

[18]

High level response

I would argue that the Aztecs were not particularly harsh or brutal as there were two sides to their culture. Some aspects of Aztec civilization were cruel and brutal. The obvious example is human sacrifice. These took place every month - children, men and women, especially those captured from enemies. Children had their throats slit while some men were thrown into fires and burned to death. In the Feast of Flaying Men captured warriors were flayed to death. The Aztecs also practised cannibalism which is horrible. Historians have claimed that accounts by the Spanish greatly exaggerated the amount of human sacrifice to justify their conquest of the Aztecs and to hide their own barbaric behaviour. However, there are also plenty of portrayals of sacrifices in Aztec drawings and so we know it went on. But archaeological digs have shown that the Spanish did exaggerate the number of sacrifices. The Aztecs did not practice human sacrifice simply to be cruel. Their religious beliefs were at the centre of their civilization and they believed their gods needed nourishment to survive. Only human blood and flesh was enough to help the gods survive. Another harsh practice of the Aztecs was the tribute payment. Conquered people in all parts of the empire had to make enormous tribute payments to the Aztecs which included luxury goods as well as basic things like food and cloth. The tribute payments were so high that people had to work very hard to pay it and non-payment led to severe punishment.

However, there were many aspects of Aztec civilization that were not unattractive or brutal. For example their engineering. They transformed thousands of acres of swamps by massive irrigation and drainage schemes that produced enough food like maize and fruit to support the population of Tenochtitlan. The Aztecs' greatest achievement was this city. When the Spanish saw it they were amazed by its size, beauty and complexity. It was one of the largest cities in the world. The centre of the city was on an island and causeways linked it to other smaller communities. The Aztecs also had many other skills. They were great craftsmen and women. Weavers produced clothes with intricate designs. Metalworkers, featherworkers and sculptors produced canopies of feathers and magnificent jewellery of gold and silver like the necklace of golden crabs that Motecuhzoma gave Cortés when they met. Their magnificent sculptures were great works of art but the fact that they were splattered with blood shows the two sides of the Aztecs. It should also be remembered that the Spaniards were no better. They used treachery and terror to conquer the Aztecs. They massacred Cholula women and children and in Motecuhzoma they massacred hundreds of unarmed Aztecs while they were dancing and singing. They also destroyed many Aztec sculptures and melted down much of their metalwork for the gold and silver.

Aztec civilization was not all brutal and unattractive. There were some brutal aspects but they had good reasons for these. Human sacrifice was not carried out for cruel or brutal reasons, it was seen as crucial to help their gods, and the number of sacrifices was exaggerated by the Spanish. The tributes were regarded as important in keeping up the strength of the empire. The Spanish were more barbaric. They killed, stole, and destroyed much of the Aztec architecture and art work because of their greed for gold. Aztec buildings, engineering and magnificent craftsmanship shows that their civilization was not just harsh and brutal.

Examiner commentary

Mid Level 6

This well-organised answer demonstrates detailed knowledge and deep understanding of different and contrasting aspects of Aztec civilization. It begins by describing unpleasant aspects of the human sacrifice practised by the Aztecs but then argues that its extent has been exaggerated and that it was carried out for religious and not cruel reasons. The candidate then explains many of the fine achievements of the Aztecs as an argument for them not being simple 'harsh, brutal and unattractive'. The argument is also made at the end that the Spanish were not any better, and could be seen as worse.

There is a consistent and sustained line of reasoning throughout the answer - that Aztec civilization was not simply 'harsh, brutal and unattractive'. Good understanding is shown of similarity and differences (comparison of different aspects of Aztec civilization and of Aztecs and Spanish) and of causation (why the Spanish carried out human sacrifice). The conclusion is argued, sustained and supported.

Medium level response

I think that Aztec civilization was harsh, brutal and unattractive. This is because they carried out human sacrifice. This was very harsh and brutal. It was carried out when the victim was still alive. He would be placed on a special stone and then have his beating heart torn out. In other sacrifices victims were burned alive or tied up and given mock weapons and then attacked by Aztec warriors. Many of the victims were warriors captured in battle and in fact the Aztecs often fought battles just to capture victims for sacrifice. They would be careful to wound and not kill them in battle. Men only became members of the warrior elite if they provided victims for sacrifice. Women and children were also sacrificed throughout the year. To add to the unattractive nature of Aztec civilization, the skulls of victims were displayed on racks around the city. Although these sacrifices were carried out to please or support their gods they were also carried out to keep the people they ruled over in the empire in fear. The way the Aztecs controlled other civilizations around them through the use of violence and fear and also exploitation such as the tribute system was also very harsh.

There were some attractive aspects of Aztec civilization like the fine gold and silver jewellery they made. They made necklaces, pendants and rings of all designs and these show a high level of skill. The city of Tenochtitlan was a fantastic achievement which Cortés and his Spanish soldiers greatly admired when they saw it. It was enormous and had magnificent buildings, causeways, libraries, workshops and markets. However, although there were some attractive aspects to Aztec civilization, the practice of human sacrifice was at the centre of it and I think this means that Aztec civilization was more harsh and brutal than not.

Examiner commentary

Low Level 4

This answer demonstrates sound knowledge of some relevant aspects of Aztec civilization, especially human sacrifice. This is used to argue that Aztec civilization was 'harsh, brutal and unattractive'. Mention is also made of the tribute system. The candidate then explains some of the finer achievements of the Aztecs such as their craftsmanship and the city of Tenochtitlan. There is a partially successful attempt to have a consistent argument throughout the answer although more explanation of the reasons for the sacrifices, more details of the tribute system and some attempt to balance to two sides of Aztec civilization against each other would have improved the answer. The conclusion needed to be more sustained and supported to be convincing.



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