

## Chapter 14 – The Early Americas



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# Geography and Early Cultures



7.7.1

## The Big Idea

The landforms and climate of the Americas affected farming and the development of early cultures.

## Main Ideas

- The geography of the Americas is varied with a wide range of landforms.
- The first people to arrive in the Americas were hunter-gatherers.
- The development of farming led to early settlements in the Americas.



**Main Idea 1:**  
**The geography of the Americas is varied with a wide range of landforms.**

- Two continents—North America and South America—make up the region called the Americas.
- These two continents have a wide range of landforms and climates.



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# The Americas

## North America

- Mountains, desert plateaus, grassy plains, and forests
- Cold and icy in the northern part of the continent
- Warmer temperatures toward the south

## South America

- **Mesoamerica** includes the southern part of what is now Mexico and the northern countries of Central America.
- Rain forests
- Very fertile soil for domesticating plants
- Andes mountains, deserts, and rich fishing waters



## **Main Idea 2: The first people to arrive in the Americas were hunter-gatherers.**

- Most scientists believe the first people came to America across the Bering Strait from Asia.
  - This strait probably formed during the Ice Ages.
- Some believe they arrived earlier by sea.
- They were hunter-gatherers who hunted animals and gathered fruits, nuts, and wild grains.
- Some eventually settled down along the coasts to fish and gather food.



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## **Main Idea 3:**

### **The development of farming led to early settlements in the Americas.**

- From their experiments with seeds, people learned how to farm. This allowed them to stop following animal herds and settle in one place.
- The Olmec formed the first urban civilization in Mesoamerica.



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# The First Farming Settlements

- People in Mesoamerica began growing maize, or corn.
- By growing more foods, they could support larger populations.
- Eventually settlements developed into towns and cities.



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## The Olmec

- The Olmec formed the first urban civilization in Mesoamerica.
- They lived mostly in towns that served as centers of government and religions.
- They built the first pyramids in the Americas and made great sculptures.
- Some believe they developed the first writing system in the Americas.
- They traded with other people and villages.



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## Farming and the Growth of Other Civilizations

- The development of farming was important in the growth of civilizations all over the Americas.
- The first major civilization in the Andes was the Chavin culture.
- People like the Chavin began growing maize, beans, and potatoes.
- People learned to choose fertile soil to farm and to use rivers to irrigate their crops.
- Steady food sources led to population growth in these regions.



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# The Maya



7.7.3

## The Big Idea

Maya civilization was characterized by great cities, trade, and warfare, but it disappeared for reasons that are still unclear.

## Main Ideas

- Geography affected early Maya civilization.
- The Maya Classic Age was characterized by great cities, trade, and warfare.
- Maya civilization declined, and historians have several theories as to why.



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## Main Idea 1: Geography affected early Maya civilization.

- The Maya civilization developed in Mesoamerica.
- Thick forests covered the area, so people had to clear the land for farming.
  - The forests also brought valuable resources.
- The Maya lived in small villages that traded cloth and **obsidian**, a sharp, glasslike volcanic rock, with each other.
- As trade grew, villages grew.



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## **Main Idea 2: The Maya Classic Age was characterized by great cities, trade, and warfare.**

- The Maya civilization reached its height in a period called the Classic Age.
- During this period, the civilization spread to the Yucatan Peninsula. It included more than 40 cities of 5,000 to 50,000 people each.



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# Maya Classic Age

## Trade

- The Maya cities in the highlands traded with those in the lowlands.
- This way, people all over could get things they did not have nearby.

## Cities

- The Maya built grand buildings, some of which honored Maya kings such as **Pacal**.
- They also built structures such as canals, ball courts, and large plazas.

## Warfare

- Conflicts between cities were started over control of the land.
- Maya warfare was bloody, and warriors fought hand to hand.
- This destructive warfare may have led to their end.



## **Main Idea 3: Maya civilization declined, and historians have several theories as to why.**

- One theory is that increased warfare over food may have destroyed the Maya.
- Another theory is that people may have rebelled against the kings, who demanded too much of them.
- A long dry period with droughts may have played a role.
- Most scientists agree that it was a combination of causes.



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# Maya Life and Society



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## The Big Idea

People played different roles in Maya society, but together they made great achievements in art, science, math, and writing.

## Main Ideas

- Roles in Maya society were based on a complex class structure.
- Religion in Maya society was often bloody.
- The Maya made achievements in art, science, math, and writing.



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## **Main Idea 1: Roles in Maya society were based on a complex class structure.**

- Maya society had a complex class structure.
- The upper classes varied greatly from the lower classes.
- The upper class was made up of kings, priests, warriors, and merchants.
- Most Maya belonged to the lower classes.



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## The Upper Class

- The Maya believed their rulers were related to the gods.
- Priests were the most educated people and planned religious ceremonies.
- Professional warriors fought battles against other cities.
- Merchants organized the transportation and distribution of trade.



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## The Lower Classes

- The lower classes lived outside the city. The women worked in the house, and the men hunted and farmed.
- The lower class supported the upper class with food and labor, and the upper class led religious ceremonies for them in return.
- Slaves were the lowest class and consisted of orphans, slaves' children, and people who owed money.



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## Main Idea 2: Religion in Maya society was often bloody.

- The Maya worshipped many gods related to different **aspects** of their daily life.
- These gods could be harmful or helpful, so people tried to please them.
- People pierced their tongues and skin to give blood to the gods. They even used human sacrifices.
  - The gods needed blood to prevent disasters and the end of the world.



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## Main Idea 3: The Maya made achievements in art, science, math, and writing.

### Art and Architecture

- Some of the best known Maya art is their sculptures and their jade and gold jewelry.
- The Maya built cities without using metal tools.

### Science and Math

- The Maya built **observatories** for priests to study the stars.
- They developed religious and agricultural calendars.
- They created a number system.

### Writing and Oral Traditions

- They developed a writing system similar to hieroglyphics and wrote in bark-paper books.
- Stories were passed down orally and were recorded in the Popol Vuh.

