

Teotihuacán

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,817

LEVELED BOOK • Z¹

Teotihuacán

Connections

Writing

Research another ancient city in Mesoamerica and compare it to Teotihuacán. Write a report comparing dates, locations, and at least three important facts about each city's history.

Social Studies

Make a museum of Teotihuacán artifacts with your class. Research an artifact and create an exhibit to teach others about your artifact.

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Written by Elspeth Leacock

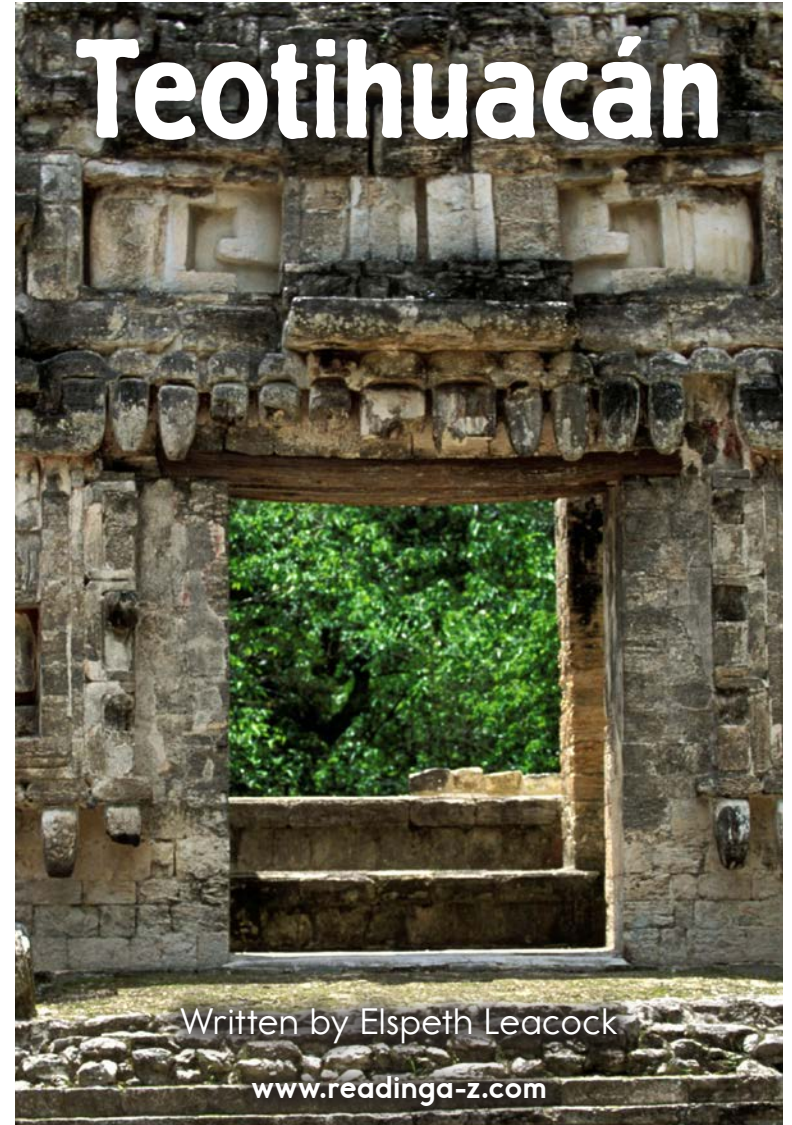
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Glossary

aligned (<i>v.</i>)	lined up with or arranged in a line (p. 6)
archaeologists (<i>n.</i>)	scientists who study the remains of ancient cultures (p. 7)
artifacts (<i>n.</i>)	any objects made or used by humans long ago (p. 7)
caravans (<i>n.</i>)	processions of people, often with vehicles or animals, traveling together (p. 12)
excavation (<i>n.</i>)	the process of uncovering or digging out something (p. 17)
innovations (<i>n.</i>)	new ideas, products, or ways of doing something (p. 6)
Mesoamerica (<i>n.</i>)	the region of Mexico and Central America that was occupied by native civilizations before the arrival of Columbus and European colonization (p. 6)
millennium (<i>n.</i>)	a period of one thousand years (p. 4)
oriented (<i>v.</i>)	positioned in relation to something else, such as a compass direction or landmark (p. 7)
rebellion (<i>n.</i>)	a fight against authority or power; an uprising (p. 16)
restoration (<i>n.</i>)	the act of returning something to its original condition (p. 17)
zenith (<i>n.</i>)	the highest point; the point in time when something is the greatest or most successful (p. 6)

Teotihuacán



Focus Question

Why are so many people intrigued by Teotihuacán?

Words to Know

aligned	Mesoamerica
archaeologists	millennium
artifacts	oriented
caravans	rebellion
excavation	restoration
innovations	zenith

Front cover: The Pyramid of the Moon

Title page: A huge doorway in one of Teotihuacán's many stone walls

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World Landmarks
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Correlation

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Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60



An archaeologist (left) examines an image taken under a temple by a small robot (below).

Discoveries Continue

In 2013, archaeologists sent a robot carrying a camera through a small tunnel to a chamber under the Temple of Quetzalcoatl to take pictures. The photos showed a chamber filled with hundreds of spheres covered with a mineral powder that gave them a golden glow. The whole chamber—the walls and ceiling—glowed like gold, too. Long ago, everything in the chamber would have appeared brilliant under torchlight. There were also masks covered with crystals and jade. Archaeologists were stumped as to the purpose of the golden chamber.

As archaeologists explore the many tunnels under the pyramids, they continue to find new artifacts, including a collection of obsidian knives and carvings of coiled jaguars. Perhaps one day archaeologists will finally discover who lived and ruled in ancient Teotihuacán.



In the museum (above), visitors can see beautiful artifacts, such as this incense burner (right), that have been unearthed at Teotihuacán.



The millions of visitors who hike to many ruins and archaeological zones in and around the city cause a lot of wear on the site. So do natural factors such as rain and wind. New developers are another destructive threat to the site. In 2004, one developer received permission to build on ground that was once part of the great city. By law, the company was bound to report any artifacts dug up during construction. It found artifacts but didn't report them. Instead, the company used heavy machines to dig and threw away priceless artifacts to save time, resulting in years of legal battles.



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The largest structures at Teotihuacán are the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon.

Inspiring Awe

Almost two thousand years ago where modern-day Mexico is located, an ancient people built the great pyramids of Teotihuacán (tay-oh-tee-wah-KAHN). No one knows for sure who built these enormous structures, but we do know the site was designed to inspire awe and has done so for over a **millennium**. The Avenue of the Dead, which leads to the pyramids, is as wide as an eleven-lane highway. On both sides of the avenue stand massive stone temples and palaces.

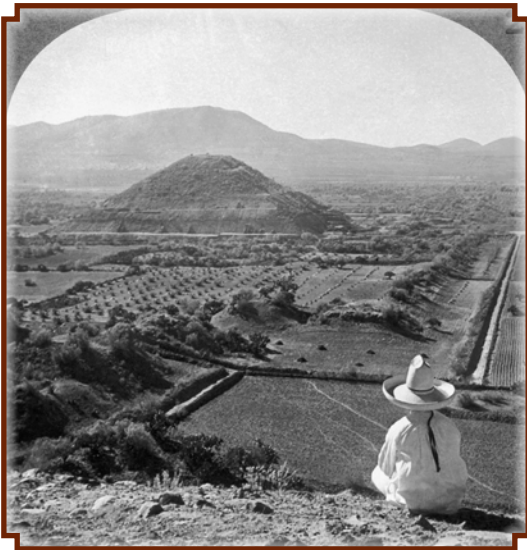
When the Aztec people came upon the ruins in 1320, they named them Teotihuacán, which means “the place where the gods were created.” Later, when the Spanish first gazed upon the pyramids, they questioned who built them. Locals said it was a race of giants who came from the heavens long ago. To this day, tourists and scientists examine the pyramids of Teotihuacán and wonder about their creators.

Teotihuacán Today

Archaeologists began a major **restoration** of Teotihuacán in 1905 with the removal of tons of dirt and weeds from the Pyramid of the Sun. Throughout the 1900s, other major structures were slowly restored. Today, millions of visitors every year come to explore the ancient city and climb the 248 steep steps to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun for a thrilling view. For safety, tourists are no longer allowed beyond the first platform of the Pyramid of the Moon, but even that provides a grand view looking down on the plaza and the length of the Avenue of the Dead. As visitors explore, they may see archaeologists hard at work continuing the **excavation** and preservation of Teotihuacán. Only 5 percent of the city has been scientifically excavated so far. In 1987, Teotihuacán was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and today it is the most studied site in Mesoamerica.



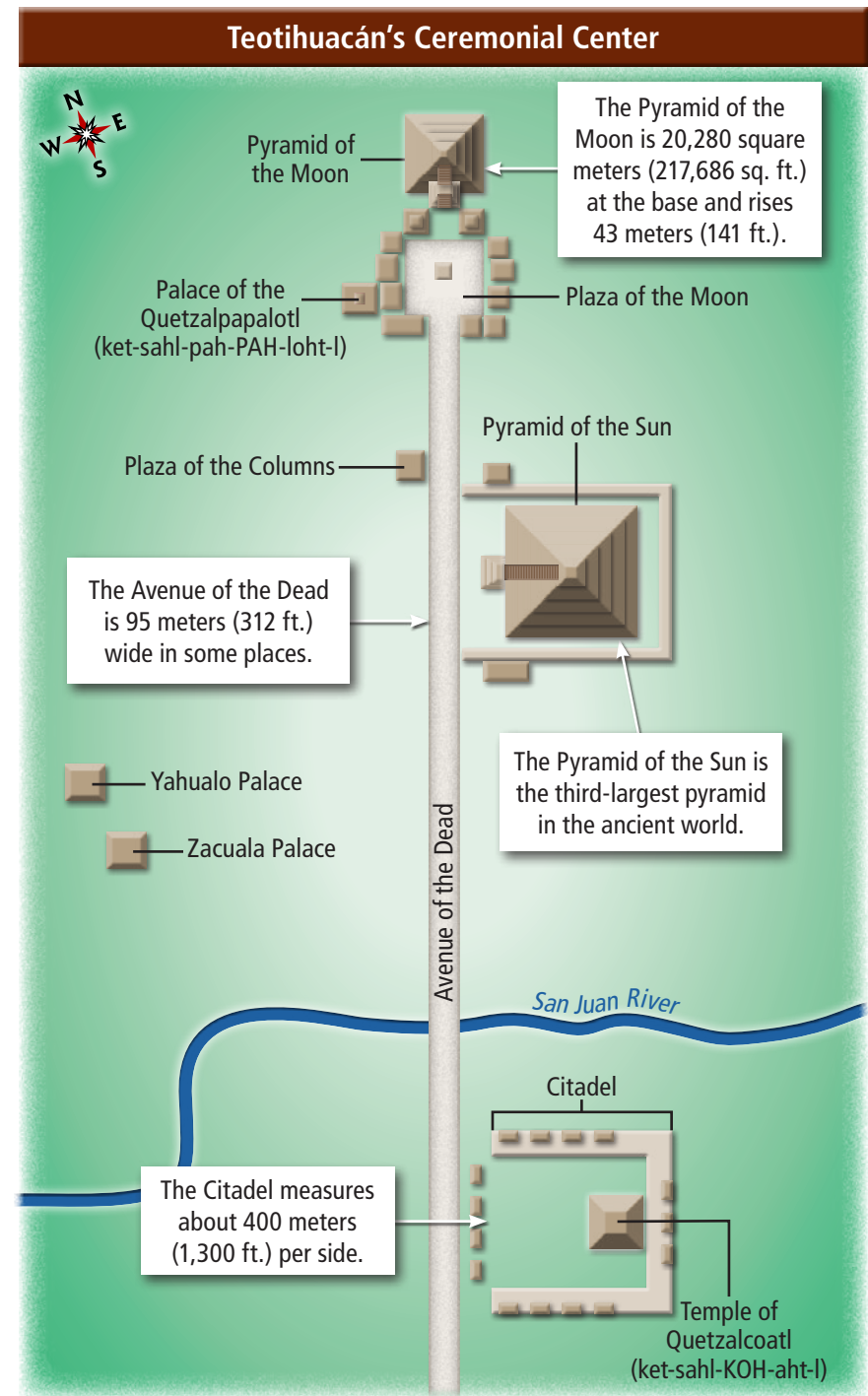
Each step of the Pyramid of the Sun is about 30 centimeters (1 ft.) high.



In 1895, the ruins of Teotihuacán were overgrown with plants before excavation began.

Collapse

After thriving for more than 650 years, a period of lengthy droughts, crop failures, and hunger among poor people may have occurred, resulting in a population decline. Researchers think the Teotihuacanos may have overused resources such as wood. Then, in 550 CE, outsiders attacked and burned the temples and palaces. Statues in the ceremonial center of the city were destroyed. Invaders may have been to blame, but there may have been a **rebellion** from within. Teotihuacán continued to be occupied, but as a much smaller town. The great pyramids and temples were nearly completely abandoned and fell into ruin for more than a thousand years.





From the top of the Pyramid of the Moon, visitors can see the vast Avenue of the Dead, which was named by the Aztecs, who mistook the structures next to the avenue for tombs.

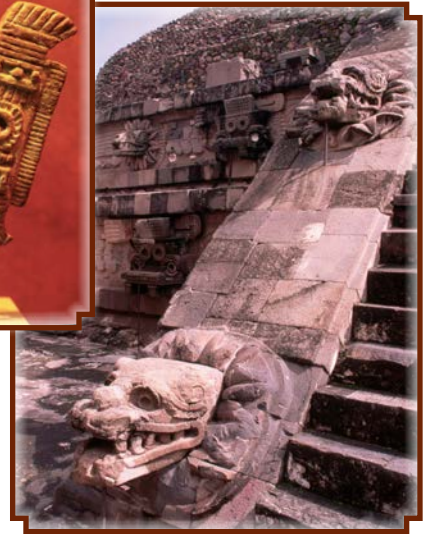
The Americas' First Great City

Teotihuacán is known around the world for its massive pyramids. The ancient city was one of the world's early urban centers, and at its **zenith** it was one of the biggest. With a population of one to two hundred thousand people, it was the largest city in the Americas and probably the sixth largest on Earth. Every building, avenue, road, and plaza in this well-planned city is **aligned** to a grid. The city's builders even changed the course of the San Juan River to flow across the Avenue of the Dead at a right angle to conform to the grid.

Since Teotihuacán was a religious and trade center, the city's **innovations** in agriculture, art, architecture, housing, and even fashion influenced **Mesoamerica** for centuries.



A carving of a warrior found at Teotihuacán (above). Sculptors carved the 4-ton (3.6 metric ton) stone heads on a temple built in 200 CE (right).

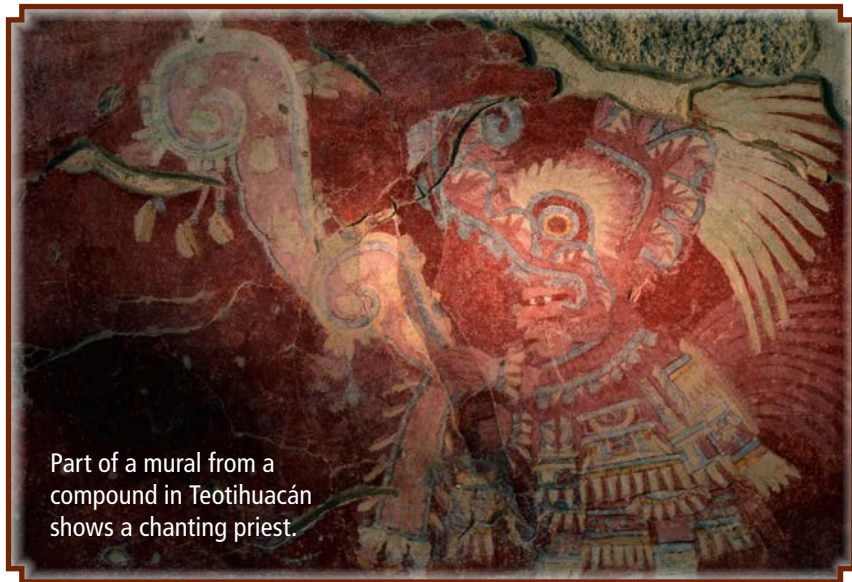


Some of these immigrants brought feathers, shells, incense, and cacao beans for making chocolate to Teotihuacán. The city became a center for art and luxury goods of all kinds. By 500 CE, Teotihuacán had grown to cover 20 square kilometers (8 sq. mi.), and its trade routes reached as far as modern-day Honduras and Guatemala.

Although Teotihuacán was a wealthy city, archaeologists found no signs of military structures. At first they wondered if the kingdom could have been a peaceful one. Today we know different. Murals show that warriors were plentiful and effective. Both commoners and wealthy men participated in battles in large numbers. They had deadly weapons and large shields and dressed as deadly animals.

The compound wall had only one grand door, but inside were beautiful courtyards, communal kitchens, a temple, and fifty or more rooms that housed between sixty and one hundred people. Fresh water was brought in from a reservoir, and drains took away wastewater. Ordinary people lived very well in Teotihuacán.

As the city developed, more immigrants came. Some evidence suggests that potters came from southern Mexico to live and work in one neighborhood. Skilled textile workers from the Gulf Coast came and settled in another neighborhood. There was a Maya neighborhood, too. All the neighborhoods competed to make the finest goods and offer the rarest imports.



Part of a mural from a compound in Teotihuacán shows a chanting priest.

Pyramid of the Sun

With a base of about 220 by 230 meters (720 by 760 ft.) and a height of more than 66 meters (216 ft.), the Pyramid of the Sun is the largest structure in the ancient city and the third-largest ancient pyramid in the world. The builders positioned it to be exactly at the point on the horizon where the Sun sets on August 13, so it is **oriented** 15.5 degrees east of true north. The Avenue of the Dead and the whole city were built with that same orientation. No one knows for sure why this was done. One theory is that the builders wanted to align structures with the movements of the Sun.

In 1971, **archaeologists** discovered a cave underneath the pyramid. Evidence suggests that the people of Teotihuacán believed that caves were where the gods were born. **Artifacts** found in the cave showed that it was used as a sacred shrine before the pyramid was built.



Building the Pyramid of the Sun may have begun around 100 CE and took more than one hundred years. Workers hauled 764,000 cubic meters (about 1 million cu. yd.) of heavy rock and other materials by hand, without the aid of wheelbarrows or animals, to build the stepped platforms. Thousands of people worked to gather broken pottery and other rubble. They filled the core of each platform with rubble and sealed the walls with clay bricks. On the surface, they laid stone blocks and covered them with a thick layer of plaster. Finally, artists painted the pyramid with brilliant murals.



Teotihuacán has more temples and palaces than any other site in Mesoamerica. A close-up of the Palace of Quetzalpapalotl shows the intricacy of carvings.



Teotihuacán ruins include stone walls of temples and other buildings.

Centuries of Greatness

By the year 200 CE, Teotihuacán's population was so large that a massive and innovative building program began.

The plan included more than two thousand apartment compounds, all built along the city grid. These new, interesting structures were built for everyone—farmers, merchants, and laborers, including immigrants—not just the wealthy. They were large, spacious, expertly built of stone, and painted with bright murals.

The city's location was also great for trade due to a break in the nearby mountains that allowed merchant **caravans** to pass in and out of the basin. The people of Teotihuacán exchanged goods with the great Maya civilization to the south and the Gulf Coast cultures to the east. Merchants exchanged goods such as cotton and shells from these other regions for valuable obsidian from Teotihuacán.

These advantages enabled Teotihuacán to grow—slowly. Then, in the first century CE, the nearby volcano Popocatepetl (poh-poh-kah-TEH-pet-l) erupted, causing tens of thousands of people to relocate. Many of them came north to Teotihuacán. A second great wave of immigrants came after the eruption of nearby Xitle (SHEET-lay) around 320 CE. The population of Teotihuacán grew with these waves of immigrants, who brought unique skills and cultures that further enriched the city.

Farming

Evidence suggests that Teotihuacanos turned nearby wetlands into farms with raised beds. Canoes used in the channels between the beds transported produce into the city.



The Great Goddess Statue (right), which is associated with rainwater, was originally located in front of the Pyramid of the Moon (below). Now it is housed in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.



Pyramid of the Moon

Not far from the Pyramid of the Sun is the Pyramid of the Moon, the second-largest structure in Teotihuacán. It sits on a rise at the top of the Avenue of the Dead. Framing it from behind is Cerro Gordo, or “Fat Hill,” an oversized hill whose streams were important sources of the precious water that sustained the city. In front of the pyramid is a huge plaza flanked by platforms that were once topped with temples.

The Plaza of the Moon could easily hold thousands of Teotihuacán's citizens. Local and visiting leaders could witness ceremonies in grand comfort from the many temple platforms.

No records of the ceremonies have been discovered, but archaeologists have uncovered the remains of people buried within the pyramid. The people were bound, sacrificed, and buried with valuable objects made of jade and obsidian, a glass-like volcanic rock used to make sharp blades for tools and weapons. Researchers also found the remains of sacrificed animals respected as powerful killers, such as pumas, rattlesnakes, and a wolf, as well as birds of prey, such as eagles, a falcon, and an owl. Evidence suggests that the people of Teotihuacán believed that if they made these sacrifices, the gods would bring rain.

How the Pyramid of the Moon Grew

Archaeologists discovered that the Pyramid of the Moon was rebuilt repeatedly, perhaps eight times. The first structure, begun around 1 CE, was just a small platform. After 350 years, it had become a stepped pyramid about 46 meters (151 ft.) high with a temple on top.



Solving the Mysteries

The people who planned and built Teotihuacán are a mystery. Today we call those people Teotihuacanos, as the Aztecs did, but we do not know what the people called themselves or what they called their city. We do not even know what language they spoke, where they were from, or the names of any of their rulers. This is because Teotihuacanos used glyphs—a form of picture writing—to name people and places, but no one has figured out how to read or interpret them yet. Instead, archaeologists have been studying the structures to find out about the people who lived there.



A mural from the site shows a rain god and a priest.

The first Teotihuacano settlers arrived around 400 BCE, and their community remained small for hundreds of years. The location of Teotihuacán in the northeastern region of the Basin of Mexico was good for farming. The wide, flat basin has good soil and is supplied with water from the mountains around it. These factors created ideal conditions for growing corn, beans, squash, tomatoes, avocados, and chili peppers to feed a growing population.