Early Civilizations in Latin America
The Maya Civilization
• Mayans thrived in Central America and southern Mexico from about A.D. 300 to A.D. 900.

• Mayans had great cities that were religious centers, too.
• The Maya built magnificent cities with huge stone temples and pyramids, but did not have the wheel nor metal tools. Their cities were designed with wide streets.
• They decorated their buildings with carvings and murals.
Pok-a-tok- game played with a stone ball. The object was to throw the ball through the stone ring.

Pok-a-tok was an integral part of the political, religious, and social life.

The actual ball games may have ranged from simple recreational events to more high-stake competitions where losing team captains were beheaded and winners attained hero-like status.
- Copan, in present day Honduras, and Tikal, in Guatemala are two important cities in the Maya civilization.
- Large pyramid shaped temples, where Mayans worshiped, are in the center of the cities.
- Farmers worked in fields which surrounded the cities.
- People from all over the empire traded goods in the market.
Polytheistic – belief in many gods

- Maize, or corn, was a main food for Mayans. Farmers grew beans, squash, peppers, avocados, and papayas.

Yum Kax, the corn god

God of rain and agriculture
Ka'kau' (Cacao)

- A lord tests the heat of his chocolate; note tamales (Maize cakes), covered with chocolate-chile sauce below him.
- Cacao was used as a medicine
Mayan priests studied the stars and planets and designed an accurate calendar. They use the calendar to decide when to hold their religious ceremonies.
Mayan develop a system of writing using signs and symbols called hieroglyphics. Almost all their books were destroyed by the Spanish.

Mayans also created a number system that included the idea of zero. This system is similar to the decimal system we use today.
About A.D. 900, the Mayas suddenly left their cities, but no one knows why.

They left their cities, but stayed in the region and millions still live in the countries of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.
In the 1100s, the Aztecs arrive in the Valley of Mexico.
The Valley of Mexico is in central Mexico.
The Aztecs found a permanent home in 1325 when they settled on an island in Lake Texcoco.
Flag of Mexico – symbol taken from the legend
The Aztecs changed the island into a magnificent city, which they called Tenochtitlan. Tenochtitlan stood on the site of modern day Mexico city.
• The Aztecs became a powerful and violent empire. They conquered the people who surrounded them and forced them to pay tribute, or taxes.
• The Aztecs became very rich from the tribute.
An emperor ruled over all Aztecs lands, and society was divided into different classes, including priests, warriors and farmers. Chinampas were floating islands to grow crops.
The Aztecs were an advanced civilization and created jewelry, art and medicine and wrote using hieroglyphics.
Tenochtitlan was the center of trade and learning.

Doctors made more than 1,000 medicines from plants.

Aztec astronomers predicted eclipses and created a very accurate calendar.

Aztecs used gold and silver to make earrings and statues.
However, the Aztec empire would not last....
In 1519, Hernan Cortes sailed from Spain to Mexico in search of treasure.
Cortes was a conquistador, or conqueror, who was sent by Spain to find riches in the new world. Cortes brought an army of 500 men and 16 horses.
The Aztec emperor, Montezuma, heard that a strange ship was offshore and sent spies to find out about it.
The spies, who had never seen horses or metal armor before, reported that white Gods had arrived and rode on hornless deer...
Montezuma decided that Cortes must be a God and welcomed him into Tenochtitlan.
• Cortes turned against Montezuma and attacked the city.
• The Spanish killed Montezuma and defeated 240,000 Aztecs.
• The Aztec empire lay in ruins. Soon, Spain began to colonize Mexico.
• Tenochtitlan became modern day Mexico City.
Inca Civilization

Machu Picchu
• About 1200, the Incas settled in Cuzco, in modern day Peru.

• Through wars and conquest, they won control of the entire Cusco Valley.

• At one time, the Incan Empire stretched 2,500 miles from Ecuador, down the coast to Argentina.
Most Incas were farmers.
Maize was the most important crop.
They did not have horses or use wheels, the Incas used llamas
1. as pack animals
2. as food
3. fur to make wool
12 million people lived in small villages throughout the empire.
Their descendents now live in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Columbia.
Many Incas were builders. They constructed 19,000 miles of road to connect the empire throughout the Andes.

The system of roads helped govern the empire. Relays of imperial messengers carried information, news, and messages to and from the capital of Cuzco.

Runners would have a 15 day duty. They would live in small houses at the side of the roads in case a message came through. They would run about 2 miles with the message, hand it off, then wait for the next.
• Incas increased their farmland by building stone terraces into the sides of steep slopes and aqueducts, pipes or channels designed to carry water from a distant source. This allowed Incas to irrigate their crops.
• Stones were shaped so well, no cement was needed to hold the wall together.
• The ruler was called the “Inca”. Now we call the whole group the Incas.
• The Inca rulers claimed to be children of the sun god.
• Gold was used throughout the empire for statues as well as everyday items.
• The government kept accurate records within the empire. They knew how many men and women lived in each village, how old they were, how much food was produced on each farm. They knew how many workers were available to build roads or temples.

• They did not write this information down, they use quipus. One man for every 10 families in each village kept information on a quipu.

• Quipus, were used to communicate information throughout the empire.
In 1531, Francisco Pizarro set sail for S. America, with 180 soldiers, because he heard of the rich Incan Empire.