

Breaking it down:

Cortes arrives in Mexico, 1519

Your instructions (to be completed **as you read**):

1. **Circle** or **underline** every word you don't know, right on the sheet.
2. **Note** the most important point of each paragraph **with a star**.
3. After reading each paragraph, try to visualize what's being said. What do you see in your mind? Does what you're reading remind you of anything? What's confusing to you? Can you predict what you'll read next?
 - a. **Circle** one of the prompts below
 - b. **Write** what you're thinking. Sentence fragments and notes are OK here, but be sure to organize your thoughts.
4. **Summarize** the paragraph **with a sentence** of your own.
5. Complete the **cast of characters** at right as you read.

Paragraph 1:

I predict / visualize / am reminded of / am confused by

This paragraph says...

Paragraph 2:

I predict / visualize / am reminded of / am confused by

This paragraph says...

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Velasquez:

Cortes:

Alvarado:

Aguilar:

Quetzalcoatl:

Moctezuma II:

Paragraph 3

I predict / visualize / am reminded of / am confused by

This paragraph says...

Paragraph 5

I predict / visualize / am reminded of / am confused by

This paragraph says...

Paragraph 4

I predict / visualize / am reminded of / am confused by

This paragraph says...

Paragraph 6

I predict / visualize / am reminded of / am confused by

This paragraph says...

Paragraph 7

I predict

This paragraph says...

It is spring, 1519. A Spanish expedition consisting of eleven ships is setting sail westward in hopes of expanding the Empire. News had reached Velasquez, the governor of Cuba, that some of his men had found land past the oceanic horizon where the sun sets. Velasquez appointed Hernan Cortes as Captain-General of the Armada and sent him off to follow the rumor.

The first land Cortes and his crew spotted was the coast of Yucatan, at one time the central nervous system of the Mayan empire. Although never a fully unified empire, distinct groups of Mayans occupied these areas, all sharing cultural characteristics such as a highly developed calendar, a complex writing system, and sophisticated mathematics. Even today, descendants of the Maya occupy some of these same lands and heartily preserve their significant cultures and languages.

Meanwhile, General Alvarado, one of Cortes' men who had traveled ahead, attacked a Maya temple. Cortes reprimanded the general – it was aggression like this that could bring their expedition to a quick and disastrous end. At Punta Catoche, Cortes came across Aguilar, a man who had survived a shipwreck and spent nine years as a slave to a warlord. Cortes enlisted the man; his knowledge of Maya would be invaluable to the explorer.

Cortes was unaware of the spiritual implications that surrounded his expedition. His arrival in the Americas coincided perfectly with the predicted return of the Plumed Serpent named Quetzalcoatl, the Aztecs' main god, credited with creating man and teaching the use of metals and the cultivation of the land.

The expectation among the Aztecs about the return of Quetzalcoatl was considerable. Cortes' armada arrived at Veracruz on Holy Thursday of 1519. Moctezuma II, emperor-king of the Aztecs, contemplated how to approach the strangers, one of whom could be Quetzalcoatl. Ruling Tenochtitlan from 1502 to 1520, Moctezuma was devoutly religious and well-read in the ancient doctrines.

Moctezuma sent envoys to greet the newcomers, and the Spaniard fired shots to intimidate the greeting party. Reports went back to Moctezuma, saying: "The noise weakened one, dizzied one. Something like a stone came out of their weapons in a shower of fire and sparks. The smoke was foul; it had a sickening, fetid smell." Another message characterized the visitors as people with "very light skin, much lighter than ours. They all have long beards, and their hair comes only to their ears"

The envoys also described the visitors, who traveled on horseback, as beasts with "two heads and six legs". Montezuma decided to meet Cortés.