

# A beautiful enterprise?



**In 1519, a group of Spanish explorers, led by Hernan Cortes, invaded Mexico. Two years later, in 1521, Cortes and his companions conquered the Aztec empire.**

1. Why do you think Cortes invaded Mexico? Record your ideas here.

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2. Read the extracts below about the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire.

*Extract A is from the Aztec account.*

*Extracts B and C are from the Spanish account.*

**A** 'When they were given the presents, the Spaniards burst into smiles; their eyes shone with pleasure; they were delighted by them. They picked up the gold and fingered it like monkeys... The truth is that they longed and lusted for gold. Their bodies swelled with greed, and their hunger was ravenous: they hungered like pigs for that gold.'

**B** 'A few days after Moctezuma and his people had tendered their obedience, Cortes spoke to him about the heavy expenses incurred by the Emperor in the wars and enterprises he was engaged in and that it would be well if everyone should contribute to them ...hence it was fitting that Moctezuma should send throughout his dominions to collect tributes in gold...'

**C** 'Now that Cortes saw himself rich and powerful, he formed three plans: one was to send to Santo Domingo... news of the country and his good fortune, this was in order to get more men, arms and horses... The second was to seize Moctezuma's domain, for he already held him prisoner. The third was the conversion of all the Indians to Christianity, which he began at once as his most important task... Few Indians, to be sure, had been baptized, either because they were stubbornly devoted to their old religion or because our men were too busy with other matters...'

3. What were the motives of Cortes according to extract A?
4. What were the motives of Cortes according to extracts B and C?
5. Has reading these extracts changed your thoughts about Cortes' reasons for invasion?
6. Do you think he was justified in conquering Mexico? Explain the reasons for your answer.

EXTRACT FROM 'CORTES' - THE LIFE OF THE CONQUEROR BY HIS SECRETARY TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY LESLEY BYRD SIMPSON USED COURTESY OF THE EDWARD C. SIMPSON LIVING TRUST

