



MEXICO CITY

The Ancient Aztecs had a story. It tells of a time, long ago, when nomadic tribes wandered the land. The Aztecs were desperate for a place to settle and build a city. They had many gods, and their priests sacrificed many of their neighbouring tribes to appease them. This made the Aztecs very unpopular.

For many months, the Aztecs searched the lands of Mexico. Every place they found was either already inhabited or unsuitable for a large city. Whenever the Aztecs had a problem, they turned to their priests. These dour men were their direct line to their deities; they were very powerful.

“My masters,” one of the priests said to the tribal leaders, one day. “There is a legend. It is very old and has been passed down for many generations. I cannot say whether it is accurate, but you must hear it.”

“Tell us,” growled the leaders. They had grown impatient with the search and with the failings of their priests.

“Many moons ago, Huitzilopochtli visited the priests and passed them a message.” The priest began reciting the prophecy from memory, “There will come a time when a priest of the Mexica is presented with a sign. When he looks out upon the land and his vision is filled with the sight of a mighty eagle perched upon a cactus, and when there is a snake held in the eagle’s talons, then he shall know the land to call their own.”

“You have done well to tell us this,” the leaders said with renewed energy.

Priests were sent out into the wilderness to find such a sign. Months and years passed, and no news arrived. Once again, the leaders grew restless, and the priests became worried.

One day, weary from his travels and desperate for rest, a priest mounted a hill and saw before him the great Lake Texcoco. Cast adrift in the middle of the water like an untethered boat, was a

small island. Growing from the island was a cactus. Perched atop the prickly plant, with a snake held dead in its talons, was an eagle. As the priest watched, the majestic bird took flight and disappeared into the hills.

Even though he was weary, the priest turned and raced back to the tribe. He told them of the good news, and they flocked to the shores of Lake Texcoco. It seemed to the priest that the island had grown in the time taken to return.

At first, the land was nothing more than a swamp but, over time, the Aztecs built the great city of Tenochtitlan - the Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus. Nowadays, that city is called Mexico City. In honour of their founding city, the Mexico flag is decorated with an eagle, holding a snake, sat on top of a cactus.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Which word means that a group of people didn't live in a fixed place?
2. What does the word "inhabited" mean?
3. Find another word for "gods" in the text.
4. What does the word "dour" tell you about the priests?
5. Which word means "tired and in need of rest"?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

How did the priest know that they had found the place to settle?

I

Why do you think the priests were worried when they couldn't find the sign?

E

Find a place where the author has used a simile. What is the impact of using this?

P

When the Aztec made it to the island, what do you think their first job would have been?

R

Who was Huitzilopochtli?

Answers:

1. Nomadic
2. Somebody else already lived there
3. Deities
4. They were serious
5. Weary

S: They saw an eagle, holding a snake and standing on a cactus

I: They knew that the leaders wouldn't put up with it for long

E: Like an untethered boat - it gives the imagery/impression of the island floating around in the middle of the lake, makes it seem small

P: Predictions could vary from rewarding the priests to sowing crops - ensure predictions link with the narrative

R: The god who sent the message to the priests