



ASTLI, THE GREAT BLUE HERON

PREPARATORY INFORMATION FOR WORKSHOP-VISIT

Astli Takes You on a Trip

Hello ! Bonjour ! Buenos dias ! Kwé ! Kwé ! She:Kon ! Panoltij !, a greeting from Astli.

In Nuaatl (the Aztec language) ASTLI means heron, and this is the name we have given to our hero: the Great Blue Heron.

Why ASTLI ?

Astli, the Great Blue Heron, is a migratory bird that travels a great deal. From Quebec all the way down to Mexico, he links two pathways: that of the North-American Indians and that of the South-American Indians. If you travel with Astli, you will be introduced to the fascinating culture of the Aztecs and Mayas of Mesoamerica, and also to that of the Algonquin and Iroquois nations of the Eastern Woodlands. Artefacts from the McCord Museum's "Simply Montreal" exhibition and from its educational collection bear witness to these civilizations and explain how they are similar and how they are different. This unique experience will be completed by a role-play activity in which you will learn the basics of Mayan numerical notation and hieroglyphic script.

Astli — In Line With Your School Program

Astli is an activity targeting Elementary Cycle 2, and designed in line with the objectives of the new school reform. It provides a link with Competency 3 in Social Sciences and will bring out the major differences between:

- The characteristics of the territory occupied
- The size of the population
- The notion of a leader or chief
- The social structure
- The habitat
- Science and technology
- Beliefs

The program makes use of a range of learning techniques appropriate to history, such as:

- Spatial scales
- Time markers
- Calculations
- Interpretation of documents

This program means that at the end of the 2nd cycle, students will be able to differentiate between a range of populations and their territories and, more specifically, between Mayas and Incas, two peoples who have left an indelible mark on the history of South America, and to bring out the similarities between the Mayas and the American Indians of the Eastern Woodlands.

Objective of the Activity

The objective of the Astli activity is to compare American-Indian civilizations in North America (Eastern Woodlands and Saint-Lawrence Valley) and Central America (Mesoamerica) and to determine how they are similar and how they are different on the basis of the four following themes: social organization, architecture, technology and nutrition. The presentation then takes us further, encouraging us to reflect on modern Western lifestyles.

The Itinerary

The exhibition offers three way stations where these ideas can be developed

- The first way station shows how populations adapted to the prevailing climate, illustrating the differences between the leather garb favoured in the Eastern Woodlands and the woven fabrics of Mesoamerica.
- The second way station explains the different lifestyles: that of the Algonquin, nomadic based; that of the Iroquois, sedentary; and that of the Mayas and Aztecs, who favoured an urban, stratified society, illustrating the type of architecture associated with each group.
- The third and last way station explains the origin of Indian corn and various agrarian and culinary practices.

The Algonquin and the Iroquois

The American Indians of the Eastern Woodlands, more specifically those of Quebec, share a number of resources, such as the forest, but use them differently, according to the range and availability of the resources in question. The Iroquois, including the Mohawk and Huron, were agricultural people and settled in the fertile lands along the St. Lawrence River. Their lifestyle was sedentary, and they built themselves "longhouses", organized into villages. Their Algonquian neighbours, including the Algonquin and the Mik'maq, lived in the woodland territories. These areas were not very cultivable, but, on the other hand, were alive with game, fish and edible plants that, following nomad custom, they used according to the season. They lived in wigwams and travelled in small communities, often using birch bark canoes.

From North to South

Although there are major differences of language and culture between the aboriginal nations of North America and Central America, over several thousand years a vast network of commercial and cultural communications has developed.

Nevertheless, with several other groups acting as intermediaries, the Eastern Woodlands and Mesoamerican populations were able to share objects and ideas, such as the cultivation of corn.

The Mayas and the Incas

There was probably no direct contact between the Mayas and Incas, that is to say between Central America and South America, because of the geographical obstacles, for example the impenetrable mountain forests of Columbia that even today hinder land-based travel. However, these two civilizations had similar lifestyles: they wove colourful clothing, knew the art of metallurgy, cultivated Indian corn on a large scale, constructed cities of stone and lived in stratified societies governed by kings.

Pre-Visit Activity

Before your visit to the Museum, we would suggest that you review the following concepts with your students:

- **The 11 aboriginal nations of Quebec:**

The Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamek, Cri Indian, Huron-Wendat, Montagnais-Innus, Malecite, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Naskapi and Inuit.

- **The two language families:**

a) **the Algonquian:** i.e. the Abenaki, Algonquin, Attikamek, Cri Indian, Montagnais-Innus, Malecite, Mi'kmaq and the Naskapi;

b) **the Iroquoian:** i.e. the Mohawk and Huron-Wendat.

- **The nomadic (or semi-nomadic) nations and those that are sedentary together with an overview of their respective lifestyles.**

Nomadic: The Algonquin, Attikamek, Cri Indian, Montagnais-Innus, Malecite, Mi'kmaq and Naskapi nations.

Sedentary: The Mohawk and Huron-Wendat nations. One Algonquin nation, the Abenaki, were an exception, since they cultivated the land.

- **Explaining** to students the geographical locations of the Mayas and the Aztecs in Mesoamerica, i.e. in Central America, which is today Mexico and Guatemala, using a map.

- **Mention the lack of contact between the Iroquois, the Incas and the Mayans in order to distinguish the two cultures.**

For example, if we travelled by bus from Montreal to Guatemala (the former homeland of the Mayans), the trip would take 2 weeks. If we went as far as Peru (the former land of the Incas) it would take about 1 month. Imagine if we had to make this trip on foot, or by canoe!



Adaptation: Martin Lominy, 2002.

Cultural areas of North America and Central America.

The above map shows the cultural areas of North America and Central America, starting with the Eastern Woodlands and going down to Mesoamerica, which includes Mexico, Yucatan and Guatemala.