Name_____ Class_____ Date_____

Primary Source

There are only a few Aztec accounts of the arrival of the Spanish in Tenochtitlán in 1519. The following, written by an unknown Aztec chronicler, describes the first meeting of the Aztec ruler Moctezuma (spelled Motecuhzoma here) and the Spanish leader Hernán Cortés. Their translator was a young native woman called Malinche. ◆ *As you read, think about how this account might differ from the Spanish point of view. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The Broken Spears

When Motecuhzoma had given necklaces to each [of the Spanish] Cortés asked him: "Are you Motecuhzoma? Are you the king? . . ."

And the king said: "Yes, I am Motecuhzoma." Then he stood up to welcome Cortés; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: "Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne. . . .

When Motecuhzoma had finished, La Malinche translated his address into Spanish. . . . Cortés replied in his strange and savage tongue, speaking first to La Malinche: "Tell Motecuhzoma that we are his friends. There is nothing to fear. We have wanted to see him for a long time, and now we have seen his face and heard his words. . . ."

La Malinche translated this speech and the Spaniards grasped Motecuhzoma's hands and patted his back to show their affection for him. . . .

When the Spaniards were installed in the palace, they asked Motecuhzoma about the city's resources and reserves and about the warriors' ensigns and shields. They questioned him closely and then demanded gold.

Motecuhzoma guided them to it. . . .

When they arrived at the treasure house called Teucalco, the riches of gold and feathers were brought out to them: ornaments made of quetzal feathers, richly worked shields, disks of gold, the necklaces of the idols, gold nose plugs, gold greaves [leg armor] and bracelets and crowns.

The Spaniards immediately stripped the feathers from the gold shields and ensigns. They gathered all the gold into a great mound and set fire to everything else, regardless of its value. Then they melted down the gold into ingots [metal mold]. . . .

Next they went to Motecuhzoma's storehouse, . . . When they entered the hall of treasures, it was as if they had arrived in Paradise. They searched everywhere and coveted everything; they were slaves to their own greed. All of Motecuhzoma's possessions were brought out: fine bracelets, necklaces with large stones, ankle rings with little gold bells, the royal crowns and all the royal finery—everything that belonged to the king and was reserved to him only. They seized these treasures as if they were their own, as if this plunder were merely a stroke of good luck. And when they had taken all the gold, they heaped up everything else in the middle of the patio.

Source: *The Broken Spears,* by Miguel Leon-Portilla (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

Questions to Think About

1. What details show the great wealth of the Aztec empire?
2. **Draw Inferences** What do you think Moctezuma means when he says to Cortés, "Now you have arrived on the earth"?
3. **Activity** Research to find other accounts of the meeting between Moctezuma and Cortés. Write a short story about the encounter from the perspective of one of the Spanish or of Malinche.

© Pearson Education, Inc., publishing as Pearson Prentice Hall. All rights reserved.