PRE-COLUMBIAN - Refers to various cultures and civilizations found throughout North and South America before the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492.

The Olmec
The Olmec were the first great civilization in Mexico (1200 B.C. to 500 A.D. approx.) The geographical area was the great coastal plain of the Gulf of Mexico.

Monumental Sculpture: Most surprising works include giant volcanic heads sculptures. They are thought to represent the severed heads of losers in a game called pelota. (Court-type sport involving a ball)

1. What does the term Pre-Columbian refer to? (1)

2. Make a sketch of the Colossal Head sculpted by the Olmec from 1200 B.C. - 500 A.D. and explain how heavy it was? (2)

3. What kind of mood/feeling do you get from his facial expression and why? (2)

4. Make a sketch of the Olmec Mask from 800-400 B.C. and explain what kind of mood/feeling do you get from this work and why? (3)

This mask may have once graced the tomb of an Olmec ruler.

Olmec Mask, Tabasco, Mexico. 800-400 B.C. Jadeite
The Maya
They controlled vast lands that included what are now the Yucatan, Guatemala and Honduras. They never advanced technically beyond Stone Age but possessed highly developed skills in other areas.

They built their first cities by 320 A.D. and their civilization declined, revived and declined with the arrival of Hernando Cortes in 1519. The Spanish conquest completed the downfall of the Maya culture.

3 Major Accomplishments:
1) Great Builders - huge plazas
2) Devised an elaborate system of mathematics
3) Invented the most precise calendar in history

Mayan Culture - tied to Religious Beliefs
They believed that the gods created human beings through self sacrifice and the first people were formed by mixing maize (corn) with water and then brought to life by the gods. To repay this debt, human beings were required to continuously return blood to the gods. This was needed to make certain the gods would maintain their strength and nourishment. As a result most sacrificial rituals were characterized by efforts to secure blood for the gods. Captives taken in war were sacrificed in public ceremonies as well as Mayan rulers typically drew their own blood.

Mayan Cities: Architecture
Mayan cities were constructed with vast central plazas to accommodate the masses of people who gathered to witness these blood ceremonies.

5. List three great accomplishments of the Mayans. (3)
1. 
2. 
3.

6. In what way was the Mayan culture influenced by their religious beliefs and what was the importance of ritualistic sacrifices? (2)

Female Dignitary. Relief Carving, Chiapasos Tabasco Mexico. 650-750 A.D. Limestone.

Mayan Sculpture
Rich reliefs covered buildings and temples that were placed around plazas. This work shows a royal priestess dressed in rich costume and wearing an elaborate plumed headdress.
Aztecs
When Cortes arrived in the New World in 1519 a people called the Aztecs had conquered a great deal of Mexico from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and as far south as Guatemala by 1521. They built a huge city called Tenochtitlan (present day Mexico City) that was built on an island in the lake.

Aztec Culture - tied to Religious Beliefs
Aztec’s were warlike people driven to continuous combat by religious beliefs. They believed human sacrifice was necessary to keep the universe running smoothly and they thought the gods demanded human hearts. The priests at the great temple at Tenochtitlan were said to have sacrificed over 20 thousand people.

Aztec Sculpture
Art was closely linked to the blood and sacrificial rituals. Statues to the gods were carved on temples atop pyramids. This sculpture depicts a man perhaps a priest or celebrant dressed in the skins of flayed victims who have been sacrificed.

Aztec Painting
They had a system of picture writing done on sheets of parchments that were joined together like a book. These kinds of painted books, later called a codex. A Codex known as The Book Of Days from which personal destinies were predicted - painting illustrates Aztec deities Tezcalipoca (war god and night winds) and Quetzalcoatl (life god) Quetzalcoatl is shown as a feathered serpent who was a nature deity transformed into a national god

1. What did the Aztec believe was required of them to keep their universe running smoothly? (1)

2. Approximately how many people were sacrificed at the great temple of Tenochtitlan? (1)

3. Make a sketch of the Xipe Impersonator volcanic rock sculpture and explain what he is wearing. (2)

4. Look at the Aztec Codex Borbonicus from the early 1500s, what element/principle of design how does the artist use to emphasis the two figures in the foreground? (1)
The Incas: Art of Peru

They are best known of all ancient peoples who inhabited Peru. Between the 13th and 15th centuries Inca power grew until their empire stretched from Quito in Equador to central Chile (more than 3000 miles).

Inca Road System

Inca Architecture

The Incas were skilled in the art of forming and fitting stone, Inca builders erected buildings that have survived to the present day. The durability of these structures is due to the precision with which each block of stone was fit into place.

Machu Picchu was an Inca city built to protect the people from hostile tribes living to the east. The city is dramatically perched on a ridge between two rugged mountain peaks 8000 feet above sea level. These buildings also constructed from huge stone blocks that were cut and locked into place with such skill that they have withstanded earthquakes for centuries.

By the time the Spaniards under Francisco Pizarro reached Peru in 1532, the Inca Empire had been weakened by civil war and they fell easily to Pizarro.

Inca Stone Fitting

Engineering Accomplishments

Skillful engineers joined all parts of their empire together with a network of road and bridges. They established an efficient system of relay runners who moved these messages to every corner of the empire. Running in short spurts at breakneck speed, a series of couriers could cover 250 miles (250km) a day - faster than the speed of messengers on horseback galloping over the famous roads of Rome.

The Inca Atahualpa and his warriors at Spanish conquerors arrive.

5. What is Machu Picchu? (1)

6. Where and why was Machu Picchu constructed? (2)

7. How were the Inca able to courier a message over 250 miles in one day? (1)