**Aztec Animal Deities**

Animals, birds, and even insects were an essential part of worship for the Aztecs. According to their oral mythology, the Aztecs came from the island of Aztlán, the land of the god Huitzilopochtli who was identified with the hummingbird. The Aztecs were nomadic for two centuries, but they were promised by Huitzilopochtli that they would find their homeland where they saw an eagle perched on a nopal, a prickly pear cactus that was growing out of stone. According to tradition, this happened and Tenochtitlán was founded. The first temple was built there (now Mexico City) in honor of Huitzilopochtli.  
  
The most powerful predator of the region, the jaguar, was associated with the ***omnipotent*** Aztec god Tezcatlipoca and was the form that the sun took on its nightly journey through the underworld Mictlan, to fight off the dangers so it might emerge triumphant the next morning. The eagle was the sun by day. Each night the jaguar lost part of his flesh in the nocturnal battle.  
  
Tiny creatures were also part of Aztec spirituality. The mysterious moth, the scorpion, and the centipede inspired both terror and ***reverence***. The Aztecs dedicated altars to these feared creatures on which their images were carved and where they made offerings to ***propitiate*** them. The night owl, the scorpion, the bat, and the spider were associated with the god Mictlantecutl, "Lord of Death," and so they were not to be killed.

Eason, Cassandra. "Aztec animal deities." *World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras*. ABC-CLIO, 2014. Web. 5 May 2014.

**Vocabulary:** *omnipotent:* all powerful, *reverence:* respect, *propitiate:* to make peace with or to appease

1. Read this sentence from *Aztec Animal Deities.  
 The Aztecs were nomadic for two centuries, but they were promised by Huitzilopochtli that they would find their   
 homeland where they saw an eagle perched on a nopal, a prickly pear cactus that was growing out of stone.*

A. Based on the context of the sentence, what do we know about the meaning of the word   
 *homeland*? Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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B. Which two words in the sentence helped you to understand the meaning of the word *nomadic*?  
 a. centuries; promised b. homeland; find  
 c. eagle; homeland d. saw; promised

2. Using lines 10-13, underline the context clues that will help you understand the meaning of the word   
 nocturnal. In your own words, provide a definition of the word. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What are the four most important words and phrases in the reading passage which help you to   
 understand the meaning of the word Deities on line 1? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Which Aztec animal deities are discussed in this reading? Annotate your text by drawing a circle  
 around each deity and an arrow from the circled words to the words and phrases in the reading   
 passage that describe the deity.