MARK YOUR TEXT FIRST
1. Place a ! next to extremely important info (main idea).
2. Place a ? next to paragraph that doesn’t make sense.
3. Circle “O” any word/key terms you don’t understand.
4. Place a ✓ if you understand what you read.

THE GIST!!! Record the GIST of these paragraphs using 10 words or less for each paragraph.

24.2 The Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico
The Aztec Empire arose in the Valley of Mexico, a fertile area nearly eight thousand feet above sea level. By the time the Aztecs arrived, in the mid-1200s C.E., the valley had been a center of civilization for more than a thousand years. Two earlier groups, in particular, had built civilizations there that strongly influenced the Aztecs.

Civilization in the Valley of Mexico From about 100 to 650 C.E., the Valley of Mexico was dominated by the Teotihuacáns (TEH-aw-tee-wah-KAHNZ). These people built an enormous capital city, Teotihuacán. One of the city’s buildings, the Pyramid of the Sun, was more than two hundred feet high.

After Teotihuacán’s collapse around the 700s, a group from the north, the Toltecs (TOHL-tek-s), migrated into the valley. Toltec civilization reached its height in the 10th and 11th centuries. The Toltecs built a number of cities. Their capital, Tollán (toh-LAHN), boasted large pyramids topped with temples.

During the 1100s, new groups invaded the valley. They took over Toltec cities and established new city-states. But the influence of the Teotihuacáns and the Toltecs continued to be felt in the new culture that was developing in the valley.

The Arrival of the Aztecs Sometime around 1250 C.E., a new group of people arrived in the Valley of Mexico. This nomadic band of hunter-gatherers called themselves the Mexico (meh-HEE-kah). We know them today as the Aztecs.

The name Aztec comes from Aztłán (az-TLAN), the Mexicans’ legendary homeland. According to Aztec tradition, Aztłán was an island in a lake northwest of the Valley of Mexico. The Aztecs left the island around 1100 C.E. They wandered through the deserts of northern Mexico for many years before coming to the Valley of Mexico.

When the Aztecs came to the heart of the valley, they found lakes dotted with marshy islands. Thriving city-states controlled the land around the lakes. The Aztecs had a difficult time establishing themselves in the valley. The people living in the city-states thought the Aztecs were crude barbarians. But the Aztecs were fierce warriors, and the city-states were willing to employ them as mercenaries.
After they settled in the valley, the legacy of the Teotihuacáns and the Toltecs began to influence the Aztecs. They made pilgrimages to the ancient ruins of Teotihuacán. They adopted Quetzalcoatl (ket-sahl-koh-AHT-l), the Teotihuacáns’ feathered serpent god, as one of their own gods.

The Aztecs thought even more highly of the Toltecs, as rulers of a golden age. Aztec rulers married into the surviving Toltec royal line. The Aztecs even began to claim the Toltecs as their own ancestors.

In 1319, stronger groups forced the Aztecs to move away from Chapultepec (chuh-PUHL-teh-pek), a rocky hill where they had made their home. The Aztecs fled to the south, where they became mercenaries for the city-state of Culhuacán. But trouble came again when the Aztecs sacrificed the daughter of the Culhua chief. This led to a war with the Culhuas, who drove the Aztecs onto an island in the shallow waters of Lake Texcoco.

It was here, the Aztecs said, that they spotted an eagle perched atop a cactus with a long snake in its beak. The Aztecs took this as a sign that they should stay in this place, and set to work building the city they called Tenochtitlán. The island turned out to be a good site for the Aztecs’ city. The lake provided fish and water birds for food, and the island was easy to defend. Over time, the Aztecs’ new home would grow into one of the great cities of the world.

From Mercenaries to Empire Builders  The Aztecs started building Tenochtitlán in 1325 C.E. For the next 100 years, they again served as mercenaries for a powerful group called the Tepanecs. Through this alliance the Aztecs gained land, trading connections, and wealth.

Eventually, however, the Aztecs rebelled against the heavy-handed rule of the Tepanecs. Under the Aztec leader Itzcoatl (itz-koh-AHT-l), Tenochtitlán joined with two other city-states in what was called the Triple Alliance. In 1428, the alliance fought and defeated the Tepanecs. Together, the allies began a series of conquests that laid the foundation for the Aztec Empire.

As Tenochtitlán became a great power, Itzcoatl set out to reshape Aztec history. He burned records that referred to his people’s humble origins. Instead, he connected the Aztecs to the distinguished Toltecs.