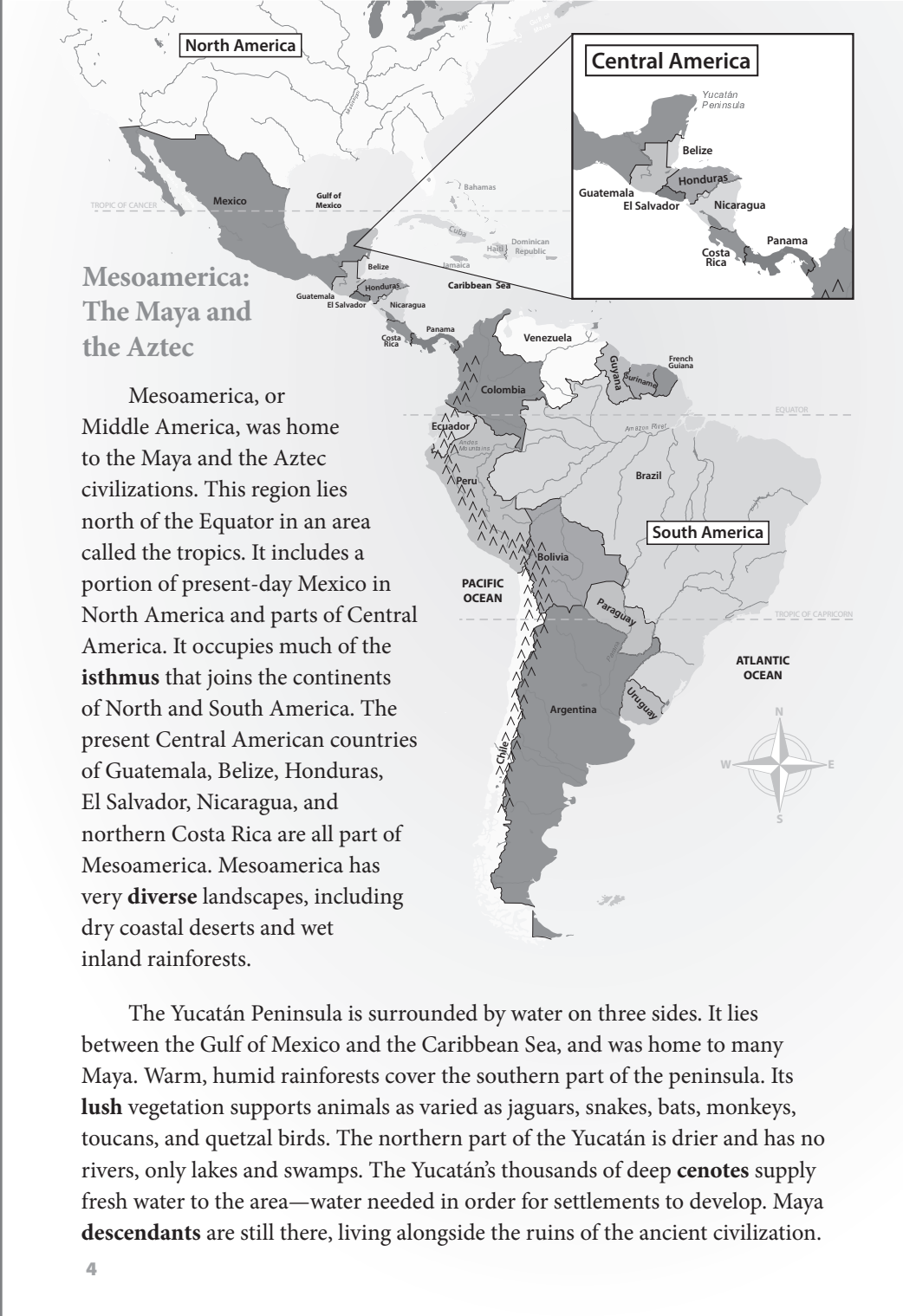


Excerpt from “The Rise of Early American Civilizations”

Read the excerpt and complete the activity that follows.

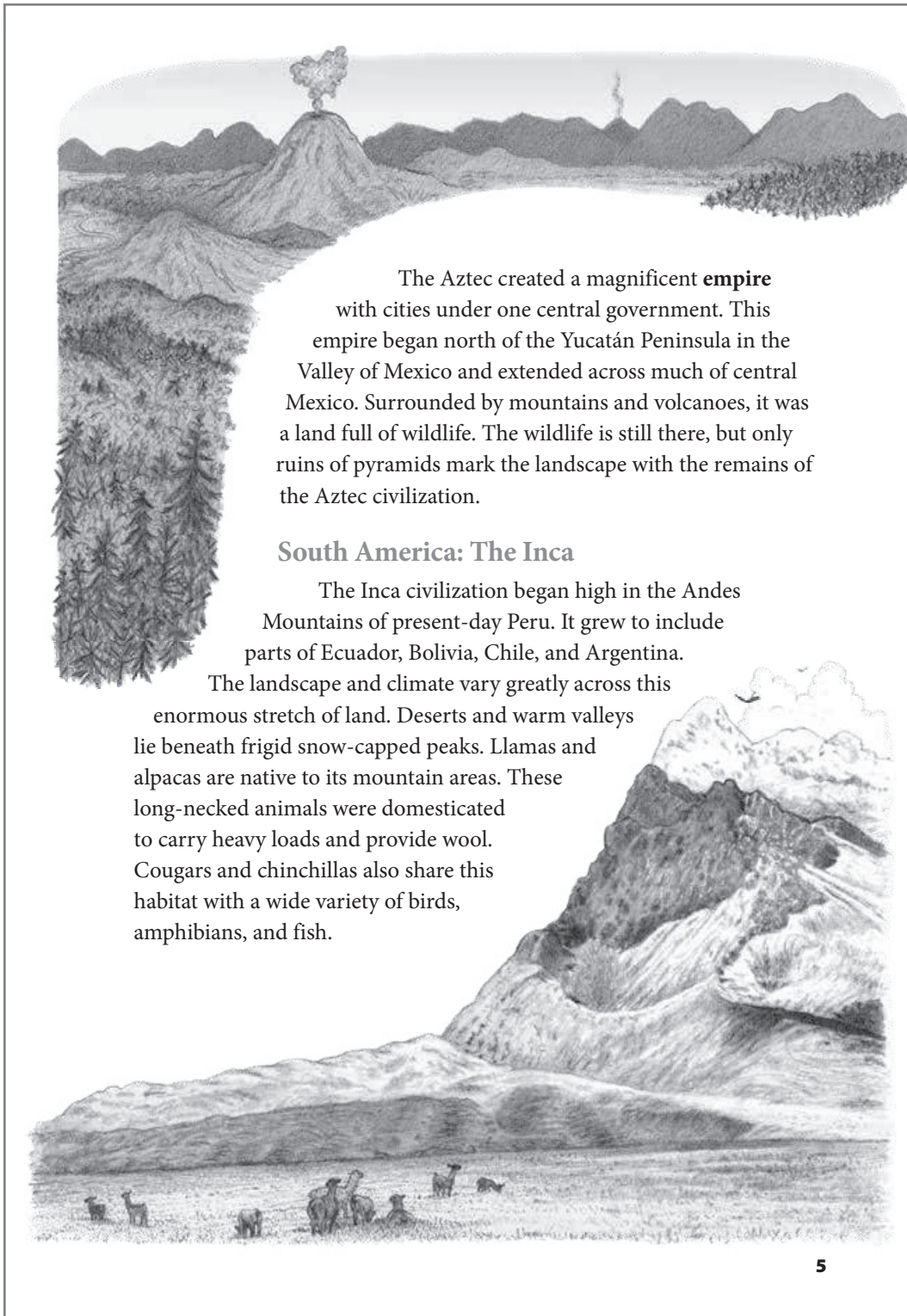


**Mesoamerica:
The Maya
and the Aztec**

Mesoamerica, or Middle America, was home to the Maya and the Aztec civilizations. This region lies north of the Equator in an area called the tropics. It includes a portion of present-day Mexico in North America and parts of Central America. It occupies much of the **isthmus** that joins the continents of North and South America. The present Central American countries of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and northern Costa Rica are all part of Mesoamerica. Mesoamerica has very **diverse** landscapes, including dry coastal deserts and wet inland rainforests.

The Yucatán Peninsula is surrounded by water on three sides. It lies between the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, and was home to many Maya. Warm, humid rainforests cover the southern part of the peninsula. Its **lush** vegetation supports animals as varied as jaguars, snakes, bats, monkeys, toucans, and quetzal birds. The northern part of the Yucatán is drier and has no rivers, only lakes and swamps. The Yucatán’s thousands of deep **cenotes** supply fresh water to the area—water needed in order for settlements to develop. Maya **descendants** are still there, living alongside the ruins of the ancient civilization.

4



The Aztec created a magnificent **empire** with cities under one central government. This empire began north of the Yucatán Peninsula in the Valley of Mexico and extended across much of central Mexico. Surrounded by mountains and volcanoes, it was a land full of wildlife. The wildlife is still there, but only ruins of pyramids mark the landscape with the remains of the Aztec civilization.

South America: The Inca

The Inca civilization began high in the Andes Mountains of present-day Peru. It grew to include parts of Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina.

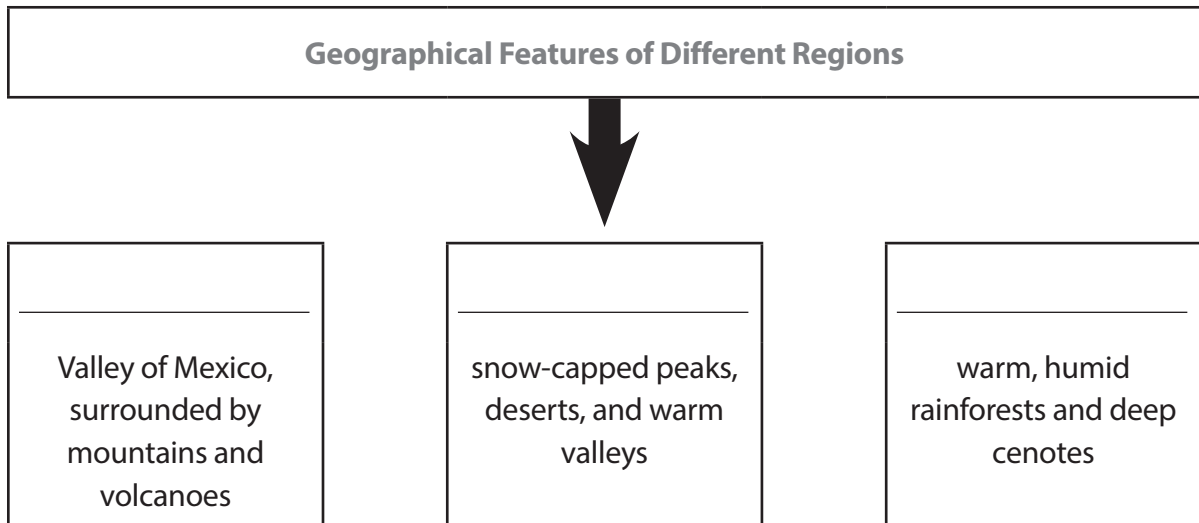
The landscape and climate vary greatly across this enormous stretch of land. Deserts and warm valleys lie beneath frigid snow-capped peaks. Llamas and alpacas are native to its mountain areas. These long-necked animals were domesticated to carry heavy loads and provide wool. Cougars and chinchillas also share this habitat with a wide variety of birds, amphibians, and fish.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

The Rise of Early American Civilizations

Each box below contains a description of the geographical features of a region. On the line in each box, write the name of the early American civilization—Maya, Aztec, or Inca—which developed in the region described there.



Match the term with its description and write the letter on the line. Refer to the text in the excerpt to confirm your answers.

- A. Andes Mountains
- B. Yucatán Peninsula
- C. Mesoamerica
- D. Central America
- E. Equator

_____ The isthmus that joins North and South America

_____ Mesoamerica lies north of this imaginary line drawn on maps and globes

_____ The mountain range where the Inca civilization began

_____ Includes parts of present-day Mexico and Central America

_____ A part of southern Mexico surrounded on three sides by water