

# Ollin



a study guide

**Ollin** is a spectacular recreation of one of the most profound cultural collisions in human history—the conquest of Mexico by Spain.

Daniel Valdez was drawn to interpret this story as a symbol of both his cultural and personal identity, as the Conquest marks the birth of the Mestizo—the mixed blood race to whom most Mexicans and Mexican Americans trace their heritage.

Originally developed by Valdez as a radio play, *Ollin* was given a workshop production in San Diego and a full student production at Stanford University. Valdez is excited to work with Su Teatro in bringing the next evolution of this remarkable piece to Denver.

This production marks the third collaboration between Valdez and Su Teatro.

**The Aztecs** were not the first nomadic peoples from the north to settle in the Mexico Valley. When they arrived there in the early 14th Century, it was being occupied by the Toltecs—a tribe who, centuries before, had pushed their Mayan predecessors from the area.



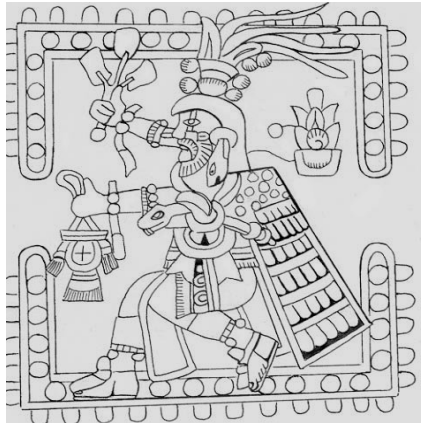
The Aztecs suffered many humiliating military defeats and eventually settled on a low-lying lake island that other tribes had not deigned to occupy. They called the place Tenochtitlan.

By the early 16th century, the Aztecs had prospered to the point that their empire had expanded for hundreds of miles to the north and south, west to the Pacific Ocean and east to the Gulf of Mexico. The Aztecs subjugated all of the surrounding tribes including the Toltecs and the Mayans—enslaving them for manual labor and as victims of human sacrifice to appease the sun god, Tonatiuh (also Huitzilopochtli).

When the Spaniards arrived in the Western Hemisphere, the Aztec Empire was at the height of its glory.

**Quetzalcoatl**, sometimes called the feathered serpent, was a major Aztec deity who traveled to Mictlan, the underworld, and created human beings with the bones of previous races.

As in the Christian tradition of Jesus,



Quetzalcoatl is said to have been a man/god who ascended into heaven upon his death. Before his ascension, he predicted his return to the people on the day one reed in the year one reed (November 8, 1519).

**Moctezuma** was the Aztec ruler at the time of the Spaniards' arrival in Mexico. In the years leading up to the Conquest, Moctezuma and the Aztecs were troubled with several strange omens, including the apparition of a comet, the destruction of a temple by lightning and fire, and the appearance of strange two-headed creatures in the country.

These omens, coupled with the eventual appearance of the Spanish armies in Mexico, greatly distressed Moctezuma and his advisors who believed the gods were unhappy with the state of the empire. To appease the gods, Moctezuma called for a great increase of blood sacrifice, which further ostracized and angered the subjugated tribes.

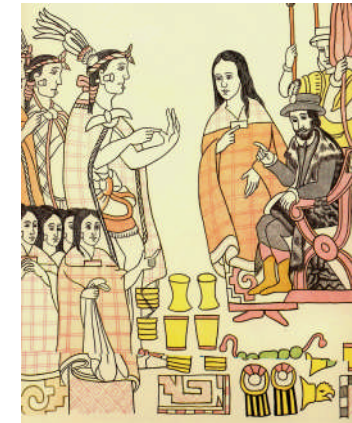
**Hernán Cortés** was the military commander who led the first Spanish expeditions into Mexico. His arrival in Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519 coincided exactly with the predicted return of Quetzalcoatl, and many legends maintain that Moctezuma mistook the arrival of Cortés with the god's return.

Cortés was greeted warmly by Moctezuma, but he and his armies were



eventually driven from the capital in the summer of 1520. Stricken with his own religious fervor, Cortés believed his god ordained the conquest of the Aztec lands for the Spanish crown. The Spaniards regrouped and gathered support from the disgruntled outlying tribes of the empire. One year later, they marched back into Tenochtitlan and completed their conquest.

**Malinche** (also Malintzín or Doña Marina) was a Mayan slave who Cortés took a liking to. As she was versed in both her native Mayan tongue and Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs), Cortés employed her, along with Gerónimo de Aguilar—a Spanish priest who also spoke Mayan—as an interpreter.



Malinche eventually learned Spanish and became sole interpreter during the Spaniards' triumphant return to Tenochtitlan.

Malinche holds a special (albeit controversial)

place in Conquest legend. Many see her as a traitor, though as a Mayan slave, she would never have been loyal to the Aztec empire. Others see her as a tragic figure—sold into slavery and made to do Cortés's bidding.

In any case, her legacy is secure. Malinche married Cortés and bore him one son. This blood mixing would be one of the most significant events in modern human history, as it signaled both the end of an indigenous empire and the rise of the Mestizo.