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so *YOU* THINK YOU'VE *GOT IT* BAD?

A KID'S LIFE IN THE
**AZTEC
AGE**



CLOTHES AND HAIRSTYLES

Have you ever woken up in the morning and every single strand of hair on your head is going in a **COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION**, as if they all had an argument while you were sleeping?

Or you're walking to school and you see that kid from class 4B who's soooo cool and just as they turn around a gust of wind blows your hair **STRAIGHT UP IN THE AIR**, so it looks like someone is holding a **GIANT INVISIBLE BALLOON** above your head?

Well, if you think **YOU'VE GOT IT BAD**, at least you're actually **ALLOWED** to have hair on your head as a kid . . .

The Aztecs – a great civilization that flourished in what is now Mexico between the years 1300 and 1521 – didn't let boys under the age of 10 grow their hair at all. They had to have their heads **SHAVED**!



Maybe that's not so bad in sunny Central America, but you'd definitely need a pretty big **WOOLLY HAT** collection to keep your hair-free headbox from getting **FROSTY** on winter mornings in colder countries.

But don't worry. After boys hit 10 they were allowed to grow hair . . . a patch of hair at the back of their heads, that is. Yay. So happy about that tiny patch. Much warmer.

Luckily for girls, there were no such problems – in fact quite the opposite. They had to wear their hair long and loose until they were married, when they would plait it and tie it up on the top of their head, almost like **HAIRY HORNS**!



IMPORTANT NOTE!

If you like having your hair in a neat ponytail or funky pigtails, sorry. They are **BANNED**. No ponies or piggies allowed – OK? It's a head, not a farmyard!

I use hair blood . . . because I'm **WORTH** it!

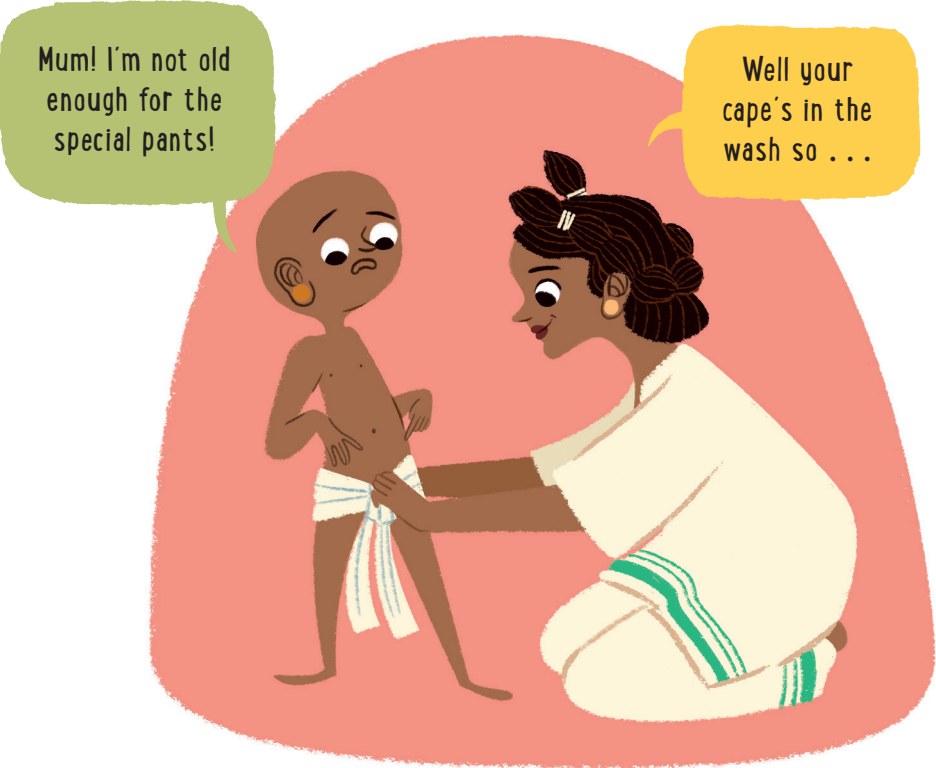
FANCY THAT!

The hair of an Aztec priest was often long and messy – smeared with soot, **MOULDY** and matted with **BLOOD**. Thankfully these days you can just pop some hair gel on if you want to create that casual, messy look. No need for mould and blood, thanks very much.



So that's the head covered (or not, if you were a bald boy), but what about the rest of you?

Clothes were very important to the Aztecs. What you could wear depended on how important you were. If you wore the wrong thing it could have **VERY** serious consequences . . . and we're not talking about people pointing and laughing at your **SILLY TROUSERS** or **WEIRD** choice of hat.



The basic item of clothing for boys and men was called a *maxtlatl*, a length of cloth that was wrapped round the waist and passed between the legs before being tied to hold it up – kind of like pants but slightly more complicated. Before the age of 12 boys weren't allowed to wear these and just wore a small cape. After 12 they could pop on a *maxtlatl* and wear it under a cloak called a *tilmahtli*.



The *tilmahtli* was a sign of how rich or grand you were. How long it was and where it was tied (at the shoulder for commoners and at the front of the neck for nobles) were **VERY** important. For example, if anyone was spotted wearing a cloak that reached down to their ankles, they'd be for the high jump . . . unless they could prove they were a warrior with lots of battle scars on their legs that the cloaks were protecting.

FANCY THAT!

Red was a powerful colour – the colour of blood and fire. Many clothes were dyed red using the juice from **SQUISHED** cochineal beetles. Just in case you were wondering, this is not where the term "you have ants in your **PANTS**" comes from. Oh, and if you think it sounds disgusting, cochineal is still used today . . . as a red food colouring. Enjoy chomping those delicious beetles!

From age three, girls wore just blouses called *huipilli*, then when they were four they could wear short skirts. From the age of five they wore long skirts.



There were no clothes shops in those days, so buying a cool tracksuit or a pair of leggings wasn't an option. There was also a limited choice of materials to make clothes from – especially if you were poor. While nobles and royalty were allowed to wear fine things made of smooth, comfortable cotton, common people had to wear plain clothes made from the fibres of the maguey plant.

It wasn't just the clothes they wore that were important to the Aztecs. Those stylish peeps also just LOOOOVED a bit of accessorising!

Just like people today, the Aztecs had a love of beautiful things to wear, and both men and women wore lots of jewellery – often the kind that involved poking holes in yourself. Ouch! They wore elaborate lip-plugs that pierced their lips, discs through their earlobes and jewellery that dangled from their noses. But the poor had to be careful about what kind of jewellery they wore . . . or they could be in **BIG** trouble.

Only emperors and the nobility could wear feather headdresses or jewellery made from jade or gold. It was a serious crime to wear accessories or clothes belonging to a richer group, and poorer people could even be **KILLED** if they wore the wrong thing.



Imagine being sentenced to death for wearing a fancy cap or expensive socks these days. Seems a **SLIGHT** overreaction, Aztecs. Just sayin'.

On their feet, rich folk wore nice sandals made from plant fibres while the poor went barefoot. Warriors were allowed to wear sandals too, so at least their tootsies would be nice and comfy while they were getting bopped and poked with nasty things.



So, if you've suddenly gone off your flashy new trainers just because Ziggy Smoove, your **FAVE POPSTAR EVER**, has a different style, stop **WHINING** and think yourself lucky to have shoes at all.

Do you ever wish . . . you could make your life a bit more colourful?

Perhaps you fancy bright green hair or a pair of electric-powered, musical roller skates in rainbow colours with added glitter fountains?

Well, the Aztec approach to making life a little brighter might be too much – even for you! Back then it was common for people to paint their bodies and hair vibrant or dark colours. For instance, women would paint themselves yellow with a paste that was made from the squished-up bodies of insects. And if that doesn't sound eye-popping enough, some would also paint their teeth red . . . after sharpening them to a point!



IMPORTANT NOTE!

Please **DO NOT** sharpen your teeth to points. Even if you think it would be excellent for eating chicken nuggets.

FAMILY LIFE

Being a kid can be weird and quite annoying at times, right? But one thing is certain – you start off small, grow bigger and then stop.

You very rarely see **SIX-FOOT-TALL BABIES** with beards. Just imagine the size of **NAPPY** they'd have to wear . . . and what would be in it. **YEUCH!** Babies are – and this is something you'll notice if you've been paying close attention – almost always on the little side. Smaller than a **COW**, bigger than a **GRAPE**. That's a good way to remember. The getting bigger bit usually happens quite naturally, without any need to water the child like a house plant.

Even if you wish you could be taller **RIGHT NOW**, you should probably just be thankful your parents aren't Aztecs. Because if you think **YOU'VE GOT IT BAD**, at least you don't get pulled and stretched every once in a while to make you grow . . .



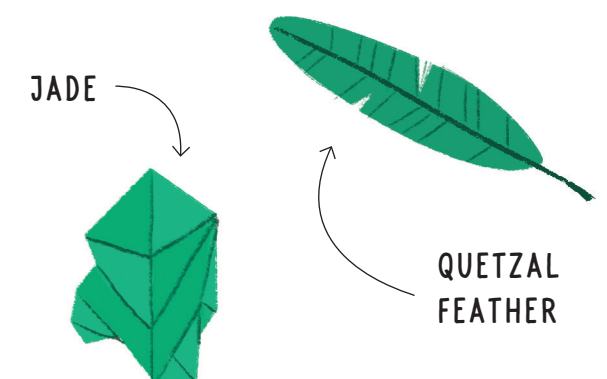
Every four years children had their ears pierced after being passed over a ceremonial flame. The ceremony of *Quinquechanaya* was then performed on them. What does 'quinquechanaya' mean? It means 'they stretch them by the neck'. Getting a hint of what happened now?

Yep. The kids were lifted up by the head while their arms and legs were **STRETCHED** to make them grow.

But wait! That's not all! There's plenty more stretching where that came from. During another festival, children's noses, ears, necks, fingers, toes and legs were also given a good old tug to get them growing.



While all this might sound a bit cruel, not to mention **REALLY ANNOYING**, the Aztecs held their children in very high regard and even likened them to precious jade – a beautiful, rare stone that was a symbol of life and purity – and quetzal bird feathers, which were wonderfully colourful and long.



Aztec parents could be extremely strict, and children had to obey their parents at all times.

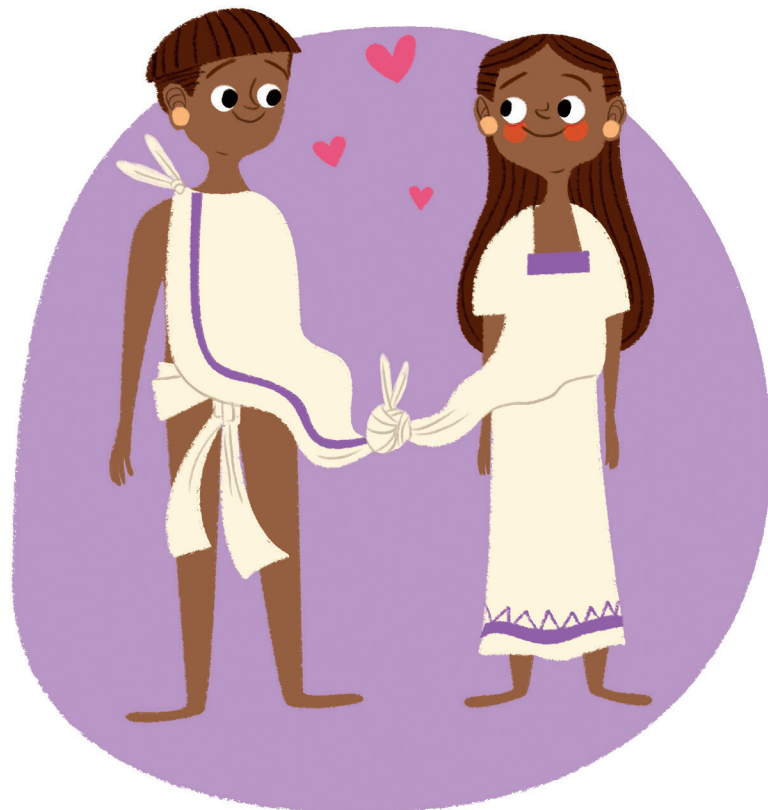
That meant no whining, no backchat and absolutely **NO** drawing a **SILLY MOUSTACHE** on your dad's face when he was asleep.

Speaking of dads, the father was head of the Aztec family, while the mother looked after the home and the children.



Aztecs married when they were young – aged between 16 and 20 years old – and their marriages were arranged by their parents or a 'matchmaker'. After they were married they would often live with the boy's parents.

During a wedding, the young bride (who had her cheeks painted yellow or red!) and groom had their clothes tied together to show their lives were now joined. Next time you're at a wedding try tying the bride's dress to the groom's trousers during the ceremony. If anyone complains just yell: "Well that's how the **AZTECS** did it!" and everyone will smile and cheer. Maybe.



Aztec parents didn't lie to their children that life was a lovely barrel of laughs. They made it clear that the world was a **DANGEROUS** place and life held great hardships for them. There was no true pleasure, mainly **WORK, WAR** and **WEARINESS**.

Four days after a child was born the parents held a naming ceremony. During the ceremony, guests gave long, depressing speeches, telling the child such jolly gems as: "You shall see and know and feel **PAIN, TROUBLE** and **SUFFERING**. This Earth is a place of torment and toil."

Wow! Thanks a lot. Way to make a kid feel **GREAT** about life. **HIGH FIVES** and milkshakes all round.

FANCY THAT!

Many Aztec names featured animals. Some of those recorded in documents include the likes of Speaking Eagle and Angry Turkey. You could give yourself a similar name. Something really cool like Itchy Weasel, Annoying Moth or Burpy Rabbit.



Having said that, if you were expecting truly **TERRIBLE** things to happen from the beginning, anything that didn't involve pain, suffering or being eaten by squirrels would seem **AMAZINGLY BRILLIANT!** Maybe those Aztecs were on to something . . .

Being at war isn't much of a chuckle, to put it mildly. But the Aztecs were in a state of near constant conflict.

Thousands of them would march out from their city of Tenochtitlán to fight against people from other cities in what is now Mexico. Although they were looking to take land and riches, another reason for fighting was so they could capture prisoners. Why? Because the Aztecs needed people for use in certain important ceremonies. Gruesome ones. Very, **VERY** gruesome ones. But more on that later . . .

Even for those Aztecs who weren't fighting in wars, death was never far away. Many children died as infants from diseases or accidents in the home, and childhood really only lasted until the age of six or seven when both boys and girls would be expected to do lots of tasks and chores. Boys would be taught by their fathers to farm and fish, while girls would learn to cook and make clothes by their mothers.



Of course, for the children of rich nobles and the emperor there would be no need to learn how to farm and fish or mend clothes. They were expected to become great warriors or well-respected priests and the like. The rich had servants and slaves to do the tasks that commoners had to do themselves.



Nobody was actually born into slavery and slaves could marry, own property and have children (who were also free). Slavery could also be a punishment for failing to pay taxes and some people who were very poor even sold themselves into slavery.

So, if you're thinking of getting in a **GIGANTONORMOUS** sulk just because you were asked to pick up that stinky sock that's been growing **TOADSTOOLS** on your bedroom floor for a year, don't. Life could be a **LOT** worse.

Do you ever wish . . . grown-ups would have a chill milkshake, relax and stop **PUNISHING** you for the tiniest things?

You know, you accidentally destroy your street after a science experiment goes wrong and your parents make you sit on what's left of the naughty step for a **WHOLE FIVE MINUTES!** What's **THAT** all about?

But in Aztec times there could be some pretty firm consequences for naughtiness. If young children were naughty, they were given a jab from a cactus spike (the Aztecs **LOVED** their cactus spikes, as you'll find out later).

When kids got a bit older, they got a proper jabbing for being untidily dressed, lazy, oversleeping and whatnot. They could even be taken to **COURT** by their mum and dad if they were extremely naughty!

Perhaps the worst punishment was one that involved parents holding their naughty child over a fire . . . which had been piled with super-hot chillies.

If that doesn't make your eyes water, nothing will!

