Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. Historical imagination risks projecting modern psychological assumptions onto people in a very different cultural context. However, it can help students move past pure horror and engage with how the practice was understood from inside the belief system. The risk is romanticizing or simplifying; the value is humanizing and contextualizing.

2. The reading confirms that sacrifice was real and archaeologically documented, which resists any revisionist attempt to deny it. But it also shows the Spanish scale claims (80,000 in one ceremony) are physically impossible, which resists the colonialist narrative that portrayed the Aztec as uniquely monstrous. Both the practice and the exaggeration are true.

Multiple Choice

1. B
2. A
3. C

Matching

1-E, 2-D, 3-B, 4-A, 5-C

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) 80,000, 2) fifth sun, 3) political/military

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: The Flowery Wars were ritualized conflicts fought specifically to capture warriors alive for sacrifice, rather than to kill them in battle. They existed because the Aztec needed a steady supply of sacrificial captives after already conquering most neighboring city-states, and because the institution also demonstrated Aztec military superiority to subject peoples without necessarily destroying them as economic contributors.

Q2: The physical evidence confirms the practice was real — cut marks, skulls, the tzompantli — while contradicting Spanish claims about the scale. This is important because it shows historians cannot simply accept written sources at face value, especially when those sources were produced by parties with clear political interests. Physical evidence provides an independent check on propaganda.

Q3: Taking Aztec theology seriously allows us to understand sacrifice as a coherent religious system with its own internal logic — cosmic debt, solar maintenance, divine reciprocity — rather than simply as mindless violence. This approach reveals how the practice fit into a complete worldview, which helps explain why it persisted and why it was accepted by Aztec society, rather than treating it as simply a sign of barbarism.