THE ANCIENT CITY AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

NOTE TO TEACHER
This second set of activities relates to the great ancient American city, Teotihuacán. The alignment of the city plan with celestial and topographical phenomena makes Teotihuacán a remarkable example of the ancient Americans' belief in the significance of the universe's rhythms. For example, the Pyramid of the Sun was positioned so that the sun set directly behind it on the summer solstice. All the patterns of life in Teotihuacán, including rituals, celebrations, and the processes of agriculture relied on signals from the natural world. See the section on Teotihuacán for further information.

PREPARATION
Show the figure of Teotihuacán and Environments from Chapter 1. Discuss the layout of Teotihuacán in relation to nature and celestial movements. Take special note of the placement of the Avenue of the Dead, the Pyramid of the Moon, the Pyramid of the Sun, and other major structures of the city.

EXERCISES
1. Redesign your school according to celestial and natural phenomena. Consider the following: which rooms or buildings are most important and where should they be placed? What natural forces (winds, weather, sun rising and setting, etc.), geographic details (streets, signs, lakes, trees, other structures, etc.) should be included in your plan and how do the rooms and buildings relate to these?
   **Variation:** A more advanced class might want to design a neighborhood, town, or city. Strategy should shift to geographic location, industry, economics, trade, waste, etc.

2. Much of what we know about life in Teotihuacán comes from what we discover in burial sites; what was buried with a person gives us clues as to how the peoples of the ancient Americas envisioned life after death. For example, food was often placed in tombs so that the buried person would not go hungry. Design and draw (or use magazine cut-outs) a monument for yourself, choosing its location and surroundings as well as the objects you will put in the monument. Emphasize the inclusion of personal, useful objects in the monuments and describe what they mean. Write or tell a story about a typical day in your afterlife and how each object will be used.

3. Research other cultures and times to find out if other cities or religious centers were designed on the basis of cosmic or topographical features. How do the shapes and positions of the structures reflect religious beliefs? Consider Stonehenge in England, Chicago on Lake Michigan, the seven hills of ancient Rome, an Egyptian city on the Nile, etc.

4. Design a model site for a real or imaginary ritual. Use a shoe box without the top or a cereal box with one large side cut away. Place small cut-out people, objects, animals, and background scenery inside to complete the scene. These can be drawn images, magazine pictures, real miniature objects, or a combination of all three. Each part of your model should work well with the others. Architecture, nature, man, ritual, and art should combine to tell the tale.