

Aztecs, Incas, & Mayans

Cuzco: City of Gold

The center of activity in the Inca Empire was the city Cuzco. Cuzco is located in what is now the country Peru. In the language of the Incas, the name Cuzco meant “the navel of the Earth.” Gold statues, **elaborate**¹ fountains, and beautiful gardens graced the city. In the surrounding countryside, perfectly ordered farms grew potatoes and corn. Cuzco was the richest city in the New World.

Nobles in Cuzco wore jewelry, especially earplugs, made of shining gold. Their outfits were made of bright cloth woven into intricate patterns. The Coricancha temple, built to the sun god, was almost dripping in gold. Trees, crops, and life-sized figures of animals were all made of gold and arranged in a garden. The decoration of the temple included many geometric designs and images based on the natural world.

The peasants in the Inca Empire carried out most of the **manual**² labor. They built roads and farmed. Many cut stones, too. Fantastic terraces and walls built of stone enabled the Incas to farm in the Andes Mountains. Crops cannot grow well on a slanted surface, but by building walls and terraces, Incas could use a lot more of their land for farming. Incan buildings were also very impressive. Some Incan structures are still standing after over 500 years. The buildings were made of stones cut in the shape of trapezoids. The stones were so perfectly fit together that you could not even stick a thin knife or your fingernail between the cracks.

In the Inca Empire, all the peasants were required by law to work. Laziness was punishable by death. Food and clothing were provided for everyone, however. The Incas even built huge food storage bins to prepare for droughts or bad crop years. Crime was also rare. Houses did not have doors

¹ **elaborate** – having many details; complicated

² **manual** – done by hand

because no one would steal. But for the rare crime, punishment was **harsh**.³ Besides murder, the most serious crime was saying something bad about the gods. Criminals were killed by being thrown off a cliff of the Andes Mountains to meet their death below.

Incas did not have a system of writing, but they did have a way to remember history. Long ropes called *quipus* were their historical record. The wool for a quipu came from the llama, an Incan farm animal. Different colors, types, and sizes of knots meant different things to the skilled reader. Yellow referred to gold, green told things about the land, and red, the color of blood, symbolized fighting or battles. The system was three dimensional, similar to our system of Braille. Very few people could read the quipu. They had to be specially trained.

Today archaeologists still study the ruins of the Incas. One Incan city was not discovered until 1911, almost 500 years after Francisco Pizarro arrived from Spain. The city, Machu Picchu, was high on a hill. No one knows exactly what the buildings were used for. We think they may have been temples for the sun god, Inti, who was the god Incas worshipped the most. Archaeologists keep finding more clues that tell us more interesting facts about this lost civilization.

³ **harsh** – cruel; very strong and severe

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Remains of the Incan city of Cuzco can be found in what present-day country?
 - a. Mexico
 - b. Turkey
 - c. Peru
 - d. Ethiopia

2. Why does the author describe how much gold was at the Coricancha temple?
 - a. to describe the colors that Incans liked best
 - b. to show how wealthy the city of Cuzco was
 - c. to prove that the temple was built for the sun god Inti
 - d. to explain why Europeans took the temple

3. Based on the passage, Cuzco can best be described as
 - a. poor and full of crime.
 - b. obsessed with writing.
 - c. wealthy and well-organized.
 - d. rural and simple.

4. Read the following sentences: "Very few people could read the quipu. They had to be specially trained."

The word **trained** most nearly means

- a. built
 - b. painted
 - c. taught
 - d. spoken
-
5. This passage is mostly about
 - a. life and culture in the ancient city of Cuzco.
 - b. why ancient peoples built temples to a sun god.
 - c. how farming was different in ancient South America.
 - d. the system of recording history with quipus.

6. What type of jobs did peasants do in the Inca Empire?

7. Explain why people today still do not understand everything about the Incan civilization, such as why certain buildings were built.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

In the Inca Empire hard work was seen as a duty of all citizens, _____ any person who was lazy could be sentenced to death.

- a. however
- b. therefore
- c. in summary
- d. otherwise

9. Read the following sentence.

The Incas kept track of history by using special long ropes called quipus.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

- 1. Who? the Incas
- 2. What did the Incas do? _____
- 3. How? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** elaborate: having many details; complicated

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 820**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic**Passage Summary:** The Inca Empire was advanced and wealthy. All citizens worked and in return were provided food and a safe place to live.

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6. What type of jobs did peasants do in the Inca Empire?

Suggested answer: Peasants did most of the manual labor. They built roads, cut stones, and farmed.

7. Explain why people today still do not understand everything about the Incan civilization, such as why certain buildings were built.

Suggested answer: Answers will vary but should reflect that the Incas did not have a regular system of writing so we do not have much recorded history from them. Students can also infer that Pizarro and the Spanish conquered the empire, preventing some of its history from being preserved.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

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The Incas kept track of history by using special long ropes called quipus.

Answer the questions below based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

- 1. Who? the Incas
- 2. What did the Incas do? **kept track of history**
- 3. How? **by using special, long ropes called quipus**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** elaborate: having many details; complicated

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.