

Aztecs, Incas & Mayans

The Land of the Four Quarters

At one time the vast Incan **empire**¹ spread all the way from Ecuador to Argentina and Chile. The Incans called their empire “The Land of the Four Quarters.” Their government divided the Incan land into four main sections, or regions. These smaller regions had a system of rulers to govern every town and farm. At the top of the entire government was the ruler who was known as The Inca, and all the rulers from the smaller regions reported to him. Ten million people total lived in the Incan Empire. There was a time when the Incan Empire was the largest nation on earth.

In 1438, the Incan empire did not yet exist. There was a man name Pachacuti who was the leader of a much smaller empire. Pachacuti’s name in Quechua, the language of the Incans, means “he who transforms the Earth.” Pachacuti’s goal was to build an empire. First, he led Incans to conquer and claim struggling towns nearby. These people were made part of the Incan empire. Then roads were built and trade routes were established between Cuzco and the other towns. The empire kept growing.

Roads in the Incan empire were **crucial**² to its success. The empire had 14,000 miles of roads! However, the Incans did not yet know about wheeled vehicles. All of their travel was on foot, and some times people guided a pack animal, such as a llama. Two main highways stretched the length of the empire. While smaller roads stretched between the two main highways like the rungs of a ladder. In many spots, the roads were paved with smooth stone. In other places, the roads had to cut through the rocky Andes Mountains. Each road was well planned and well cared for. There were rest stops along the way as well, about a day’s travel apart. Here, trained runners who carried messages back

¹ **empire** – a group of nations or peoples who are ruled over by an emperor or another powerful government

² **crucial** – necessary; extremely important

and forth to different leaders, could stop and sleep. There were even temples for praying to the sun god who was the main deity of the Incas.

High up in the Andes Mountains, the Incans built **suspension bridges**³ out of braids of vine and rope. These bridges were very strong. One bridge built over a deep river valley above the river Apurimac lasted for 500 years! Later, the San Francisco Bay Bridge and the Brooklyn Bridge would be examples of famous suspension bridges in the New World. But the Incan bridges were the first suspension bridges in the world!

What happened to the Incas? When Europeans came to the New World they came in search of wealth, and they brought with them a disease that would kill thousands of people. Early groups of Europeans had brought smallpox to the New World. Incas had no immunity to this illness so it spread quickly. Two out of every three Incas died from smallpox. In addition to bringing small pox to the Inca, the Spanish destroyed their empire in another way. The ruler of all Incas died of smallpox and his kingdom was left fighting a civil war over who would be the next ruler. Then Pizarro, the conquistador who wanted to conquered the Incas, arrived. His guns and horses enabled him to **conquer**⁴ the rest of one of the greatest civilizations in search of riches.

³ **suspension bridge** – a type of bridge that has its roadway hung from ropes or cables

⁴ **conquer** – to take over a group of people by force

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why was the Incan Empire called “The Land of the Four Quarters”?
 - a. They invented the coin we call the Quarter.
 - b. There were four parts to their official sport.
 - c. The government had divided the Inca land into four main sections.
 - d. The Incans celebrated the four cardinal points, North, South, East and West.

2. How did Pachacuti live up to his name?
 - a. He transformed the Earth by conquering the towns around his own lands.
 - b. He was very strong and developed a democratic system of government.
 - c. He found a cure for small pox.
 - d. He came from Ecuador.

3. What did the network of roads show about the Incan people?
 - a. They were greedy and dedicated.
 - b. They were fierce and loyal.
 - c. They were intelligent and creative.
 - d. They were royal and strong.

4. Which event stated below is the earliest?
 - a. The Incans built a bridge above the river Apurimac.
 - b. The conquistador Pizarro conquered the Incas.
 - c. Pachacuti conquered the towns nearby his own.
 - d. Two of every three Incas died of smallpox.

5. How many miles of roads did the Inca Empire build?
 - a. 14,000
 - b. 2,000
 - c. 10,000
 - d. 7,000

6. How did the ruler of the Incan government control all four regions of his empire?

7. Even though the Incas had not yet invented the wheel, describe how the people and goods moved throughout the vast empire.

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

The Inca were expert builders and constructed bridges that would _____ become models for modern day suspension bridges.

- a. once
- b. later
- c. because
- d. also

9. Answer the following question based on the sentence below.

When the Spanish arrived in South America, in search of gold, they caused the destruction of the Incan Empire by spreading small pox and conquering cities.

Who? _____

(did) What? caused the destruction of the Incan Empire

How? _____

Where? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** crucial: necessary; extremely important

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 780**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic**Passage Summary:** The Incan empire was vast, and citizens were able to travel between cities as a result of the complex network of roads and bridges.

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6. How did the ruler of the Incan government control all four regions of his empire?

Suggested answer: Inca assigned rulers to govern in each of the four regions and then these lesser rulers reported back to him.

7. Even though the Incas had not yet invented the wheel, describe how the people and goods moved throughout the vast empire.

Suggested answer: Even though the wheel had not yet been invented, people moved along the vast network of roads and bridges. People walked and often guided pack animals, such as llamas, to carry goods and food to far away towns.

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(did) What? caused the destruction of the Incan Empire

How? **by bringing small pox and conquering cities**

Where? **South America**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** crucial: necessary; extremely important

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