

Aztecs, Incas, & Mayans **Cuzco: City of Gold**

The center of activity in the Incan empire was the city Cuzco. This is located in the part of the world we now call Peru, South America. According to Incas, the city was “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 Coricanca 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 Incan 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, Incans 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 Incan empire, all the peasants were required by law to work. Laziness was punishable by death. But food and clothing were provided for everyone. The Incans even built huge food storage bins to prepare for droughts or bad crop years. Crime was also rare. Houses did not have doors because no

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

² **manual** – done by hand

one would steal. But for the rare crime, punishment was **harsh**.³ The most serious crime was saying something bad about The Inca, head of all Incans, or the sun god. Criminals were killed by being thrown off a cliff of the Andes Mountains to meet their death below.

Incans 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, and 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 especially trained.

Today archeologists still study the ruins of the Incas. One Incan city was not discovered until 1911, almost 500 years after Pizarro arrived from Spain. The city, Machu Piccu, was high on a hill. No one knows exactly what the buildings were used for. We think they may have been a temple to the sun god, the Incas' most important deity. 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. If you had lived in Cuzco during the Incan empire, your life would have been easier if you were a

- a. peasant.
- b. noble person.
- c. slave.
- d. Native American.

2. Which of the following is an example of a geometric design?

- a. A cloth with a rainbow of colors.
- b. A cloth with square or rectangle shapes on it.
- c. A solid white cloth.
- d. A gold colored cloth.

3. Why did the houses in Cuzco not have any doors?

- a. They weren't invented yet.
- b. The peasants were too lazy to make them.
- c. There was no crime so doors weren't needed.
- d. All of the houses had doors.

4. Remains of the Incan civilization can be found in what modern day country?

- a. Mexico
- b. Turkey
- c. Peru
- d. Ethiopia

5. Who was the Incas most important god?

- a. sun god
- b. rain god
- c. god of family and marriage
- d. gold god

6. What were some benefits to living as a peasant during the Incan Empire?

7. Explain the types of jobs the Incan peasants might have done.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word 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 thrown off a cliff and put to death.

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

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

Quipus were a record keeping system which used different colors, types, and sizes of knots to keep track of information related to farming, battles, and gold.

What? Quipus

(were) What? _____

Why? _____

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 Incan Empire was advanced and wealthy. All citizens worked and in return were provided food and a safe place to live.

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Suggested answer: Answers will vary but could include mention of the food and clothing that were provided, the storage bins of food in case of drought, and the lack of crime.

7. Explain the types of jobs the Incan peasants might have done.

Suggested answer: Peasants built roads and farmed. Many cut stones to build terraces and walls. They also were farmers.

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

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What? Quipus

(were) What? **a record keeping system**

Why? **to keep track of information related to farming, battles, and gold**

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

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