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INCAN CIVILIZATIONS

Unit Overview

In this unit, you are going to learn that early Incan Indian civilizations existed in the Western Hemisphere prior to the arrival of Europeans. These civilizations had developed unique governments, social structures, religions, technologies, and agricultural practices and products.

Complete the Inca column of the "[Ancient Civilizations Graphic Organizer](#)" as you read and learn about the ancient Inca Civilization!

Inca

The Aztecs arose in Mesoamerica, in what is now Mexico. In South America another great empire arose. That empire belonged to the Incas. However, South America was the home of several civilizations before the Incas built their empire. These civilizations provided a foundation for the Incas. The Incas borrowed from the scientific and cultural achievements, such as farming techniques and craft-making skills, of these cultures. These early cultures also built some of South America's first cities. In these cities people developed crafts such as textiles, pottery, and gold jewelry. Because the cities were also religious centers, religious symbols often appeared in the crafts. The influence of these early civilizations set the stage for the Inca civilization.

The Incas began as a small tribe in the Andes Mountains. Their capital was **Cuzco**. In the mid-1400s a ruler named Pachacuti led the Incas to expand their territory. He gained territory through agreements with other tribes and through conquests.

One of the most important aspects of the Inca daily life was the ayllu. The **ayllu** was a group of families that worked a portion of land together. They shared most of their belongings with each other just like a larger family. Everyone in the Inca Empire was a member of an ayllu. Once a person was born into an ayllu, they remained part of that ayllu their entire life. Most of the peasant men worked as farmers. They did not own their own farms but worked land owned by the government. They also had to pay taxes to the government. The women worked hard at the home during the day. They cooked, made clothes, and took care of the children. Women married as young as twelve and were generally married by the age of 16. Men were married by the age of 20. Many people had to pay their taxes through labor. They worked for the government as soldiers, builders, or farmers in order to pay their taxes. The government had inspectors that would keep an eye on the commoners. They even checked to see if the people were keeping their houses clean and tidy.

The Inca nobles lived a much easier lifestyle. They still had to work but had important jobs in the government. They could own land and did not have to pay taxes.

The men wore long sleeveless shirts or tunics. The women wore long dresses. Both men and women would wear capes or ponchos to keep them warm during the winter. The peasants and the nobles wore similar fashions. Of course, the clothing of the rich was made from finer cloth and was more decorated. Starting at the age of 14, men of the nobility wore large gold earplugs. They would put in bigger and bigger plugs over time.

Hairstyles were an important part of Inca fashion. The type of hairstyle you wore told people your social status as well as what group, or ayllu, you were from. When a noble was just a small child, a board would be strapped to his or her head. This would force the top of their head to grow almost to a point. This was the symbol of nobility and royalty. Men cut their hair short in the front and kept it somewhat longer in the back, long enough to wear in a sling or held with a woven band. Although the royal men wore their hair short in front and longer in back, like the common men, each noble family had a distinctive hairstyle for the men. Women wore their hair long, parted in the middle. The only time they cut their hair was in mourning for a lost husband, as a sign of respect. Once their hair grew out, it was time to remarry. The Inca people could easily recognize who was a commoner and who was a nobleman simply by their hairstyle or the way their head was shaped.

Only the wealthy children went to school. Peasant children began to work when they were still young and only learned the craft or skill that would be their job for the rest of their lives. Children were not watched over like they are in most societies today. They were left alone throughout the day. Parents did not hug or coddle their children. The mother would feed and clean the child and then leave it to itself.

Government

When the Spanish arrived in Peru in the 1500s the Inca Empire was huge. It stretched for over 2,000 miles from the north to the south and had a population of an estimated 10 million people. The Inca needed a sophisticated and organized government to maintain an empire this large. The Inca government was called the **Tawantinsuyu**. It was a **monarchy** ruled by a single leader called the Sapa Inca. The emperor or king of the Inca Empire was called the **Sapa Inca**, which means "sole ruler." He was the most powerful person in the land and everyone else reported to the Sapa Inca. His principal wife, the queen, was called the **coya**. Nobles were allowed to have many wives, but commoners could only have one wife.

Below the Sapa Inca were several officers who helped to rule the empire. High ranking officials were often relatives of the emperor.

- **Inkap Rantin** - Below the Sapa Inca was the viceroy. He was a close relative of the Sapa Inca and worked as his closest advisor.

- **Willaq Umu** - The high priest, called the "Willaq Umu," was also a very powerful man. He was probably second in power to the Sapa Inca due to the importance of religion in the Inca Empire.
- **Governors of a Quarter** - The Inca Empire was divided up into four quarters. Each of these quarters was ruled by a governor called an "Apu."
- **Council of the Realm** - The Sapa Inca also kept a council of men who advised him on major matters. These men were powerful nobles.
- **Tokoyrikoq** - In order to maintain control and to make sure people were paying their taxes and following the ways of the Inca, the Sapa Inca had inspectors that watched over the people. The name for the inspectors "tokoyrikoq" is translated as "he who sees all."
- **Apukuna** - There were also military generals. The head general was usually a close relative of the Sapa Inca.
- **Other Officials** - There were many other government officials and leaders throughout the Inca Empire such as priests, military officers, judges, and tax collectors.

In order to run the government, the Inca needed food and resources which they acquired through taxes. Each ayllu was responsible for paying taxes to the government. The Inca had tax inspectors that watched over the people to make sure that they paid all their taxes. There were two main taxes that the people had to pay. The first tax was a portion of the ayllu's crops. The crops were divided up three ways with the first third going to the government, the second third to the priests, and the final third to the people. The second type of tax was called the mit'a. The **mit'a** was a labor tax that each man between the ages of 16 and 60 had to pay by working for the government for a portion of the year. They worked various jobs such as laborers on government buildings and roads, mining for gold, or even as warriors in the army. Every ayllu had its own tax collector. Nobles and high level leaders, such as curacas, did not have to pay taxes.

The laws were made by the Sapa Inca and passed down to the people through the tax collectors. Murder, stealing, cheating on taxes, and cursing the gods was all against the law. However, there was not a lot of crime in the Inca Empire, mostly because the punishments were very harsh. For example, people were often executed for cursing the gods. If they were caught stealing, they would have their hands cut off.

Social Structure

The Inca society was based around strict social classes. Few people had the opportunity to improve their social status. Once a person was born into a social class, that was where they would remain for the rest of their life.

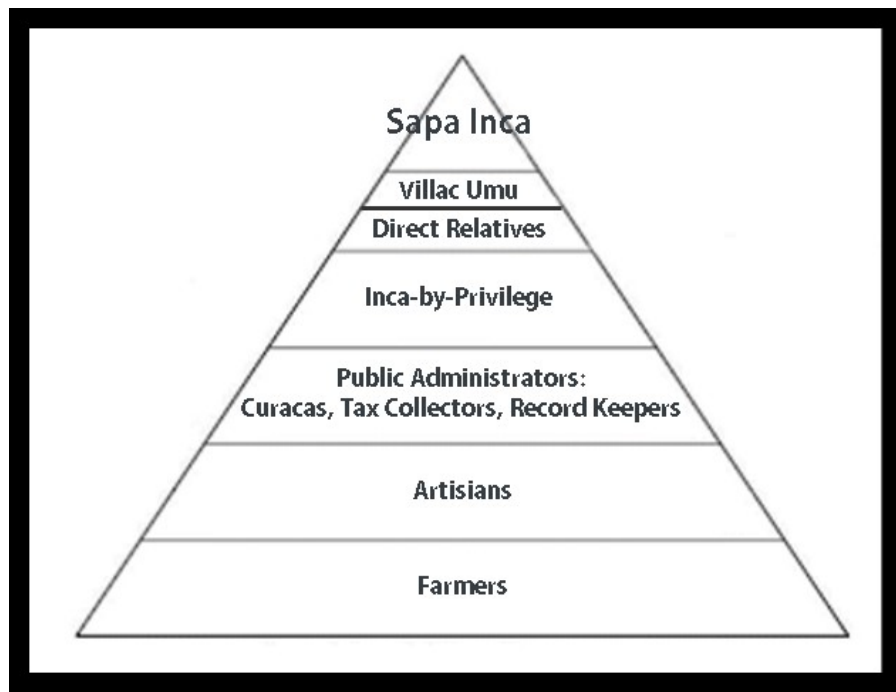
- **Noble Class (Inca Class)** - The noble class, or **Inca class**, was made up of the people directly descended from the people who first established the city of Cuzco. The emperor or king was called the **Sapa Inca**. He was at the top of the Inca social class and was considered a god in many ways. The high

priest (**Villac Umu**) was just behind the Sapa Inca in social status. Priests were very important and powerful in Inca society. The High Priest lived in Cuzco and was often the brother of the emperor. The **direct relatives** of the Sapa Inca were the next in line.

- **Inca-by-privilege** - As the empire grew, the emperor needed more people he could trust in high positions in the government. There were not enough of the original Inca to rule. So a new class was created called Inca-by-privilege. These people were considered nobles, but they were not as high in class as the true Inca.
- **Public Administrators** - The **Curacas** were the leaders from the tribes that were conquered. They were often left as leaders of their tribes. They still had to report to the Inca, but if they remained loyal, they often kept their position. Each group of families, or ayllu, had a **tax collector** who kept watch over them. He made sure that they paid all of their taxes. There was also a strict hierarchy of tax collectors. The higher levels kept an eye on the people below them. In order to track who had paid their taxes and where the supplies were stored, there were many **record keepers** in the government.

Upper-class families had many privileges. They lived in stone houses in Cuzco and wore the best clothes. They didn't have to pay the labor tax, and they often had servants. Still, as part of the Inca government, they had a duty to make sure that people in the empire had what they needed. Sons of upper-class families went to school in Cuzco. They studied Quechua, religion, history, and law to prepare for lives as government or religious officials.

- **Commoners - Artisans** were commoners but were also considered a higher social class than the farmers. They worked on crafts such as pottery or gold jewelry for the nobles. At the bottom of the social class were the **farmers**. The farmers were also the largest and the most important class within the Inca Empire. Farmers worked long hard days and sent two-thirds of their crops to the government and the priests. The Inca Empire relied on the production of the farmers for its wealth and success. Lower-class men and women farmed on government lands, served in the army, worked in mines, and built roads. Lower-class Incas lived outside Cuzco in small houses. By law they had to wear plain clothes. Also, they could not own more goods than they needed.



Religions

The polytheistic religion of the Inca was closely tied into the everyday life of the Inca as well as with their government. They believed that their ruler, the Inca Sapa, was part god himself. As a result, the Incas thought their kings never really died. The Inca believed that their gods occupied three different realms: 1) the sky or Hanan Pacha, 2) the inner earth or Uku Pacha, and 3) the outer earth or Cay pacha. **Inti** was the most important of the gods to the Inca. He was the god of the sun. The emperor, or Inca Sapa, was said to be a descendent of Inti. Inti was married to the Goddess of the Moon, **Mama Quilla**. She was also the goddess of marriage and the defender of women.

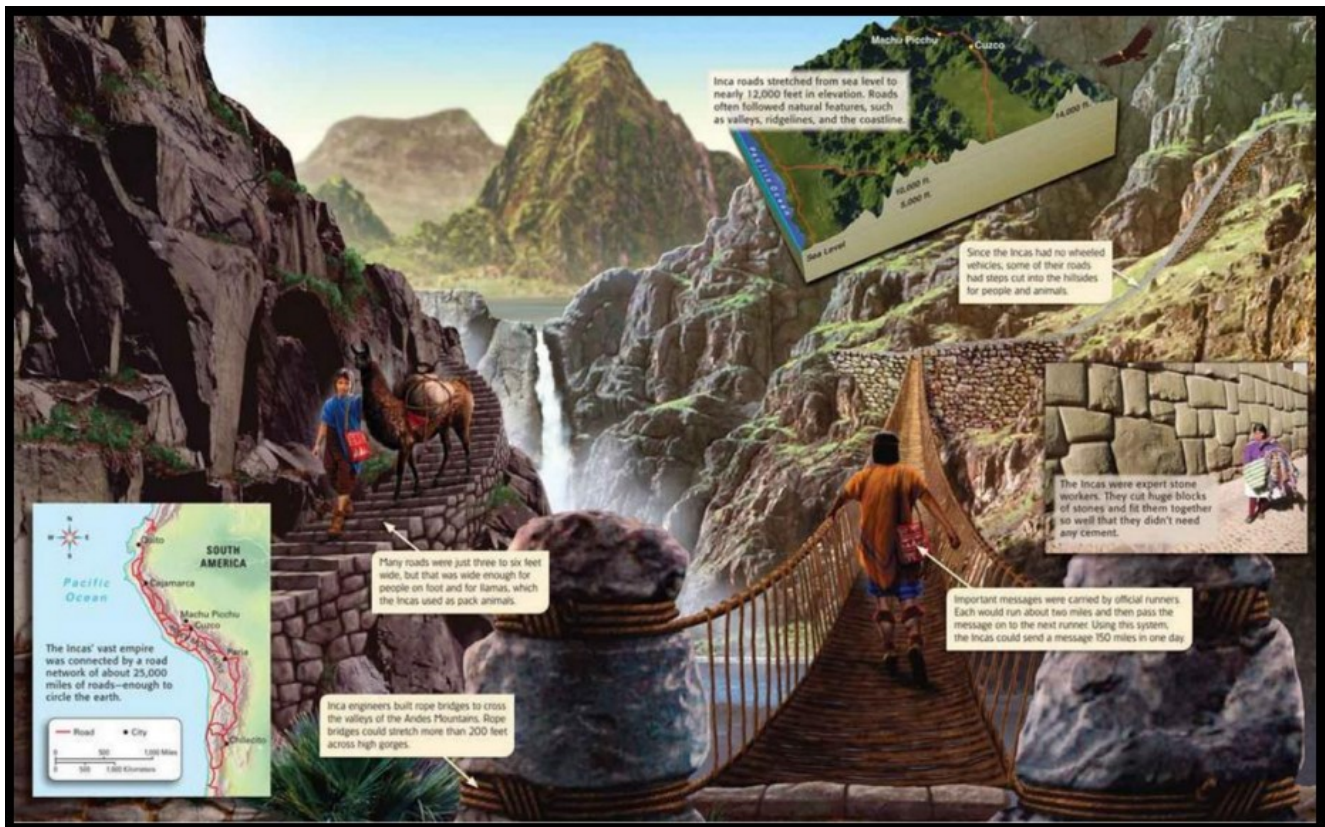


The Inca built many beautiful temples to their gods. The most important temple was the Coricancha built in the heart of the city of Cuzco to the sun god, Inti. The walls and floors were covered with sheets of gold. There were also gold statues and a huge gold disc that represented Inti. Corichancha means "Golden Temple." Incas outside Cuzco worshipped their gods at local sacred places. The Incas believed certain mountaintops, rocks, and springs had magical powers. Incas performed sacrifices at these places as well as at the temple in Cuzco.

The Inca believed strongly in an afterlife. They took great care in embalming and mummifying the bodies of the dead before burial. They brought gifts to the dead that they thought the dead could use in the afterlife. **Huacas** were sacred places or objects to the Inca. A huaca could be manmade or natural such as a rock, a statue, a cave, waterfall, mountain, or even a dead body. The Inca prayed and offered sacrifices to their huacas believing that they were inhabited by spirits that could help them. The most sacred huacas in the Inca Empire were the mummies of the dead emperors. The Inca held religious festivals every month. Sometimes human sacrifice would be included as part of the ceremony. The only time peasants did not have to work was during religious festivals.

Technology

The Inca, however, did not have a lot of basic technologies we often consider important to advanced societies. They did not use the wheel for transport, they did not have a writing system for records, and they did not even have iron for making tools. One of the main forms of medicine used by the Inca was the coca leaf.



The Incas built a large system of roads that went throughout their empire. The roads were usually paved with stone. Stone steps were often built into steep areas in the mountains. They also built bridges where the roads needed to cross rivers. The main purpose for the roads was for communication, moving army troops, and to transport goods. Commoners were not allowed to travel on the roads. Communication was accomplished by runners on the roads. Fast young men called "**chaskis**" would run from one relay station to the next. At each station they would pass the message on to the next runner. Messages were either passed verbally or by using a quipu (device for recording information, consisting of differently colored threads knotted in different ways). Messages traveled quickly this way at the rate of around 250 miles per day. The messengers who ran on the roads were punished harshly if the message was not accurately delivered. This rarely happened.

The Inca were able to create sturdy stone buildings. Without the use of iron tools they were able to shape large stones and have them fit together without the use of mortar. By fitting the stones closely (as well as other architectural techniques), the Inca were able to create large stone buildings that survived for hundreds of years despite the many earthquakes that occur in Peru. The Inca also built a variety of bridges, including suspension bridges and pontoon bridges, mostly from rope. (Also illustrated in the image above.)

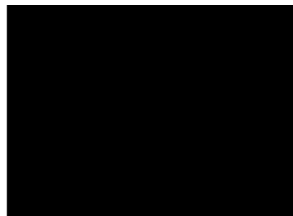
Agriculture



Most Incas were farmers. Nobody went hungry in the Inca Empire. The commoners ate little meat, but all people ate well. They grew crops such as maize and peanuts in valleys where the climate was warm. In the cooler mountains they grew potatoes. The Inca were the first to grow potatoes. In the highest mountains, people raised animals, such as llamas, for meat and wool.

The Inca were expert farmers. The Inca invented **terrace farming**. They lived in the mountains. Flatlands were rare. So, they simply created flat land by building steps of land for agriculture down the mountainside. This was great for irrigation. Instead of rainwater running down the mountainside, the Inca channeled it through each step. They used **irrigation** and water storage techniques to grow crops in all sorts of terrain from the deserts to the high mountains. Despite not having beasts of burden or iron tools, the Inca farmers were very efficient. They also built aqueducts to carry water where it was needed.

The Inca grew more food than they needed. Stored food was dried and kept in special buildings. Because they lived high in the Andes, where it was often cold, it was easy to dry food. First, they left it out to freeze. Then they stamped on it until most of the water was out. They left it out in the sun to finish drying. And presto - dried food.



The video recounts the history of the Inca Empire in South America. The segment also reveals parts of Inca civilization that still remain today, including the ancient city of Machu Picchu, Peru.



Below are additional educational resources and activities for this unit.

[Unit 12 Inca Civilization Activity](#)

[Unit 12 Machu Picchu, Ancient City of Peru Article and Quiz](#)

Now answer the questions!