

The Incas

SECTION

2

**BEFORE
YOU
READ**

Reach Into Your Background

Throughout history, rulers have tried to promote the unity, or oneness, of their empire and their people.

Suggest two ways in which you might help bring about unity among your classmates. Name two things you could do to encourage unity in your neighborhood.

Questions to Explore

1. How did Incan rulers establish a system for effectively ruling their vast empire?

2. What were some accomplishments of the Incas?

Key Terms

quipu
terrace

Key Place

Cuzco

High in the mountains, a young boy races along a narrow stone highway. He breathes heavily, relieved that he has almost reached his goal. He lifts a conch-shell trumpet and blows. It is the signal telling the next runner to get ready.

The boy is a relay runner, chosen for his speed and endurance. The Incas depended on runners to carry messages to and from the capital at Cuzco. Like every other royal messenger, the boy knows his stretch of royal highway so well that he could run it on the darkest night.

As the runner reaches the end of his stretch of road, he passes the message to the next runner. He recites the message he memorized at the start of his run.

▼ An Incan relay runner announces his arrival by blowing a conch-shell trumpet.



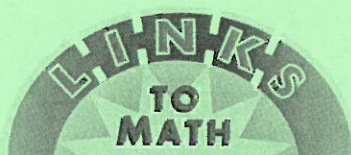
Securing the Empire

Incan relay runners covered a lot of territory, for the Incan empire was huge. It stretched some 2,500 miles (4,023 km) along the Andes Mountains from what is now the country of Ecuador through the

► The Incas believed that gold was the sweat of the sun god and that the gleaming metal reflected the sun god's glory. All the gold belonged to the emperor. It was used only for ceremonial objects, like these decorated knives.



countries of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. But this great empire had small beginnings. In about the year 1200, the Incas settled in Cuzco (KOOS koh), a small village high in the Andes. Through wars and conquests they extended their control practically the length of this mountain range, about 2,500 miles (4,023 km). Many different peoples lived within the borders of this huge empire.



An Official Census High government officials made sure that the Incan empire ran smoothly. They decided where people would live and what kind of work they would do. They used a census, or official count of the people, to keep track of everyone in the land. Such records helped officials make sure that the people paid taxes and registered to work on public projects.

The Rule of the Incas The Incas developed their own system of government to rule their empire. At its head was a ruler called "Sapa Inca," or "the emperor." People believed that he was descended from the sun god. He, and only he, owned the land and divided it among the people. Incan rulers used interesting methods to unify the huge empire and its people. One ruler, for example, made the Incan language, Quechua (KECH wah), the official language of the empire. He sent people into newly conquered lands to teach Incan customs and laws and to set up schools that taught Incan religion and history.

All people were expected to pay taxes to the empire. Men had to work on public projects. They might farm land, mine gold, or build roads. Women wove cloth for government officials. Farmers and their families gave the government parts of the crops they raised. In return, the government took care of the poor, the sick, and the elderly.

Although the Incas did not have a written language, they did create an unusual system for keeping detailed records. Government officials noted information about births, deaths, taxes, and harvests on knotted strings called **quipus** (KEE poos). Every quipu had a main cord with several colored strings attached. Each color represented a different item. Knots of varying sizes stood for numbers.

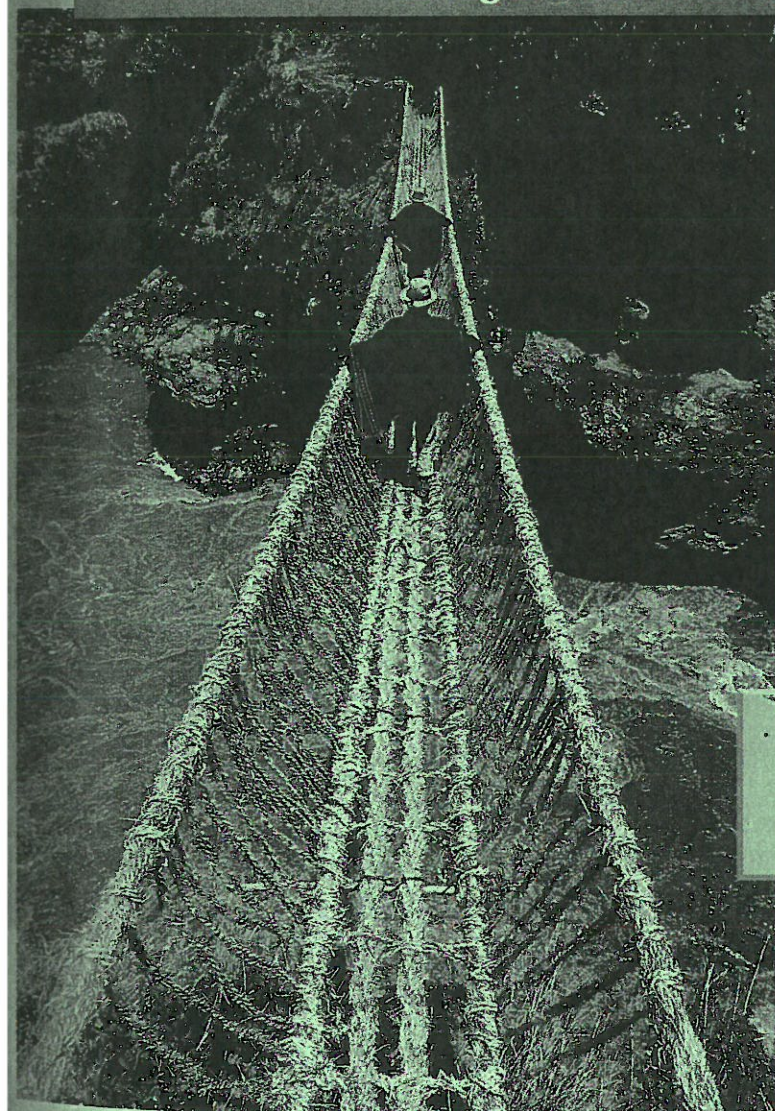
A System of Roads and Bridges To control the empire, the emperor and his officials had to know what was going on. To accomplish this, they needed a communication system—the runners. But these messengers needed roads to travel on. The Incas, therefore, built a large system of highways and bridges.

The roads served another purpose besides communication. In times of trouble, they allowed the army to travel quickly. As the soldiers traveled, they picked up supplies at stations along the way. Thus, the emperor could keep control of every part of the empire.



Connect Think of some ways in which you might communicate and keep records if your society had no written language.

Bridges From the Past



This rope bridge, strung across a gorge in the Andes, is similar to those used by the Incas. Incan bridges were made with strong cords of braided vines and reeds. The bridges were part of the huge road network that linked every part of the empire. Only soldiers and government officials were allowed to use this system of roads and bridges. **Critical Thinking** Why were bridges important in controlling the Incan empire?



A Perfect Fit



These finely fitted granite stones are part of a building that still stands in the old Incan capital of Cuzco. Using hammers and chisels, skilled Incan stoneworkers carved 12 corners in the large stone. Then they fitted other stones around it to make a sturdy wall. If the stones of this wall were rocked by earthquakes, they simply moved, then settled back into place.

Incan Achievements

A network of roads was not the only Incan achievement. Incan engineering feats still amaze people today. For example, they changed the direction of rivers. And they were master builders.

Building With Stone Without any of our modern power tools Incas built magnificent bridges and huge cities. They built fortresses on mountaintops. Much of what they built is still standing.

The Incas built these fortresses and cities mainly with stone. Sometimes they chose huge stones and used them just as they came from the mountains. Other times they broke the stones into smaller blocks. To break up the stone, they cut a long groove in the surface of the rock. Then they drove stone or wooden wedges into the groove until the rock split.

When the Incas made a wall, they made sure its large, many-sided stones fit together almost perfectly. After a wall was finished, the fit was so tight that not even a very thin knife blade could be slipped between two stones. They did all this with only hammers of stone and chisels of bronze.

Many examples of Incan stonework can still be seen in the Peruvian city of Cuzco, once the capital of the Incan empire. Its ancient stone walls and buildings have withstood major storms and earthquakes for centuries.

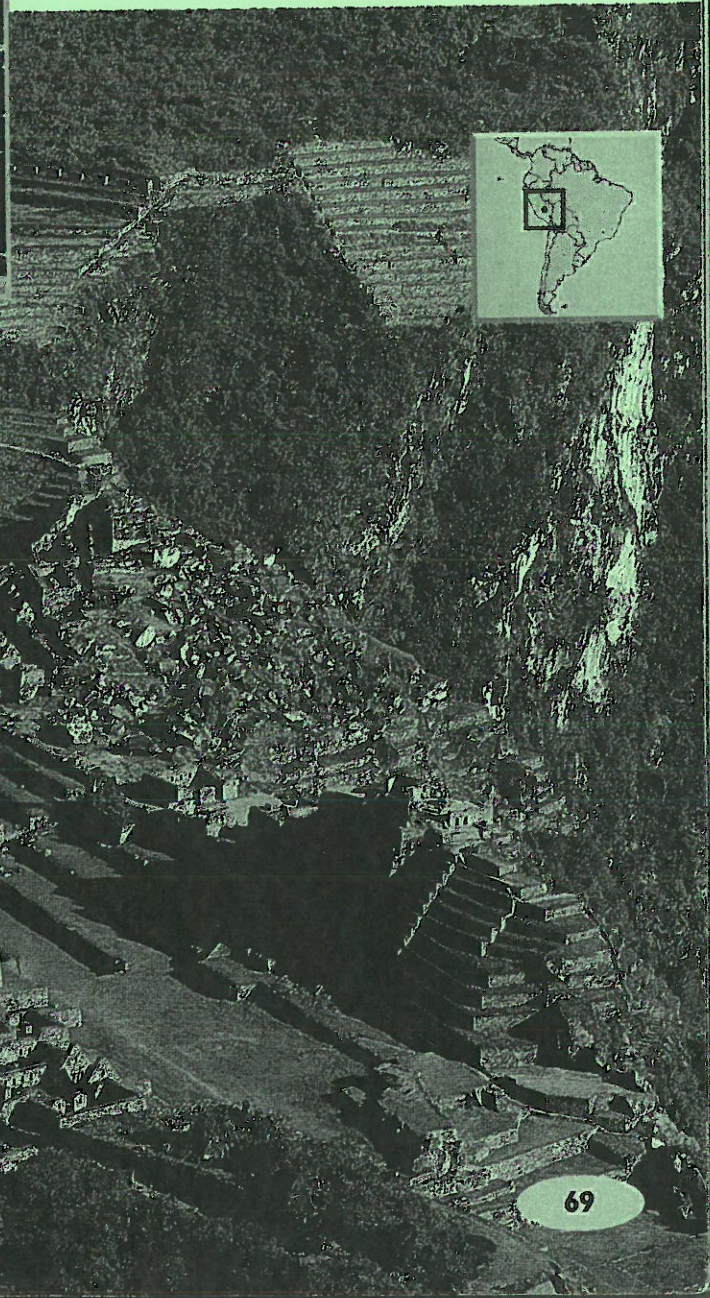
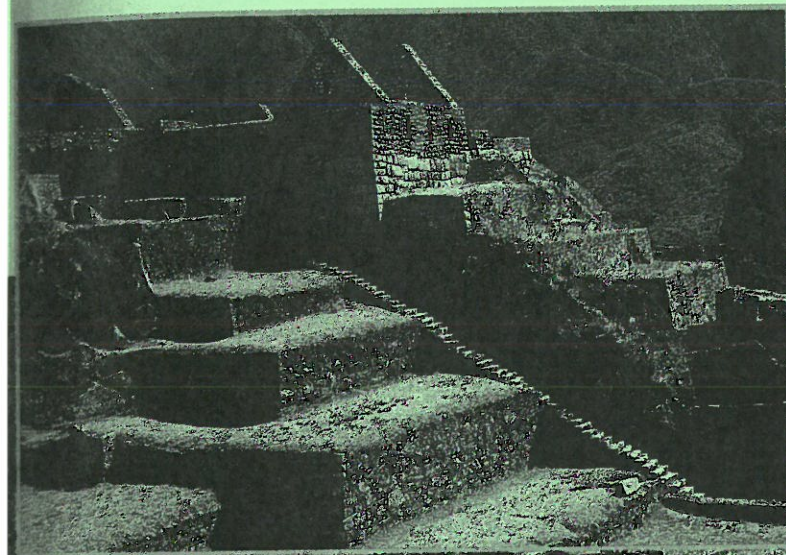
READ ACTIVELY



Ask Questions Think of three questions you might ask about Incan building methods and achievements.

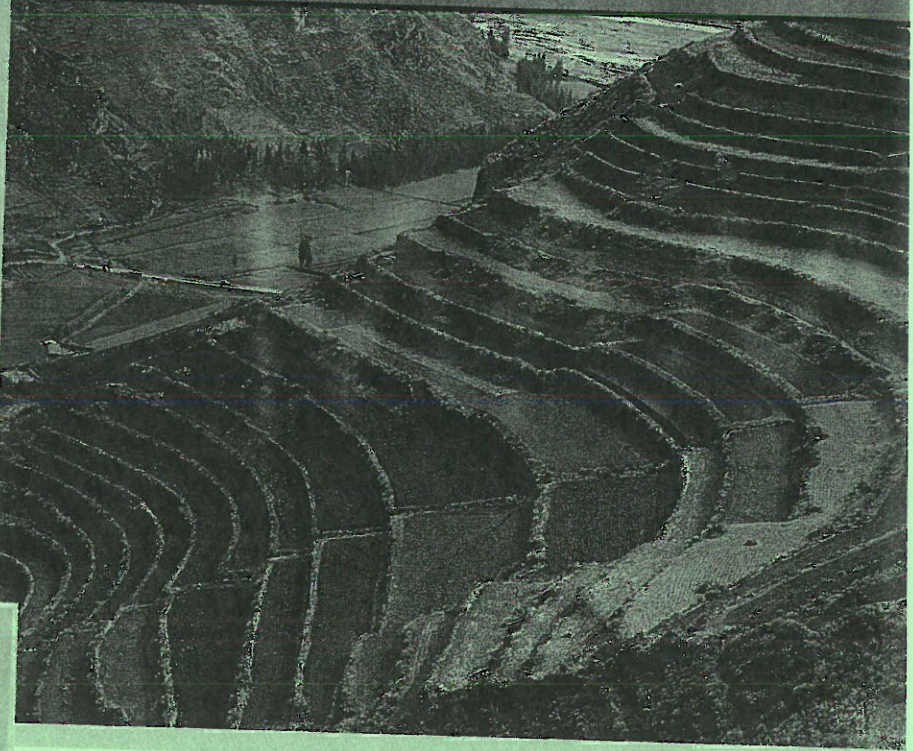
Machu Picchu (MAHCH oo PEEK choo), too, is a great example of Incan building and engineering. The Incas built this city on a high and narrow ridge between two peaks in the Andes Mountains. Using huge stone blocks from the mountaintops, they created acres and acres of buildings, walls, and plazas. They carved stairs into the face of the mountain to connect city buildings. They also cut roads into the bare rock. More than 500 years later, people still use these roads. In fact, the workers who built Machu Picchu did more than build a city. They changed the shape of the mountain landscape.

◀ ▼ The ancient city of Machu Picchu (below) is located high in the Andes about 54 miles (87 km) from Cuzco. It was home for several thousand people. It also served as a religious center. Some of the buildings located on higher ground (left) housed stones that the Incas considered holy.



Terrace Farming

The Incas built their terraces using stone walls. The area behind the wall was leveled out and lined with a layer of gravel to help with drainage. Then, earth was piled over the gravel. Finally, stone-lined channels were built to carry water to the terraces. These terraces in the mountains near Cuzco are still in use today. **Critical Thinking** How did the building of terraces help Incan farmers?



More Land for Farms Because they lived among steep, rugged mountains, the Incas had little natural farmland. They found two things to increase the amount of land available for farming.

First, they built a system of canals and aqueducts. The water that flowed through this system turned dry land into fertile fields.

To make use of the land on the slopes of the mountains, the Incas built **terraces**. These steplike ledges cut into the mountainside could then be used as fields for crops. The terraces also stopped soil from being washed away by rain. Incan farming techniques such as terraces are still used in the Andes today.

SECTION 2 REVIEW

1. **Define** (a) quipu, (b) terrace.
2. **Identify** Cuzco.
3. What were the main features of the Incan system of government?

4. Why did the Incas build a system of roads and bridges?
5. What advances did the Incas make in building and farming?

Critical Thinking

6. **Recognizing Cause and Effect** Why do you think that unity was an important goal of Incan rulers?

Activity

7. **Writing to Learn** You are an explorer seeing an Incan city for the first time. Write a description of what you see. In your description, include building methods and materials, farming techniques, and other interesting points of information.