

Early Americas

Inca Empire



Maya Civilization

Aztec Empire

Inca Empire

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.



Where was the Inca Empire?





The Inca Empire developed in **South America**. It was the largest empire in the early Americas and it covered parts of modern-day Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.

Early tribes began farming in South America in around 2500 BC. They began to settle and form permanent villages.

In around 1200 AD, the Inca people settled in what is now southeast Peru. They established their capital, **Cuzco**, using the remains of an earlier fortress. The early Incas lived peacefully near Cuzco for the next 200 years.



Can you find Peru using a globe or map of the world?





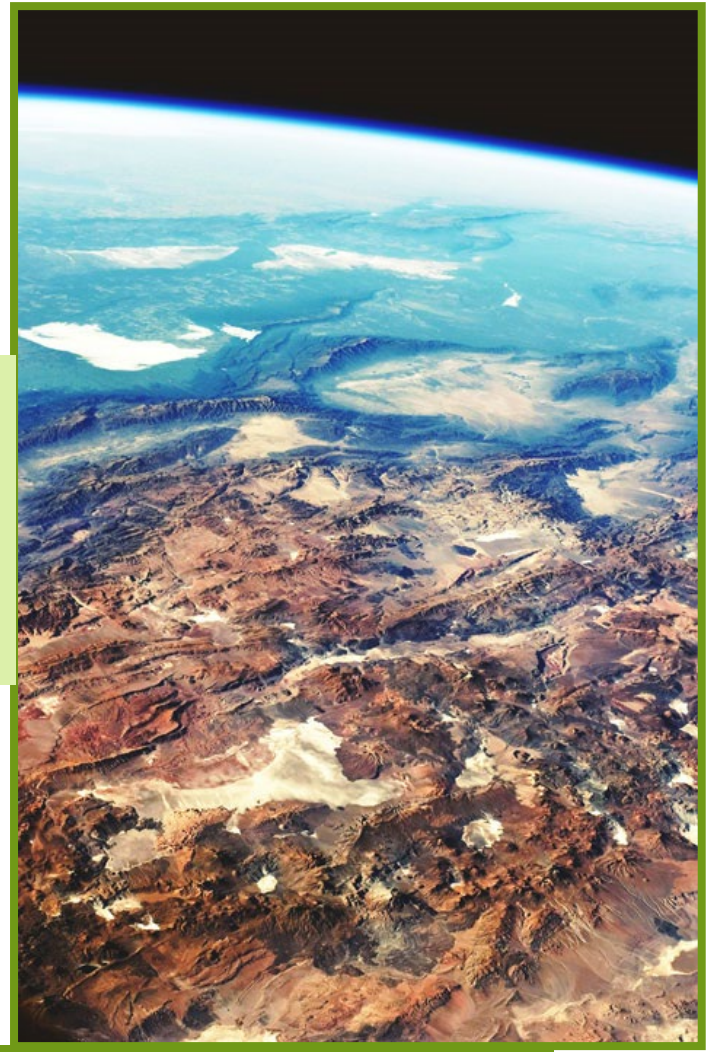
Inca Empire geography



The Inca Empire encompassed a wide range of difficult terrain, including the Andean Mountains, commonly known as the **Andes**.

The Andes were rich in **natural resources** such as gold, silver and copper, but these were often difficult to access and mine.

The Incas also controlled the **Atacama Desert**, a stretch of land along the Pacific west coast that is one of the driest places in the world.



This photo shows the Andes from space.
Why might it have been difficult to build there?





The beginning of the Inca Empire



In 1438, **Pachacuti** became the new ruler of Cuzco. Inca legend states that when he was a young prince, the city came under attack from a neighboring tribe. Pachacuti and a small band of warriors prayed to the gods for help.



Miraculously, many stones near the palace transformed into warriors and Pachacuti emerged victorious. He later built stone warriors to show his gratitude to the gods.

Although the legend has probably been exaggerated by later generations, Pachacuti did expand Inca territory. This began the period of expansion and conquest that led to the foundation of the Inca Empire.





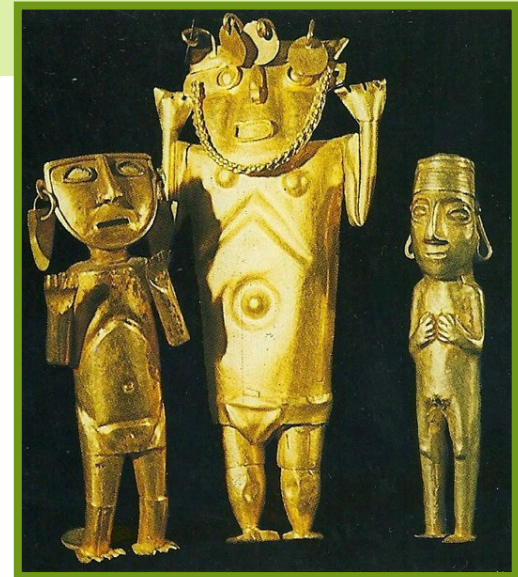
Growth of the empire



Pachacuti sent **envoys** to encourage nearby tribes to join his empire. These emphasized how wealthy the Inca were and how joining them would be highly beneficial.

Villages conquered by the Inca were often taken peacefully and agreed to pay **tribute**. Their leaders were allowed to remain in power, but they had to follow Inca ways of life and were encouraged to worship Inca gods.

When there was resistance to Inca rule, the Incas would invade using military force. The old leaders were executed and their children were sent to Cuzco to be educated in Inca ways and culture as they grew up.



Why do you think they did this?



The Incas had a **centrally planned economy**. This means that the government made all decisions concerning trade, labor and production.

All people under Inca control had to contribute, usually through labor. Most people were farmers. They were only allowed to keep enough to live on: everything else was collected by the government in a tax called **mita**.

The Incas did not have currency. People traded items between each other, but the government provided their basic needs, so there was no need for merchants.

Those who were elderly, sick or otherwise unable to work were provided for by the rest of the community.

Can you think of any advantages of this system?

People under Inca rule were either nobles or commoners. Most people were commoners. They had to work the land or produce goods to contribute to society.

Commoners were members of an **ayllu**, which was a group of families that worked together in the same community. People were born into an **ayllu** and would usually stay within it their entire lives.



Commoners spent most of their time working or sleeping. There were harsh punishments for laziness. However, the Incas also established several **festivals**, in which everyone participated. During festivals, people did not have to work.





Inca women had many responsibilities, including:

- cooking and preparing food
- weaving cloth
- cleaning the home
- agricultural labor.

Inca women tended to get married between the ages of 12–16, while men were around 20. Noblemen often practiced **polygamy** (having multiple wives), but commoners would not.

Some girls were selected to become **Aclla Cuna** (Virgins of the Sun). They spent their lives living in temples, preparing ritual food and weaving special cloth. They were managed by the *coya pasca*, a high priestess.



How much freedom do you think Inca women had?



The Inca emperor was called the **sapa inca**, which means “sole ruler” in **Quechua**. This was a **hereditary monarchy**, with the line of succession passing down from father to son. The *sapa inca* was considered to be a god by the Incas.

The Inca Empire was so large that it needed an organized government in order to maintain it effectively. Their territory was divided up into four quarters. Each was managed by a governor (**apu**): often a nobleman related to the emperor.

Local administrators oversaw smaller areas and reported any problems to the *apu*. They were often commoners and could include women. Their responsibilities included:

- collecting taxes
- judging at trials
- taking **censuses**.



Why do you think censuses were taken?



One of the Incas' most impressive achievements was the construction of a huge **road network** across their empire. This was crucial for both communication and transport.

Roads were made of paved stone. The Incas did not use wheeled carts, so their roads often had steps to allow passage over or through the Andes.

Much of the Inca road system was destroyed by Spanish conquistadors in the 1500s, but about 25% of it still survives today. One of the most famous routes is **Camino Inca**: the trail to the city of Machu Picchu.



How were the roads used for communication?

This photo shows a section of surviving Inca road.



What do you notice about the way it was made?

Can you think of any difficulties involved?



As well as roads, the Incas built great cities with architecture that has withstood over 500 years of **seismic** activity.



The Incas did not use mortar to keep their buildings upright. Instead, they cut stones very precisely so that they fit together without gaps.

This method of laying stones meant that they were very good at surviving earthquakes.

The Incas also used their masonry skill to cut **terraces** (flat steps) into hillsides, many of which are still visible today.

What do you think these terraces were used for?

One of the most iconic Inca cities is the mountaintop settlement of **Machu Picchu**. Archaeologists believe that it was built for Pachacuti after he became the first emperor.

Machu Picchu was constructed on top of a mountain ridge. Its buildings include:

- the **Intihuatana**, a mysterious stone structure, possibly used as a sundial
- the **Temple of the Three Windows**, a sacred building made of huge blocks
- the **Temple of the Sun** (right), a temple dedicated to Inti, the sun god.



Today, Machu Picchu is a popular tourist destination and is visited by thousands of people each year.



The Incas did not use a written alphabet like many other empires of the time. Instead, they used a system of knotted string called a **quipu**, or “knot-record.”

Quipu were primarily used for **accounting** and trade, where knots symbolized numbers, but stories and poetry could also be represented using colored string and hundreds of knots.

Quipu were highly portable because they could simply be rolled up to transport.



Can you think of any other advantages?

The Inca believed that their emperor (the *sapa inca*) was part god. Behind the emperor, the **High Priest** was the most senior religious figure. He coordinated religious ceremonies and was usually one of the emperor's male relatives.

The Incas worshiped many different gods and goddesses. The sun god **Inti** and the moon goddess **Mama Quilla** were two of the most significant. They were worshiped in purpose-built temples.



Coricancha in Cuzco is an example of an Inca temple. When the Spanish invaded in the 1500s, they built a church on top of it, so only its foundations are visible today.

Can you spot the Inca stonework in this photo?

The Incas worshiped by bringing gifts to the altars of specific gods or goddesses. Gifts and offerings could include:

- small statues, carvings, toys or games
- food and drink, such as **chicha** (an alcoholic drink)
- animal sacrifices, such as llamas or guinea pigs
- human sacrifice, though this was less common.

The Incas believed in an **afterlife**, in which people would either meet the gods or be punished for living a bad life.

The bodies of important people were embalmed and **mummified** before they were buried, so that they were ready for the afterlife. Previous emperors' mummies were paraded through the streets on special occasions.





By 1532, Spanish **conquistadors** led by **Francisco Pizarro** had reached Inca territory, intending to conquer it for Spain.

After an initial meeting with the Inca emperor **Atahualpa**, the Spanish killed his companions and took him prisoner.

Atahualpa promised to fill the room he was imprisoned in with gold and another two rooms with silver if he was set free.

However, the Spanish were concerned that the Incas would rebel against them if they allowed Atahualpa to live. They had him executed on the 26th July 1533.



Why else might the Spanish have wanted Atahualpa dead?



The Spanish conquistadors were able to successfully conquer the Inca Empire for several reasons:

- They inadvertently passed on European diseases such as **smallpox**, to which the Incas had no immunity. By 1532, the Inca population had dramatically declined.
- The Inca Empire was in the middle of a civil war between Atahualpa and his brother **Huáscar**, which meant that it was fragmented and vulnerable to attack.
- The Spanish had superior weapons, such as iron swords and armor, **arquebuses** and a few cannons.
- The Inca road system meant that the Spanish could easily move their troops around to where they were needed.

What do you think was the main reason for the fall of the Inca Empire?

Keywords

