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# **Incas, Mayas, Aztecs**

*Mr. Donn and Maxie's World History Series*

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 1-56004-244-3

**Product Code: ZP966**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Incas, Mayas, and Aztecs

**Subject:** Early civilizations of Middle America and South America.

- Middle America: Mayas and Aztecs
- South America: Incas

**Time Frame:** 6 weeks

**Level/length:** The units below on the Incas, Mayas, and Aztecs were written with seventh graders in mind but can easily be adapted for grades 5–9. Each civilization is presented as a stand-alone unit. Each unit is composed of sections. Some sections are mini-units and will take longer than one class period to complete. Lessons are based on a 55-minute class period or they can be adjusted to fit any time frame. Activities are varied and include classifying, abstracting, map work, dramatizing, writing, reading, speaking, researching, interpreting, cooperative learning, and other higher-level thinking activities.

### THE INCREDIBLE INCAS

- **Length:** The time frame needed to complete this unit is three weeks.
- **Unit description:** This unit explores the rise and fall of the Incan empire. It includes Geography, Manco Capac, the Hero Pachacuti, the Sapa Inca, Lords of Cuzco, Emperors of the Four Quarters, Government, Crime and Punishment, Daily Life, Common People, Terrace Farming, Specialized Professions, Royals and Nobility, Religion, Llama Legends and Other Tall Tales, Incan Textile Designs, Expansion and Growth, Incan Roads and Bridges, Incan Mailmen, Quipus, Architecture, Inventions, The Forgotten City—Machu Picchu, Civil War, Spanish Arrival, and a final activity.

### THE MYSTERIOUS MAYAS

- **Length:** The time frame needed to complete this unit is two weeks.
- **Unit description:** This unit explores the civilization of the Mayas, which lasted 1,500 years. It includes Geography, The Hero Twins, Master Builders, Pyramids, Temples, Palaces, Stelas, Ball Courts, Mayan Hieroglyphics, Mayan Books, Religion, Mirror Myths, Daily Life, Confidence-Building Shields, City-States, Achievements, Inventions, the Game of Bul, and a final activity: The Mysterious Mayas.

## THE AWESOME AZTECS

- **Length:** The time frame needed to complete this unit is one week.
- **Unit description:** This unit explores the rise and fall of the Aztec empire. It includes Geography, Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus, Human-Environment Interaction, Government, Emperor, City-States, War, Tribute, One-Time Forgiveness Law, Crime and Punishment, Daily Life, Slaves, Public Schools, Code of Behavior, Specialized Professions, Player Poems, Religion, Expansion and Growth, Inventions and Achievements, Quetzalcoatl, and Spanish Arrival.

**Rationale:** In view of the latest government guidelines on education with “no child left behind,” all units were developed to meet standards applicable in most states. Lessons are designed to address various learning styles and can be adapted for *all* students’ abilities. Units are designed to fit into an integrated curriculum.

# THE INCREDIBLE INCAS

# THE INCREDIBLE INCAS

## Introduction

**Subject:** The Incan Empire.

**Level/length:** This unit is written with seventh graders in mind but can easily be adapted for grades 5–9. The unit is presented in eleven sections; some sections are mini-units and will take longer than one class period to complete. Lessons are based on a 55-minute class period or they can be adjusted to fit any time frame. As written, the time frame needed to complete this unit is three weeks.

**Unit description:** This unit explores the rise and fall of the Incan empire. It includes Geography, Manco Capac, the Hero Pachacuti, the Sapa Inca, Lords of Cuzco, Emperors of the Four Quarters, Government, Crime and Punishment, Daily Life, Common People, Terrace Farming, Specialized Professions, Royals and Nobility, Religion, Llama Legends and other Tall Tales, Incan Textile Designs, Expansion and Growth, Incan Roads and Bridges, Incan Mailmen, Quipus, Architecture, Inventions, The Forgotten City—Machu Picchu, Civil War, Spanish Arrival, and a final activity.

Activities are varied and include classifying, abstracting, map work, dramatizing, writing, reading, speaking, researching, interpreting, cooperative learning, and other higher-level thinking activities.

**Rationale:** In view of the latest government guidelines on education with “no child left behind,” this unit was developed to meet standards applicable in most states. Lessons are designed to address various learning styles and can be adapted for *all* students’ abilities. This unit is designed to fit into an integrated curriculum.

**Ongoing project/graphic organizers:** Using bulletin boards or wall space as graphic organizers supports critical thinking activities and fits the theme of the unit. At the end of the unit, each “board” (graphic organizer) should be completed and will support the final activity. To complete each, students will need to be directed to add information as it is discovered in your unit study.



## Setting Up the Room

### GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS:

#### WORD WALL

*Design:* This is a consistent for all units, but each has its own look. The Incas are called the Children of the Sun. A huge sun might work well as the container for your words. You might use a snow-capped mountain or even a llama.

*Key Words:* Words you may wish to include on your word wall as you discover them in your unit of study are Andes Mountains, Sapa Inca, terrace farming, Machu Picchu, Cuzco, Children of the Sun, and quipu.

*Use:* Once a week, have your students pick any word, define it, and use it in a sentence. Use the word wall to fill in short periods of time throughout the unit. Direct the kids to select any five words from the word wall and create a news article; or select any six words to form a group and be able to define the group. (Examples: buildings, words that begin with A.)

#### CUZCO (CUSCO)

*Design:* Put a sign above an open wall area marked CUZCO (CUSCO), the capital city and heart of the Incan empire. Add a small table to hold handouts. Use both spellings of the capital city.

*Concept:* The Incas never invented a system of writing. However, they did invent the quipu. A quipu was a system of knots and cords strung on a main string. The quipu had meaning to those who could read it. When your students make their own quipus, make one yourself or bring one to class, and hang it in this area to further emphasize that the Incan invention, the quipu, was something that could be read.

*Make a quick quipu:* Buy a refill cotton mop head (the stringy kind, any size). Tie some colored pieces of yarn to the top. Tie some knots in the yarn and in various strands of the mop head. If you need an example, there are many samples of quipus on the Internet (Google Image search).

*Use of this area:* Use the table and wall area to post papers with no names, and stack copies of reproducibles and homework assignments for pick up by students who were absent.

*Spelling of the capital city:* As you introduce this area to your students, be sure to point out that the capital city of the Incan empire can be spelled *Cuzco* or *Cusco*. Both are correct. Cuzco was the center of government and the heart of the Incan empire. The invading Spanish gave this name to the capital city.

**DOOR INTO THE CLASSROOM:** Create an entrance to the Incan empire high in the Andes Mountains. On the hallway side of the door into your classroom, cut some snow-capped mountain peaks on construction paper. Label your peaks the ANDES MOUNTAINS.

**CLOSING CLASS EACH DAY:** We like to close class each day with a sentence or two that reminds students what we are studying. With the Incas, we suggest you close class each day with, “See you tomorrow from the top of the world, the Andes Mountains.”

As we are sure you are aware, the Andes Mountains are not the tallest mountains in the world. The Himalayas are the tallest. If a student does not challenge your statement, you will need to point this out. Then add, “To the Incas, the Andes Mountains were the top of the world.”

## SECTION ONE

# GEOGRAPHY, MANCO CAPAC

Time frame: One class period (55 minutes).

Includes: Introduction, Quick Background, Geography, Manco Capac.

### Preparation:

- Daily Question: Use overhead or write question on the blackboard.  
(This is a student writing activity. Students are to write answers to daily questions in their notebooks upon arrival.)
- Overhead of the *Outline Map of the Incan Empire*
- Reproducibles:  
*Natural Barriers*  
*Manco Capac*  
*Outline Map of the Incan Empire*  
*Outline Map of South America*

**Daily Question:** “What is a natural barrier?”

OPEN CLASS: Meet your class at the door.

**Say:** “WELCOME TO CUZCO, CAPITAL OF THE INCAN EMPIRE!”

ACTIVITY: Briefly Introduce the Incas

- Say: “Around 1500 CE, Incan Indians lived high in the Andes Mountains of South America. In just 100 years, they built one of the largest empires in the world. It was the last great empire in the Americas—an empire that was 2500 miles long, 500 miles wide, and home to over 12 million people.

The Incas were an incredible people. The Incas never invented the wheel. They never invented a system of writing. They had no use for money. Yet, high in the rugged Andes Mountains of South America, the Incas built thousands of miles of well-paved roads, kept accurate records, and enjoyed vast wealth. Everyone in the empire was well fed and no one was homeless.”

**Transition:** Say: “Today, we are going to begin our study of a people who called themselves the Children of the Sun. As always, we will start with geography. The Incan civilization began in the second largest mountain range in the world, the Andes Mountains.”

**Ask:** “Where are the Andes Mountains?” (Expect someone to shout, “In South America.” If they don’t, ask again. Get an answer. Say: “Right!”)

#### ACTIVITY: Natural Barriers—Geography of the Incan Empire

- Handout: *Natural Barriers*
- Read and answer questions.

#### ACTIVITY: Map the Incan Empire

- Handout: *Outline Map of the Incan Empire*
- Use the overhead.
- Point to places on the map they need to label. Add other information you feel is pertinent to your class level and course content.
- Remind them that the city of Cuzco can be spelled *Cuzco* or *Cusco*. They will see it spelled both ways on the Web, tour guide offers, and ads to visit Peru. They may choose whichever spelling they wish.

**Teacher Note:** The capital city of Cuzco is spelled Cuzco, Cusco, Qusqu, and Qosqo. We prefer the Spanish spelling of Cuzco, but all are correct. It is important that students know of these alternate spellings, as they will see all of them, and especially Cuzco and Cusco, in textbooks, library books, and Web sites.

- Handout: *Outline Map of South America*
- Use the overhead.
- Point to the outlines of modern-day countries in South America that were once part of the Incan empire to get an even better sense of size and scale.
- Have students find and label the Amazon Basin, the Andes Mountains, the Pacific Ocean, the coastal desert, and modern-day countries.
- Students may color in their maps if appropriate to your class and level.

#### ACTIVITY: Manco Capac

- Say: “Most ancient cultures have an origin story, a story about how their civilization began. The Incas were no exception. They had many origin stories. They believed in a great many gods and goddesses, and they loved stories.

One of the legends the Incas loved to tell about the founding of Cuzco, the capital of the Incan empire, told of a great bird. One day, the people looked up and saw a great bird in the sky with colorfully beautiful feathers. As the bird soared away, the people ran after it, pointing at the sky. Then the bird finally landed, it immediately turned into stone, creating a great rock. The people knew that it was a sign, an omen. The bird had been sent by the gods to show the people where to build their city. Certainly, with such a beginning, the city they built would be the finest in all the land. And so it was.

Another origin story about the founding of the city of Cuzco is the story of Manco Capac and the sun god, Inti.”

- Handout: *Manco Capac*
- Read and answer questions.
- Transition: Most probably, Manco Capac was a pretend hero, a character in a story.

CLOSE CLASS: “Tomorrow, we will learn about a *real* hero, the hero Pachacuti. See you tomorrow from the top of the world, the Andes Mountains.”

Name:  
Date:  
Class:  
Period:

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## Natural Barriers

Talk about natural barriers! The Incan empire had them all. The empire covered a vast amount of space. At its height of development, the Incan empire was 2500 miles long, 500 miles wide, and home to 12 million people, connected by 14,000 miles of roads, many of which were paved. The Incan empire was located on the western side of South America. Although the empire was huge, it can be easily divided into three geographical regions: mountains, jungle, and desert.

**Andes Mountains:** The Andes Mountains, home of the Incan civilization, ran north to south. The mountains dominated Incan society. The mountain peaks were worshipped as gods. The Andes created a natural barrier between the coastal desert on one side and the jungle on the other. The snow-capped mountains were full of deep gorges. The Incas built bridges across the gorges so that they could reach all parts of their empire quickly and easily. If an enemy approached, the Incas could simply burn the bridges.

**Amazon jungle:** On one side of the Andes was the Amazon jungle. The Incas must have entered the jungle occasionally, as they did know about the many valuable things that could be found in the Amazon, like wood and fruit and natural medicines. But they never established settlements there. They had no desire to live in the jungle. The Incas expanded north and south instead.

**Coastal desert:** Between the mountains and the Pacific Ocean is a coastal desert 2000 miles long and 30 to 100 miles wide. The desert provided a wonderful natural barrier. Some scientists think it is the driest place in the world. It's not completely barren. There are fertile strips where small rivers and streams run from the Andes mountaintops to the sea.

Question: "What three major geographic features dominated the Incan empire?"

Name:  
Date:  
Class:  
Period:

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## Outline Map of the Incan Empire



Name:  
Date:  
Class:  
Period:

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## Outline Map of South America





Name:  
Date:  
Class:  
Period:

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## Manco Capac

Inti, the sun god, created the first Inca and named him Manco Capac. The sun god created a sister for Manco. The sister did not have a name of her own. She was simply called "his sister." The sun god told Manco and his sister to go on a journey. Their job was to search high and low for a special place called Cuzco. The sun god gave Manco Capac a golden staff.

The sun god said, "You will know that you have found Cuzco when the staff is swallowed by the earth. When you find it, you will build a city and name it Cuzco. In this special city, you will teach others about the power of the sun god."

Because no one argued with the sun god, Manco Capac and his sister immediately traveled into the harsh Andes Mountains (referred to in this myth as "the wilderness.") Things were looking pretty grim. Though they tried over and over, they could not find a place where the golden staff sank into the ground.

One day, they stumbled upon the most beautiful location they had ever seen. When Manco tested the ground, his staff sank immediately out of sight, just as the sun god had foretold. Manco Capac and his sister built their city on that spot. They named their city Cuzco.

There were other tribes in the area, but Manco Capac soon took over leadership of all the tribes. Manco Capac became the first ruler of the Incas. That's how Cuzco became the capital of the Incan empire.

Manco Capac went on to have 400 children. When he died at a very old age, the Incas built the Temple of the Sun on the spot where he died.

### Questions:

1. What did the sun god Inti give Manco Capac?
2. What was he supposed to do with this gift?
3. Did he accomplish his mission?