**Student Reading: Achievements of the Inca**

Inca were a native South American people who ruled one of the largest and richest empires in the Americas. The Inca empire emerged in the early A.D. 1400’s and occupied a vast region centered around the capital of Cusco, in southern Peru. The empire extended over 2,500 miles (4,020 kilometers) along the western coast and mountains of South America. It included parts of present-day Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Thatand Argentina. The Inca empire was conquered by Spanish forces in 1532.

**Agriculture and Trade**

The Inca used several methods to make their farms more productive. They built irrigation canals in the coastal desert. In the highlands, they cut terraces into the hillsides to reduce erosion and level the land for irrigation. They planted their fields by hand using simple tools. The Inca divided fields in lands they conquered into three groups that were all worked by their subjects. The harvest of one set of fields went to the local people. The other two sets of fields were harvested for the Inca state and temples.

The main crops of the Inca were corn, cotton, potatoes, a root crop called oca, and a grain called quinoa. Freeze-dried potatoes called chuno were made in the highlands to preserve the harvest for long-term storage. The Inca brewed chicha, a beer made from corn. Important domesticated animals were the llama, alpaca, and cuy (guinea pig). Llamas and alpacas provided meat, often dried to make a durable food called charqui, and wool for clothing. Llamas also were used to transport goods over long distances.

A well-constructed network of roads connected all parts of the Inca empire. Suspension bridges maintained by the local communities spanned rivers and canyons. Some of these roads and bridges still exist today. Rest stops were common along the roads. Some of these were large structures with facilities to house the Inca army and storehouses to feed travelers.

People traveled by foot, and they and llamas carried all loads. The Inca did not use any wheeled carts or vehicles, which were useless on the mountainous roads. The emperor and nobles rode on litters, seats mounted on poles and carried on men’s shoulders. The Inca used boats and rafts on the major rivers, lakes, and on ocean voyages along the Pacific coast.

**Arts and Architecture**

The Inca produced fine metalwork in gold, silver, and bronze and wove fine textiles of wool and cotton. Pottery was painted with geometric designs in black, brown, red, white, and yellow. Ceramics and textiles of the nobles incorporated designs, called tocapu, that had symbolic meaning for the Inca rulers. Musical instruments included woodwinds and drums. Flutes and panpipes made of wood, ceramics, and bone played the haunting melodies of the Andes.

Inca builders were known for their sturdy temples and palaces made of stone. Large blocks of rock were cut so finely that they fit together without cement. The architecture of Cusco, its fortress at Sacsayhuamán, and Machu Picchu, a royal retreat north of Cusco, are good examples of the Inca building style.

**Language and Writing**

The Inca spoke a language called Quechua. Different peoples within the empire spoke a variety of other native languages. A second important language in the empire was Aymara. Both Quechua and Aymara are still spoken by millions of people in the Andes today.

The Inca did not have an alphabet. They did have quipu, a cord with knotted strings of various lengths, colors, weaves, and designs that served as a system of recordkeeping. Special officials throughout the empire could read the quipu and maintained the knotted strings. Most people in the Inca empire could not read them. Archaeologists have discovered how the Inca recorded numbers and dates using quipu. However, they are still trying to understand what other information might be encoded in the knotted strings.

Information was passed through the empire on the system of royal roads by the messengers, called chaski. Messages were passed by word of mouth or by quipu. Chaski were stationed every few miles, and messages would be passed from one messenger to the next so information would flow quickly throughout the empire.

Source: Adapted from Williams, Patrick Ryan. "Inca." World Book Student. World Book, 2016. Web. 22 Nov. 2016.

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