

## THE INCAS

The early history of the Incas is a mystery. Since the Incas never developed a system of writing, we must rely on the writings of their Spanish conquerors for any Incan history that we know. We can also study artifacts of the ancient cities for clues to the early Incas' story.

We do know some Incan myths. One early story is that the sun god created the first Incan, Manco Capac, and his sister. The god told them to go and teach other Indians. They went into the wilderness to establish a city. They named their city Cuzco, and it became the capital of the Incan empire.

The Incas probably began as one of many small tribes in the Andes Mountains. At its peak, the Incan empire spread through parts of what are now Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina. The Incan land included desert, fertile valleys, some rain forests, and the Andes Mountains.

The Incas conquered most of their territory under the leadership of Pachacutec, who ruled from 1438 to 1471. The Incas crushed most of the other tribes during brutal fighting.

The Incan empire was so large that they built a system of roads that stretched over 12,000 miles. The Incas did not use wheeled vehicles on their roads. The great road system was for pedestrians. Only the road system of the ancient Romans was equal to that of the Incas.

The Incas developed terrace farming. They cut terraces into the steep sides of the mountains to create more farm land. They also dug irrigation systems to bring water from the mountain streams to the terraces. Many of the Incan roads, terraces, and irrigation ditches are still in use today.

The llama was an important animal for the Incas. They tamed the llama and used it for transportation of men and materials. The llama also provided the Incas with wool and food.

The Incas developed a counting system that used a based of ten. They used a *quipus* to remember numbers. The quipus had a main cord about two feet long. They tied many colored strings to the main cord. Each string had knots tied in it. The color of the strings and the distance between the knots had special meanings.

The Incan civilization was at its peak when the Spanish arrived. Francisco Pizarro led the Spanish invaders against the Incas. After a series of fierce battles, the Spanish defeated the Incan king, Atahualpa, and in 1533 he was killed. The descendants of the Incas, like those of the Mayas and Aztecs, continued to live under the rule of the Spanish.



The Incas conquered a vast empire in South America, constructed a 12,000-mile road system, and developed terrace farming and irrigation systems.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Why is so little known about the early history of the Incas?

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2. According to legend, who was the first Incan?

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3. What was the capital of the Incan empire named?

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4. Where is it believed that the Incan tribe began?

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5. Under whose reign did the Incan empire grow most?

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6. What did the size of the empire compel the Incas to do?

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7. How did the Incas grow crops in the mountains?

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8. How was the llama beneficial to the Incas?

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9. What Incan invention helped with counting?

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10. Who defeated the Incas?

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## THE INCA AND HIS GOVERNMENT

Inca was the title of the ruler of the Incan empire. At first, the word "Inca" meant the children of the sun god Inti. It later became the title of the ruler. Today, we also use Inca to mean the people of the tribe.

The ancient Incas believed their ruler was a descendant of the gods. They worshiped him as both a god and ruler, and he had absolute power.

The Inca had many wives. His main wife was his queen. Her title was *coya*. The Inca's sister could also be his *coya*. The Inca might have over 30 children. The oldest son of the Inca did not automatically become the next ruler; instead, a council of nobles chose the next ruler. Usually, the council chose the most promising son of the *coya*. At times the selection of the new Inca led to fighting among the supporters of various sons.

A *borla*, or Incan crown, was worn by the Inca. It had a fringe of brightly colored cords. Gold tubes decorated the end of each cord. The Inca wore garments of the finest wool. Each of his garments was worn only once. The Inca ate and drank only from gold plates and goblets.

Servants carried the Inca on a platform and chair made of gold since he didn't walk great distances. The chair, called a litter, had a canopy of gold and jewels to protect the Inca from rain and the rays of the Sun.

Each Inca had a new palace built. The walls of the Inca's palace were decorated with gold. The Inca's throne was also gold.

The empire had a 30-day period of mourning after the death of the Inca. Priests mummified the Inca's body. Many of the Inca's servants volunteered to die, because they believed that they would then be able to continue to serve the Inca. The old palace became a shrine for the previous Inca. They put the Inca's mummified body into the shrine, and the people then worshiped the mummies of the Incas.

The Incas had an efficient government. The rulers, priests, and generals all came from the noble class. Most were relatives of the Inca. The Inca used the road and bridge system to help him govern. Messengers and soldiers were able to move quickly throughout the empire.

All Incan men gave the government physical labor. This was the *mita*, or service tax. The government built the great palaces, public buildings, and roads with this labor.



The Inca and his main wife, the *coya*, were carried in a golden litter by servants.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the title of the ruler of the Incan empire?

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2. Why did the people worship their ruler?

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3. What was the title of the Incan queen?

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4. How was a new ruler chosen?

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5. What was the royal crown called? Describe it.

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6. How did the ruler travel?

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7. What did each new ruler have? Why?

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8. How were dead rulers remembered?

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9. What was the name of the Incan capital?

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10. What was a *mita*?

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## INCAN RELIGION

Like the other Indian tribes, the Incas worshipped many gods and goddesses. The major Incan god was the god of nature, Viracocha, the creator.

Another Incan god was Inti, the sun god. Gold was the symbol of Inti. The sun god temple is the most important structure in Cuzco, the major city of the Incas. The Incas believed Inti was the father of Incan rulers. They worshipped the ruler as a living god.

Major Incan goddesses included Pachamama, the goddess of the earth and the sea. The Incas also worshipped many lesser gods and goddesses. These included gods of thunder, the Moon, stars, rainbows, and others.

The Incas believed they could learn the will of the gods by divining. Divining is studying objects to find magic signs. Priests would look at things such as animal organs, flames of a fire, or movements of animals, and from these they would try to discover if it was a good day for planting crops, going to war, or making other important decisions.

In addition to the gods and goddesses, the Incas worshipped *huacas*. A huaca was a sacred place or thing. Huacas included mummies of the dead, temples, holy places, and things of nature such as mountains, springs, and stones. Each Incan family had small statues in their homes of huacas. The statues were sacred to that family.

Religious ceremonies were an important part of Incan life. Each family had daily prayers to their huacas. The priests performed daily ceremonies at the various temples. The high priest was a favorite relative of the ruler.

The Incas held a major religious festival during each of the 12 months of their calendar. The Incan year began in December with the Capac Raimi. This means "the magnificent festival." This was the most important and elaborate of all celebrations. Pauca Huaray, in March, celebrated the ripening of the earth. The June ceremony of Inti Raimi was the festival of the Sun. Uma Raimi, the festival of the water, occurred in October.

Some rituals happened inside the temples. The great monthly festivals occurred outdoors. All of the people could take part in them. The celebrations included dancing, feasts, games, songs, and parades. The ceremonies also included sacrifices and offerings. Incas sacrificed animals such as the llama and guinea pigs. At times human sacrifices, including child sacrifices, were part of the rituals.



Winged attendants of the thunder god are shown in profile rather than full face. The figures have rayed headdresses and carry staffs.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Who was the major Incan god?  
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2. What was the name of the sun god?  
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3. What was the sun god's symbol?  
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4. What is divining?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What was a huaca?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How many months did the Incas have in their calendar?  
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7. What events were held each month?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the most important festival? When was it held?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
9. Where did the festivals take place? Why?  
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10. What types of things were sacrificed at festivals?  
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## INCAN ROADS AND BRIDGES

The Incas built one of the ancient world's best transportation systems. They built roads and bridges to keep the empire together. The transportation system allowed them to have fast communication between villages and cities. They also used it to move food and other supplies. The roads also allowed military troops to move faster.

The Incan roads stretched for more than 10,000 miles. The Incas had two major roads. The Royal Road was 3,250 miles long. It went from the northern border of the empire through Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia into Argentina and Chile.

The other major road, the coastal highway, was 2,520 miles long. It ran from the village of Tumbes in the north, through the desert, then into Chile.

Several other roads ran between the two major ones. The standard width of the roads was 24 feet. They were narrower only when natural barriers were in the way. The roads included side walls to keep out sand drifts and to mark the road. There were also markers along the road to tell the distance to the next village.

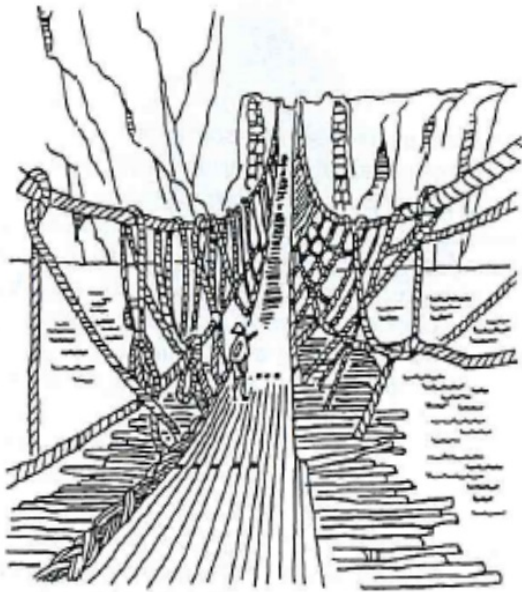
Incan workers provided the labor to build the roads as part of the "labor tax" they paid to the government. Government engineers directed the workers.

The roads belonged to the government. No one could use the road without special permission. The Incas did not use wheeled vehicles on their roads. The travelers and messengers walked to their destinations. The Incas used llamas to carry goods on the roads. They built rest houses called *tampus* about every 12 to 20 miles along the roads. In addition to providing a place to rest, most *tampus* also had food available.

The Incas built causeways to elevate the roads in swampy areas. They also built amazing bridges, which they called *chacas*. The hanging bridges are the most famous of the Incan *chacas*. One Incan bridge was over 250 feet long. Built in 1350, it lasted until 1890.

The Incas used the fibers of the maguey plant to weave the cable for the bridges. The main cables were from four to five feet thick. Incan workers had to replace the cables about every two years.

The Incas also built pontoon bridges made of reed boats tied together. Another type of Incan bridge had a basket hung from a cable stretched between two stone towers. Travelers got into the basket, and a workman then pulled along the cable to the other side.



The Apurimac Chaca, the hanging bridge over the Apurimac River in Peru, was one of the most famous of the Incan *chacas*. It is known as The Bridge of San Luis Rey in literature.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. How many miles of Incan roads were there?  
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2. What was the longest Incan road called?  
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3. What was the name of the other major Incan road?  
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4. How wide were most Incan roads?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What kind of walls did the roads have? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What were Incan rest houses called?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What was a *chaca*?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What plant fibers did the Incas weave together to make cables for their bridge?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
9. Of what were pontoon bridge boats made?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Describe another type of Incan bridge.  
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\_\_\_\_\_

## ANCAN AGRICULTURE

Many of the foods we use today are also part of the Incan diet. Incan farmers grew a greater variety of crops than any other ancient American tribe. They grew potatoes, corn, tomatoes, avocados, peppers, strawberries, peanuts, squash, beans, pineapples, chocolate, and other crops.

The potato was the most important food of the Incas. They called it *apa*. The Incas had many varieties and colors of potatoes, and today we know of 10 of those varieties. The potato became the main source of food for the Incas since they could plant it at great heights in the Andes Mountains. Some of the varieties of potato would also resist the frosts of the region.

The Incas used the first known freeze-dried process. They left the potatoes outside to freeze. Then the Incas trampled the potatoes by foot to squeeze the water out of them. Next they left them in the sunlight to dry. The Incas called these dried potatoes *chuñu*. The Incas preserved *chuñu* either whole or ground into flour. *Chuñu* would last for years without spoiling and was easy to store. The Incas were able to eat it throughout the year.

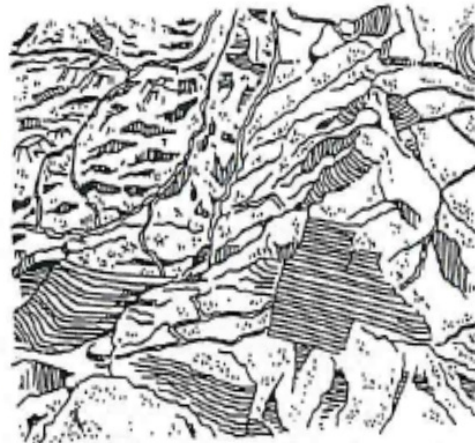
Corn was another important Incan crop. The Incas planted over 20 varieties of corn. Corn is called maize by many Indian tribes. The Incas named it *sara*. Corn was grown only in the lower regions.

The mountains presented farmers with special challenges. To create enough flat land for the crops, the Incas carved flat step-like terraces into the mountain sides. The terraces also helped to keep the soil from being eroded. Modern Andes farmers still use many of the ancient Incan terraces.

Planting the crops was a group effort. The men would break up the soil with planting sticks. The women then followed, putting the seeds into the earth. The children often worked in the fields to scare away birds and animals that might eat the crops before the harvest.

The Incas also developed a system to carry the water of the mountain streams to the terraces. They dug canals and tunnels and built raised aqueducts to carry the water. The Incan water system is still in use today.

Farming was the subject of many Incan religious ceremonies. After the planting season, the Incas made sacrifices to the rain god. At another major festival, the Incas thanked the gods for a good harvest.



Using step-like terraces carved into the mountain sides, the Incas created more flat land for crops. The terraces, which are still used today, also helped control soil erosion.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the most important food to the ancient Incas?

2. How many varieties of this crop were there?

3. Why was this food popular?

4. What was the Incan name for corn?

5. What were Incan "freeze dried" potatoes called?

6. How did the Incas make more flat farm land?

7. How did Incas irrigate their farm land?

8. What in the text might make you believe that the Incas designed things to last?

9. Why might farming be the subject of religious ceremonies?

10. When did Incas sacrifice to the rain god?

## THE LLAMA: THE ANIMAL OF THE INCAS

The most important animal to the Incas was the llama. It was the only large native animal of the Western Hemisphere to be tamed. The horse and cow came to the Americas later. The Incas were the only people of South or Central America to use animals to help in their work.

The llama is a member of the camel family. It is about four feet tall at its shoulder and about four feet long plus a tail of about six inches. An adult llama can weigh up to 300 pounds. The llama has a slender body, long neck, and long thin legs. Its head is similar to that of a camel. It has large eyes and a pointed snout with a split nose. Its hooves have two toes.

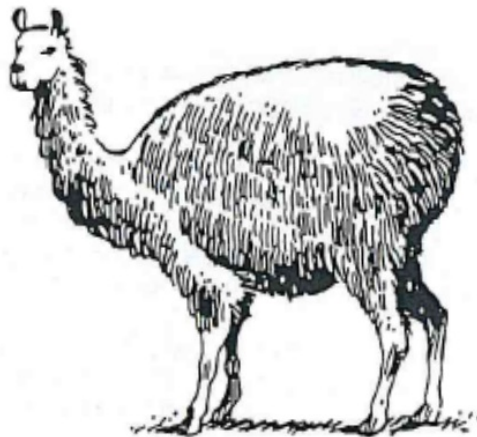
Although the llama does not have a hump like its cousin the camel, its body stores water well. The llama can travel great distances without needing water.

The Incas used llamas to carry food and trading goods throughout the empire. The animal is well suited to the rugged mountains of the Andes. It also adapts well to high altitudes. The llama can carry loads of about 100 to 130 pounds and can easily travel six to 12 miles per day over uneven ground. On flat ground it can travel 20 to 25 miles in one day. The llama can even run faster than a horse when necessary.

The llama was, and still is, a source of wool. Its wool is thick and greasy and comes in a variety of colors. The Incas used llama wool to make blankets, ropes, and sacks to carry goods. They tanned the hide of the llama to make leather. Many Incas used this leather to make sandals.

The llama was also a source of food. The Incas dried llama meat in the heat of the sun. *Charqui* is the Incan name for dried llama meat. Our word "jerky" comes from the Incan word *charqui*.

Today the llama is still an important animal in the Andes Mountains. The descendants of the ancient Incas use the llama in much the same way as their ancestors did.



The llama was used as a pack animal by the Incas, and it was also a source of wool, leather, and meat.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the only large animal native to the Western Hemisphere to be tamed?  
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2. What animal is the llama related to?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How much can an adult llama weigh?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why is the llama a good animal to have in the Andes Mountains?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
5. How much can a llama carry?  
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6. How fast can a llama run?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What is llama wool good for?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
8. What is llama leather good for?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What is charqui?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How are llamas useful today?  
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## INCAN WEAVING

Weaving was one of the most important crafts of the ancient Incas. The women did most of the dyeing, spinning, and weaving of cloth. However many Incan men were also weavers.

The Incas used wool for weaving most of their cloth. Llama wool is very coarse and is varied in color. The Incas used it to make blankets and ropes. Wool from the alpaca is white with some gray and brown. The Incas used alpaca wool to weave clothing. The wool from the vicuña is a soft fiber. They used vicuña wool for weaving the finest cloth. When the Spanish invaders first saw cloth woven from vicuña wool, they thought it was silk.

Cotton could not be grown in the mountain regions of the Incas. When the Incan empire spread to the coast, cotton became available through trade with other tribes and soon became popular with the Incan weavers.

Three types of looms were used by Incan weavers. The most unusual was the backstrap loom. They tied one end of the loom to a tree. They then tied the other end to a belt that went around the weaver's back. The Incas also used a horizontal loom. It was stretched about a foot off the ground between wooden supports. They also used a vertical loom, attached to a wall. The weaver using this loom would stand to work.

Incan cloth had bright, bold colors. They obtained the colors to dye the wool from many sources. They used metals such as copper and tin for some of the dyes. The Incas also used vegetable dyes. The indigo plant gave a bright blue dye, and the achiote tree was the source of a brilliant red dye. A dye made from ground shellfish provided a deep purple color.

Several steps were necessary in the production of wool cloth. The Incas gathered the wool from the animals. The women then dyed the wool. After drying it, they spun the wool into thread. Next, they wove the thread into cloth. The Incan weavers used geometric patterns. Seldom did a weaver repeat the same pattern.

The Incas used embroidery to decorate some of the cloth. Some of the better garments had decorations of gold, silver, or copper attached to them, and some garments had leathers woven into them for extra color and decoration.

A group of women called the "chosen women" lived in the temples. They wove the finest wool into garments for the ruler. He only wore each garment once, and then it was destroyed.

Today, descendants of the ancient Incas still weave beautiful, bright textiles. The methods and designs used have remained unchanged for about 3,000 years.



One type of loom used by Incan women was the backstrap loom.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Name three animals the Incas used as sources of wool.

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2. What did they use to make blankets and rope?

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3. What was aicapa used for?

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4. What did the Spanish think the finest wool cloth really was?

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5. What item became popular as the Incan empire grew?

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6. What type of loom that was used by the Incas was most unusual?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What types of minerals were used as sources of dye colors?

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8. What color was obtained from the indigo plant?

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9. From what did the Incas get purple dye?

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10. What did the "chosen women" do?

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## THE INCAS AND THE SPANISH CONQUEST

The Incas had little contact with the Mayas or the Aztecs. They did not know of the earliest arrival of the white man, nor did they know of the Spanish conquest of the other tribes.

The Incan ruler, Huyayna Capac, died in 1525. He did not choose an heir to become the new ruler. Two of his sons, Atahualpa and Tuscara, fought each other for this honor. Their fighting caused a bloody civil war that lasted for over five years. Atahualpa won the war and became the next ruler. He then ordered the death of thousands of Tuscara's soldiers and his family.

The Incas soon received reports of strange-looking pale men with beards. An enemy tribe of the Incas captured a shipwrecked European on the coast of Brazil. He joined the enemies in some fighting against the Incas. He was the first white man that the Incas ever saw. The Incas also heard stories of white men arriving in giant boats.

The Spanish landed on the Caribbean coast on May 13, 1532. Over 180 Spanish soldiers arrived to search for gold. Led by Francisco Pizarro, they brought with them guns, armor, a cannon, and horses. This was the first time that horses appeared in the new world. These strange new animals fascinated and frightened the Incas.

Atahualpa and Pizarro agreed to meet in a courtyard in the town of Cajamarca. Atahualpa and his men arrived without weapons. The Incas believed the Spanish might be gods, and so they did not want to offend the Spanish by being armed.

The Spanish, however, had planned an ambush. Atahualpa arrived in the courtyard armed on a gold throne. The Spanish then opened fire. They soon killed over 2,000 Incas. The Spanish captured Atahualpa and put him in a prison. Atahualpa agreed to pay the Spanish a ransom of enough gold and silver to fill his prison cell.

Even after he paid the ransom, the Spanish refused to free Atahualpa. They condemned Atahualpa to death and gave him a choice: would he prefer that they strangle him or burn him at the stake? He chose strangulation. With Atahualpa's death, the great Incan empire came under Spanish rule and influence.



After agreeing to meet with the Spanish, Atahualpa was ambushed by Pizarro and his men. Atahualpa paid a huge ransom in gold and silver, but the Spanish executed him anyway.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Why didn't the Incas know about the Spanish conquest of other tribes?

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2. Why was there a civil war among the Incas?

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3. How long did the civil war last?

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4. Who won the civil war?

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5. Who was the first white man ever seen by the Incas?

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6. When did the Spanish land on the Caribbean coast?

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7. Who was the leader of the Spanish?

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8. What did the Spanish bring with them that frightened the Incas?

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9. Why did the Incas meet the Spanish unarmed?

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10. What did the Incan ruler fill with gold and silver?

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