

Reading Essentials and Study Guide

networks

Pre-Columbian America, 300–1550

Lesson 2 Early South American Civilizations

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

In what ways were civilizations in early Mesoamerica and South America complex? How were civilizations in early Mesoamerica and South America influenced by previous cultures?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

instruct to teach or to train

resident one who resides in a place

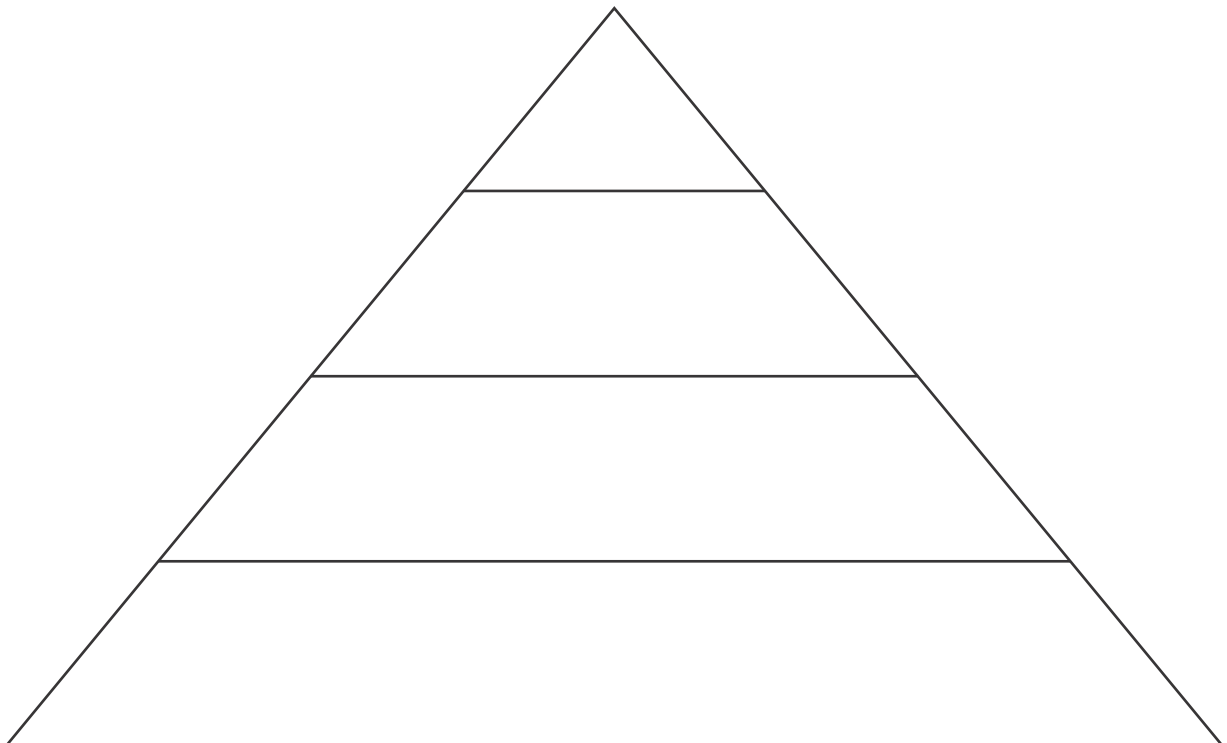
Content Vocabulary

maize corn

quipu a system of knotted strings used by the Inca people for keeping records

TAKING NOTES: *Organizing*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a pyramid diagram like the one below to show the hierarchy of the Inca political organization.



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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The Nazca and Moche cultures existed in South America before the Inca. They built stone buildings and sophisticated irrigation systems to water crops. Later, the Inca created a spectacular, well-organized empire. The Inca Empire was still flourishing when the Spanish arrived in the sixteenth century.

The Nazca

Guiding Question *What characteristics defined the early civilizations of South America?*

As in Mesoamerica, great civilizations flourished in early South America. The people of the Nazca and Moche cultures lived before the Inca gained power. Not much is known about these cultures. However, the cities, buildings, and artifacts these peoples left behind provide some clues about their cultures.

The Nazca culture appeared in Peru around 200 B.C. At its height, the Nazca culture covered more than 200 miles (321.9 km) of territory. They prospered until about A.D. 600.

Nazca culture preserved some aspects of Chavin culture, especially its style of pottery. However, the Nazca culture did not build great temples as the Chavin did. The Nazca may have practiced their religion outdoors. This is suggested by ancient formations known as the Nazca Lines. These are lines etched into the rocky ground of southern Peru. The Nazca Lines depict, or show, images of animals, especially birds, as well as humans and geometric shapes. The images that the Nazca created are so large that their full image can only be seen from the air. Although there are many different ideas about the meaning of the Nazca Lines, their exact purpose is unknown.



Reading Progress Check

Identifying How do the structures and artifacts the Nazca left behind provide clues about their civilization?

The Moche

Guiding Question *What characteristics defined the early civilizations of South America?*

Another civilization developed near the Pacific coast not far south of the border of Ecuador around A.D. 300. This was the Moche (MOH-cheh) civilization. Moche was a major city that arose in the middle of irrigated fields in the Moche River Valley. This river flows from the foothills (hills at the base of mountains) of the Andes into the Pacific Ocean. Farmers in the area grew **maize** (corn), peanuts, potatoes, and cotton. They probably supplied much of the food for peoples living throughout the region.

Moche was the capital of a powerful state. Moche rule might have extended as far as 400 miles (644 km) along the coast. The people of Moche had no written language. However, their pottery gives us some idea of their interests. Among other things, the pottery indicates that the people at Moche

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were similar to those in Central America. They led lives centered on warfare. Moche paintings and pottery frequently portray warriors, prisoners, and victims of sacrifice.

The Moche civilization collapsed in the eighth century. This was followed by a period of decline for about 300 years. Then, the kingdom of Chimor dominated the area for nearly four centuries. Chimor was destroyed by a people who created a more spectacular empire—the Inca.



Reading Progress Check

Inferring Why was it important for the urban center at Moche to be in a river valley?

The Inca

Guiding Questions *How did the Inca develop their successful empire? What were the main attributes of Inca culture?*

The Inca (IHNG•kuh) were only a small community in the late 1300s. They lived in the area of Cuzco (KOOS•koh), a city located 11,000 feet (3,353 m) above sea level in the mountains of southern Peru. In the 1440s, under the leadership of the ruler Pachacuti, the Inca launched a campaign of conquest. It eventually brought the entire region under Inca control.

Pachacuti created a highly centralized state. The capital of Cuzco was transformed from a city of mud and thatch into a city of imposing stone structures. The city's most impressive structure was a temple dedicated to the sun.

Political and Social Structures

Pachacuti's immediate successors were Topa Inca and Huayna Capac Inca. (*Inca* means "ruler.") Together, these rulers extended the boundaries of the Inca Empire as far as Ecuador, central Chile, and the edge of the Amazon basin. The empire possibly included 12 million people.

Like the Aztec civilization, the Inca state was built on war. All young men had to serve in the Inca army. The army had some 200,000 members, and it was the largest and best armed in the region. The Inca, like other people in the early Americas, did not make use of the wheel. Supplies were carried on the backs of llamas.

After an area was under Inca control, the local inhabitants were **instructed**, or taught, in the Quechua (KECH•uh•wuh) language, the language of the Inca. Control of new territories was carefully regulated, or organized by a set system. A noble of high rank was sent to govern the new region. Local leaders could keep their jobs as long as they were loyal to the Inca ruler. The children of local leaders were taken as hostages to the Inca capital to ensure loyalty. While there, the children were educated in Inca ways before returning home.

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Pachacuti created a well-organized empire. He divided it into four quarters, with each ruled by a governor. In turn, the quarters were divided into provinces, each also ruled by a governor. Those chosen to be governors were usually related to the royal family. Each province was supposed to contain about 10,000 **residents**, or people living there. At the top of the entire system was the emperor. He was believed to be descended from Inti, the sun god.

Forced labor was another important feature of the state. All people ruled by the Inca were responsible for labor service. They usually worked for several weeks each year. Laborers, often with their entire communities, were moved from one part of the country to another to work on building projects. Forced laborers probably built the buildings and monuments of the capital city of Cuzco.

Inca society was highly regimented, or controlled very strictly. So, too, were marriage and the lives of women. Men and women were required to choose marriage partners from within their immediate tribal groups. After marriage, women were expected to care for the children and to weave cloth. Some young girls were chosen to serve as priestesses in temples.

Economics and Culture

The Inca economy was based on high-altitude agriculture. In the mountains, the Inca used terraced farms. The crops were watered by irrigation systems that carried precise amounts of water into the fields. These fields were planted with corn, potatoes, and other crops that grew well in high altitudes. The farmers' houses were built of stone or adobe (sun-dried brick) with thatched roofs. They were located near the fields.

The Inca also established extensive trade networks for long-distance trade. Government officials, not independent merchants, organized trade. Food, textiles, and pottery were the major items that were exchanged.

The Inca were great builders, and they were the best engineers among Native American peoples. They built a system of about 24,800 miles (around 40,000 km) of roads. The roads extended from the border of modern-day Colombia to south of modern-day Santiago, Chile. Two major roadways went in a north-south direction. One went through the Andes, and the other ran along the coast. Routes ran between the two major roadways to connect them.

Rest houses, which were located a day's walk apart, and storage buildings were placed along the roads. Various types of bridges, including some fine examples of early suspension bridges, were built over ravines (deep, narrow valleys) and waterways. The roads were used chiefly for official and military purposes. Government permission was needed to use them. Trained runners carried messages rapidly from one station to another. This allowed information to travel up to 140 miles (225.3 m) in a single day. Most people walked the roads. However, rulers and other high officials were carried in litters (covered couches with poles on each side used to carry passengers on people's shoulders or on animals).

The buildings and monuments of the capital city of Cuzco were the wonder of early European visitors. These structures were built of close-fitting stones without mortar. They were built to withstand the frequent earthquakes in the area.

Nothing shows the architectural genius of the Inca more than the ruins of the abandoned city of Machu Picchu (mah •choo PEE•choo). Machu Picchu has an elevation of 8,000 feet (2,400 m) above sea level. It was built on a high hilltop surrounded by mountain peaks far above the Urubamba River. Machu Picchu contained only about 200 buildings. Perhaps 1200 people lived there. They grew crops on agricultural terraces similar to the ones used throughout the mountainous regions of the Inca

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Empire. The buildings were placed harmoniously in their natural setting, creating a place of incredible beauty. In one part of Machu Picchu, a long stairway leads to an elegant stone. The stone was known to the Inca as the “hitching post of the sun.” This stone is carved, or cut, from the mountain. The stone might have been used as a solar observatory (a place used for scientific observation of the sun and planets). Sun festivals were held in June and December. During these festivals, the people of Machu Picchu gathered to chant and say prayers to Inti.

The Inca had no writing system. Instead, they kept records using a system of knotted strings called the *quipu*. The *quipu* enabled the Inca to record the number of men who went to war and goods that were exchanged. The Inca number system was based on units of 10.

The lack of a fully developed writing system did not stop the Inca from having an advanced culture. The *quipu* could only be a record of things that could be counted. So, Inca wise men turned historical events into stories. They told the stories to young people as a way of passing down history.

The Inca had a well-developed tradition of court theater. It included both tragic and comic works. Plays often involved the telling of valiant, or heroic, deeds and other historical events. Actors were not professionals. They were members of the nobility. Poetry was also recited, often accompanied by music played on reed instruments.

Like the Maya and Aztec, the Inca made astronomical observations. They created two calendars based on the path of the sun. One was based on a year of 365 days.



Reading Progress Check

Making Connections How did the Inca use technology to support their empire?
