

CHAPTER 12**Critical Thinking Activity****South America****The Incas and Machu Picchu**

The Aztecs were not the only advanced civilization in the Americas. Another, that of the Inca, flourished in the Andes Mountains of South America. Their religion was based on Sun worship. Their name—Inca—meant “children of the Sun.” Read the information below and then answer the questions that follow.

By 1400 the Incas had built an empire that numbered about 15 million people. Their empire, larger than the Aztec empire, stretched over almost the entire western coast of South America. It was a state in which everything belonged to the Inca ruler, and everyone owed absolute obedience to him. Most Incas believed that the ruler was a descendant of the Sun god, and did not question his authority.

The Inca capital was Cuzco, known as the “City of the Sun.” The Incas built fortresses and irrigation systems and laid paved roads from one end of their realm to the other. Pack animals carried goods and swift runners brought news to the Inca capital. Most Incas worked as farmers and herders.

The rulers of the empire maintained storehouses and moved food supplies to villages when crops failed. Thus they were able to prevent local famines. The Inca made sure that every family had a place to live and enough clothing to wear. In turn the people worked for the empire. No system of money was needed. Instead the gold and silver were used to craft beautiful jewelry and statues and decorations for the temples.

The rulers sought to eliminate diversity in their empire. In order to pacify and colonize newly conquered lands, they transferred entire villages. They established a public school system that taught the Inca religion and history. The result was that the Inca language—Quechua—is still spoken today by millions of people in five South American countries.

The Incas did not have a system of writing. They did keep records by means of the *quipu*—a kind of knotted string. Message runners would carry information across an amazing network of roads built thousands of miles through the mountains. Where rivers and canyons blocked the way, the Incas built bridges made of vine ropes with wooden walkways.

An American explorer named Hiram Bingham went to Peru in 1911 to look for the ruins of ancient Inca cities. He searched where no explorer had gone before. Bingham was searching for Vilcabamba, which was the undiscovered last stronghold of the Inca empire. When he stumbled upon Machu Picchu, he thought he had found it, although now most scholars believe that Machu Picchu is not Vilcabamba.

Machu Picchu (which means “manly peak”) is a city located high in the Andes Mountains in modern Peru near Cuzco, the Inca capital. The city was most likely a royal estate and religious retreat. The city has an altitude of 8,000 feet, and is high above the Urubamba River canyon cloud forest, so it

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likely did not have any administrative, military, or commercial use.

Machu Picchu is comprised of approximately 200 buildings, most residences, although there are temples, storage structures, and other public buildings. Most of the structures are built of granite blocks cut with bronze or stone tools, and smoothed with sand. The blocks fit together perfectly without mortar. The joints are so tight that even the thinnest of knife blades can't be forced between the stones

One of the most important things found at Machu Picchu is the *intihuatana*, which is a column of stone rising from a block of stone the size of a grand piano. *Intihuatana* literally translates as "for tying the sun," although it is usually interpreted as "hitching post of the sun." As the winter solstice approached, when the sun seemed to disappear more each day, a priest would hold a ceremony to tie the sun to the stone to prevent the sun from disappearing altogether. The Spanish conquistadors destroyed the other *intihuatanas*, but because the Spanish never found Machu Picchu, it remained intact.

- 1.** Describe in detail three technological advances of the Inca.

- 2.** Give three specific reasons why the Inca people might have been content living under the rule of the Inca king.

- 3.** What features at Machu Picchu indicate that the Incas might have used an astronomical calendar?

- 4.** How did the Inca government seek to unify all the peoples in the empire?
