Name: _____ Date: _____

Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

Circle group

The Inca people ruled a big empire high in the Andes Mountains of South America. They kept careful records. But they did not write like we do. They used a tool called a quipu, said KEE-poo.

A quipu was a set of strings tied to one thick cord. Each string had knots. Where a knot sat on the string, and what kind it was, stood for a number. The strings had many colors. The colors may have shown what was counted.

Special record keepers learned to make and read quipus. They counted bags of corn, llamas in a herd, or people in a village. The records told the empire what it had stored and who could work.

Quipus were made of cotton or wool. They could be rolled up. Runners carried them along mountain roads.

Experts know how a quipu showed numbers. But they are still learning if some strings held other messages.

Questions

1. Where did the Inca live?

_____

_____

2. What was a quipu?

_____

_____

3. What could the knots stand for?

_____

_____

4. What did record keepers count?

_____

_____

5. Why was it good that quipus were made of cotton or wool?

_____

_____

6. What are experts still trying to learn about quipus?

_____

_____

Words to know

empire: a large group of lands ruled by one government
quipu: a set of knotted strings the Inca used to record numbers
record keepers: people whose job was to write down or track information
herd: a group of animals that live or are kept together

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

Triangle group

The Inca people ruled a huge empire high in the Andes Mountains of South America. They kept careful records, but they did not use writing like ours. Instead, they used a tool called a quipu, which is pronounced KEE-poo.

A quipu was a set of strings tied to one thick cord. Each string had knots in it. The place of a knot on the string, and the kind of knot, stood for a number. The strings came in many colors, and the colors may have shown what was being counted.

Special record keepers learned how to make and read quipus. They could count things such as bags of corn, llamas in a herd, or people living in a village. The records helped the empire know what it had stored and who could be called on to work.

Quipus were made of cotton or wool, so they could be rolled up and carried by runners along mountain roads.

Experts today understand how the quipu showed numbers. But they are still trying to learn if some of the strings held other kinds of messages.

Questions

1. Where did the Inca live?

_____

_____

2. What was a quipu?

_____

_____

3. What could the knots stand for?

_____

_____

4. What kinds of things did record keepers count?

_____

_____

5. Why was it useful that quipus were made of cotton or wool?

_____

_____

6. What are experts still trying to learn about quipus?

_____

_____

Words to know

empire: a large group of lands ruled by one government
quipu: a set of knotted strings the Inca used to record numbers
record keepers: people whose job was to write down or track information
herd: a group of animals that live or are kept together

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

Square group

The Inca people governed an immense empire high in the Andes Mountains of South America. Although they maintained meticulous records, they did not use a writing system like ours. Instead, they relied on an ingenious device called a quipu, pronounced KEE-poo.

A quipu consisted of numerous strings attached to one thick cord, and each string was tied with knots. The position of a knot along the string, together with its style, represented a number. The strings came in a wide range of colors, which may have indicated what was being counted.

Specially trained record keepers learned how to create and interpret quipus. They could tally items such as bags of corn, llamas in a herd, or the people living in a village. These records allowed the empire to keep track of what it had stored and who could be called upon to work.

Because quipus were made of cotton or wool, they could be rolled up compactly and carried by runners along mountain roads.

Experts today understand how the quipu represented numbers, but they are still investigating whether some of the strings contained other kinds of messages.

Questions

1. Where did the Inca people live?

_____

_____

2. What was a quipu?

_____

_____

3. What did the knots represent?

_____

_____

4. What sorts of things did record keepers tally?

_____

_____

5. Why was it helpful that quipus were made of cotton or wool?

_____

_____

6. What are experts still investigating about quipus?

_____

_____

Words to know

empire: a large group of lands ruled by one government
quipu: a set of knotted strings the Inca used to record numbers
record keepers: people whose job was to write down or track information
herd: a group of animals that live or are kept together

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

Easier · 154 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3

1. In the Andes Mountains of South America.
2. A set of knotted strings on one thick cord, used to record numbers.
3. Numbers.
4. Bags of corn, llamas and people in a village.
5. They were light and could be rolled up for runners to carry.
6. If some strings held other messages.

Triangle: Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

This passage · 183 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.8

1. In the Andes Mountains of South America.
2. A set of knotted strings tied to one thick cord, used to record numbers.
3. Numbers.
4. Bags of corn, llamas and people in a village.
5. They were light and could be rolled up and carried by runners.
6. Whether some strings held other kinds of messages.

Square: Counting with Knots: The Inca Quipu

Harder · 188 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8.7

1. In the Andes Mountains of South America.
2. A set of knotted strings attached to one thick cord, used to record numbers.
3. Numbers.
4. Bags of corn, llamas in a herd and people in a village.
5. They could be rolled up compactly and carried by runners.
6. Whether some strings contained other kinds of messages.