Name: _____ Date: _____

Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

Circle group

The Inca ruled a big empire in the mountains of South America. They did not have a written alphabet that scholars have found. So their officials kept records with quipus. A quipu was a bundle of colored cords with knots.

A quipu had one long main cord. Many thin cords hung down from it. The knots were the key. The type of knot, where it sat on a cord, and the color of the cord could all have meaning.

Experts think many quipus showed numbers. The knots showed ones, tens, and hundreds, like the numbers we use now. A cord could stand for a count of llamas, bags of corn, or workers.

Trained record keepers made and read the cords. They traveled the mountain roads. They told what was in the warehouses and how many people lived in each district. A quipu was light, so a runner could carry it fast.

Some scholars think a few quipus held names or stories. Nobody has fully decoded them. Only a few survive today. How to read the rest is still a puzzle.

Questions

1. What did Inca officials use to keep records?

_____

_____

2. What three things on a cord could have meaning?

_____

_____

3. What did many quipus show?

_____

_____

4. Who made and read the cords?

_____

_____

5. Why could a runner carry a quipu fast?

_____

_____

6. Why is it still a puzzle to read the quipus?

_____

_____

Words to know

empire: a large area with many peoples ruled by one government
scholars: people who study a subject very carefully
district: a part of a country or region
decoded: figured out the meaning of a secret or unknown system

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: _____

Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

Triangle group

The Inca ruled a huge mountain empire in South America during the 1400s and early 1500s, yet they had no written alphabet that scholars have found. Instead, their officials kept records with quipus, which were bundles of colored cords tied with knots. A quipu had one long main cord, and many thinner cords hung down from it like a fringe.

The knots were the key to the system. Their type, their position along a cord, and the color of the cord could all carry meaning. Experts believe that many quipus recorded numbers, because the knots were arranged to show ones, tens, and hundreds in a decimal system much like the one we use today. A cord with a few knots near the bottom and more knots higher up could stand for a precise count of llamas, bags of corn, or workers.

Specially trained record keepers made and read these cords. They traveled along the empire's mountain roads and reported on the goods stored in warehouses and on how many people lived in each district. Because a quipu was light, a runner could carry one across a high pass much faster than he could carry a heavy load of anything else.

Some scholars think a few quipus may also have held names or stories, not only numbers, but nobody has fully decoded them. Most were made of cotton or the wool of llamas and alpacas, and only a fraction survive in museums today. How to read the rest remains a puzzle that researchers are still working to solve.

Questions

1. What did Inca officials use to keep their records?

_____

_____

2. Which three features of a cord could carry meaning?

_____

_____

3. What did many quipus record?

_____

_____

4. Who made and read the cords?

_____

_____

5. Why was a quipu a good way to send information across the mountains?

_____

_____

6. Why do researchers still not fully understand quipus?

_____

_____

Words to know

empire: a large area with many peoples ruled by one government
scholars: people who study a subject very carefully
decimal: based on groups of ten
district: a part of a country or region
decoded: figured out the meaning of a secret or unknown system

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: _____

Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

Square group

At the height of its power in the 1400s and early 1500s, the Inca empire stretched along the mountain spine of South America, yet scholars have found no evidence that its people used a written alphabet. In place of letters, the empire's officials relied on quipus, which were elaborate bundles of colored cords fastened with knots. Each quipu had one long main cord, and many thinner cords hung down from it like a fringe.

The knots were the heart of the system. Their type, their position along a cord, and the color of the cord could each carry a separate meaning. Experts believe that many quipus recorded numbers, because the knots were arranged to show ones, tens, and hundreds in a decimal system remarkably similar to our own. A cord with a few knots near the bottom and more knots higher up could stand for a precise count of llamas, bags of corn, or laborers.

Specially trained record keepers made and interpreted these cords. They traveled along the empire's mountain roads and reported on the goods stored in warehouses, as well as on how many people lived in each district. Since a quipu weighed very little, a runner could carry one across a high pass far faster than he could haul any heavy load.

Some scholars suspect that a few quipus may also have preserved names or stories, not only numbers, although nobody has managed to decode them completely. Most were woven from cotton or from the wool of llamas and alpacas, and only a small fraction survive in museums today. Learning to read the remainder is a puzzle that researchers are still working patiently to solve.

Questions

1. What did the officials of the Inca empire use in place of a written alphabet?

_____

_____

2. Which three features of a cord could each carry a separate meaning?

_____

_____

3. What did many quipus record, according to experts?

_____

_____

4. Who made and interpreted the cords?

_____

_____

5. Why was a quipu well suited to carrying news across the mountains?

_____

_____

6. Why are researchers still unable to fully understand quipus?

_____

_____

Words to know

empire: a large area with many peoples ruled by one government
scholars: people who study a subject very carefully
decimal: based on groups of ten
district: a part of a country or region

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: Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

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

Circle: Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

Easier · 180 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.6

1. Quipus, which were bundles of colored cords with knots.
2. The type of knot, where it sat, and the color of the cord.
3. Numbers.
4. Trained record keepers.
5. A quipu was light.
6. Nobody has fully decoded them, and only a few survive.

Triangle: Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

This passage · 257 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8.6

1. Quipus, which were bundles of colored cords tied with knots.
2. The type of knot, its position along the cord, and the color of the cord.
3. Numbers, such as counts of llamas, corn, or workers.
4. Specially trained record keepers.
5. It was light, so a runner could carry it quickly across high passes.
6. Nobody has fully decoded them, and only a fraction of them survive.

Square: Quipu: The Inca Records Tied in Knots

Harder · 277 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10.1

1. Quipus, which were bundles of colored cords fastened with knots.
2. The type of knot, its position along the cord, and the color of the cord.
3. Numbers, such as counts of llamas, corn, or laborers.
4. Specially trained record keepers.
5. It weighed very little, so a runner could carry it quickly across high passes.
6. Nobody has completely decoded them, and only a small fraction survive.