

CATEGORY: PERU: INCA EMPIRE

CONCEPTS: AGRICULTURE, work, conquest

ACTIVITY: THE INCA GARCILASO'S DESCRIPTION OF FARMING.

The people of Peru are proud of their Inca heritage and often point out the high level of social development in the Inca Empire. The writings of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega bear witness to this development and have been instrumental in creating this national pride. The Inca Garcilaso also offers the fascinating vision of a man who lived between two cultures: Spain and indigenous Peru.

OBJECTIVES: Students will be able to describe how the Incas socially organized to cultivate the land.

MATERIALS: Copies of the excerpt from the Inca Garcilaso.

PROCEDURE: Students should read and discuss the excerpt.
Ideas for discussion:

1. Compare the Inca system of division of agricultural labor with our own.
2. Compare this system with the current system in Peru (see lesson on land reform in Peru).
3. The Spanish "conquistadores" considered the Incas barbarous or uncivilized. What does "civilized" mean? From this reading, would you call the Incas civilized or not?

VOCABULARY: division of labor, civilization

RESOURCES: Friedrich Katz, The Ancient American Civilizations, New York: Praeger, 1972. Alfred Métraux, The History of the Incas, New York: Pantheon, 1969. J. Alden Mason, The Ancient Civilization of Peru, Baltimore: Penguin, 1969.

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1989.

FARMING IN INCA TIMES
From The Royal Commentaries of the Incas
by the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1609)

The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was the son of a Spanish man and an Inca woman. He grew up experiencing both his heritages in Peru. When Garcilaso went to live in Spain as an adult, he was very disturbed by the stories he heard and books he read about the "barbarous" Incas. He decided to write his own book, The Royal Commentaries, to tell the true story of Inca history and life as he had learned to know it as a child. His book is different from all other descriptions of the Incas written just after the conquest. He was not a conqueror justifying the conquest but rather a man who looked back to the height of the Inca Empire with nostalgia. We discover many interesting aspects of Inca life in his writings. Here is how he describes Inca agriculture.

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In the planting and harvesting of the land there was wonderful order and harmony. The first lands to be worked were those dedicated to the Sun (sacred fields) and then those that belonged to widows, orphans and the ill and elderly. All of these people were considered poor so the Inca ordered that the land be worked for them. In every town and in every neighborhood there were men specially named to be in charge of seeing that the lands of the poor were productive. They were called "llatacamayu" which means village aldermen. When it was time to plow, plant or harvest, these men climbed the platforms or towers built in each village and called the people together with a trumpet or conch shell. They then shouted: "On such and such a day the lands of the needy will be worked. Let everyone go to their proper places on this day."

The townspeople all knew from a well-established plan where to go, usually to the land of a relative or nearest neighbor. Each one was obliged to take along his or her own food for the day so that the needy didn't have to worry about providing food for their helpers. It was said that the elderly, the ill, widows and orphans had enough misery to contend with and shouldn't have to worry about providing for others. If these poor people had no seeds they were given seed from public deposits. The lands of soldiers away on a campaign were also worked since their wives entered the status of widows while their husbands were gone. Great care was taken to look after the children of parents who died in war and this lasted until they married.

Once the land of the poor had been worked, the people turned to their own lands. They helped each other, working first one family's land, then another family's land. Then they worked on the lands of the priest, which had to be the last in each village and province. During the reign of the Inca Huaina Capac, in a town of the Chachapuyas region, an alderman was hanged because he ordered a priest's land worked before a widow's land. The priest was a relative of his. He was hanged for breaking the Inca's law and the gallows was left on the priest's land as a reminder.

The Inca also ordered that the land belonging to his subjects should receive preference over his own land. It was said that the prosperity of the citizens was a benefit to a king; if people were poor and in need they would be of little use in war or in peace.

The last lands to be cultivated were those of the Inca. Everyone worked on them together and on these days the Indians went to work with great joy, dressed in their finest clothing, with gold and silver jewelry and elegant plumed headdresses. When they plowed (the happiest time of all) they sang many songs praising the Incas. The work was turned into a party and there was great joy since they were serving their God and Kings.

The Inca Tupac
Yupanqui speaks
to the priests

