TUPANANCHISKAMA

ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

MARCH 19, 2026 – JANUARY 3, 2027

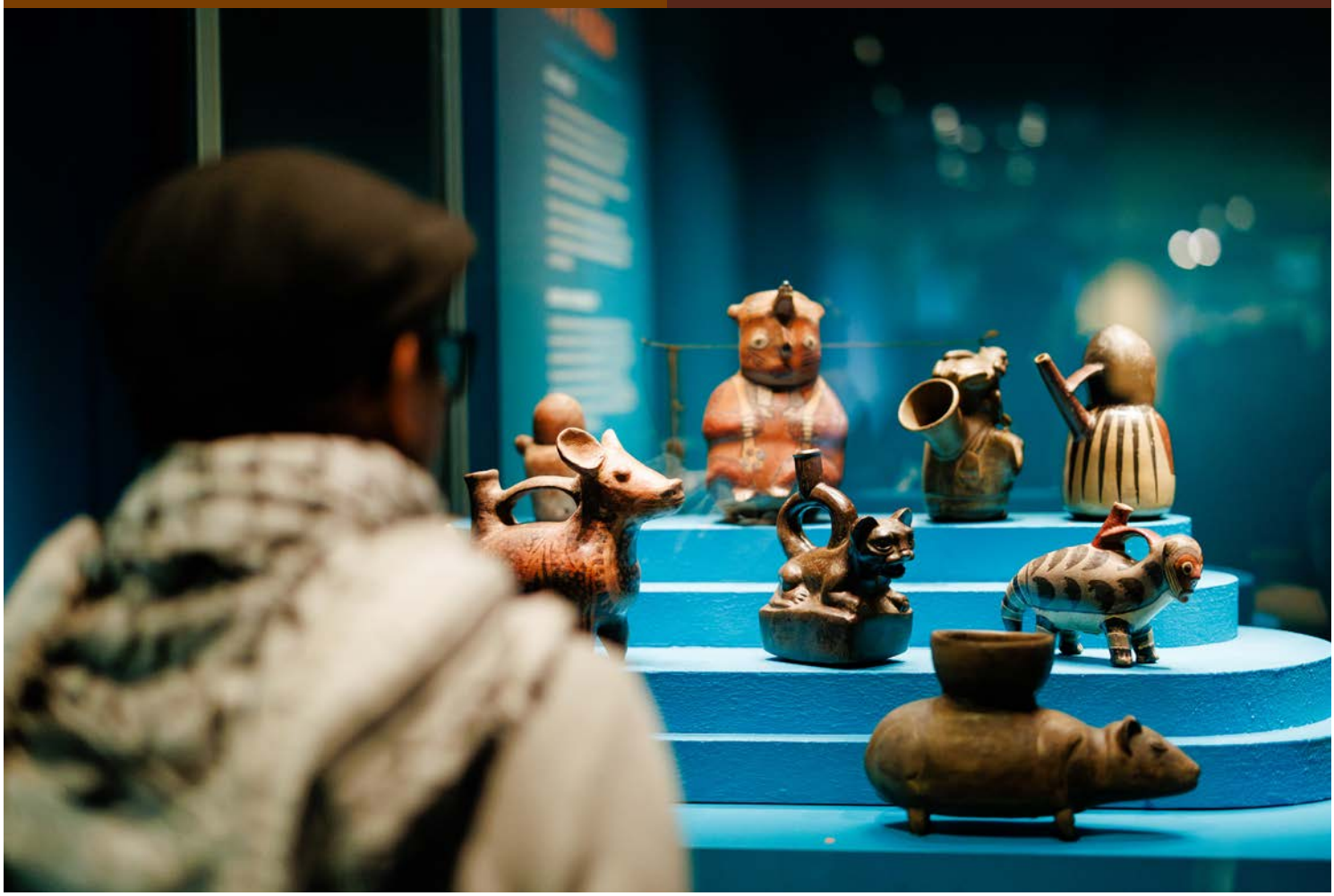

Photo by Sarah Race.

SELF-GUIDED TEACHER RESOURCE

MOA

Museum of Anthropology at UBC
A place of world arts + cultures

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Photo by Sarah Race.

Tupananchiskama: Ancient Andean Cosmovision explores the enduring worldviews of ancient Andean civilizations through nearly 100 exquisite pre-Columbian ceramic, textile, bone and wood works, some dating back more than 2,500 years. These works were collected by former UBC Professor Alan R. Sawyer and donated to MOA. The Andes are home to some of the world's most complex cultural traditions, and its knowledge lives on in landscapes, practices, languages, and material culture.

This exhibition highlights Andean cosmovision—a holistic and spiritual understanding of the universe grounded in reciprocity, balance, and the recognition of nature as a living being. Far more than artistic objects, the belongings on display embody relationships between humans, ancestors, and sacred forces.

Tupananchiskama, is a word in Quechua, an Indigenous language of the Andes. It means "until life brings us together again" and reflects an ancestral view of life and death as part of a continuous cycle. In Andean philosophy, death is not an end but a transformation. Through the belongings in this exhibition, visitors are invited to reflect on continuity, resilience, renewal, and the promise of reunion.

Guest Curator: Luis Manuel González (Adjunct Professor, UBC Department of Anthropology)

Curatorial Liaison: Nuno Porto (MOA Curator, Africa + South America; Associate Professor, UBC Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory)

TEACHERS – START HERE!

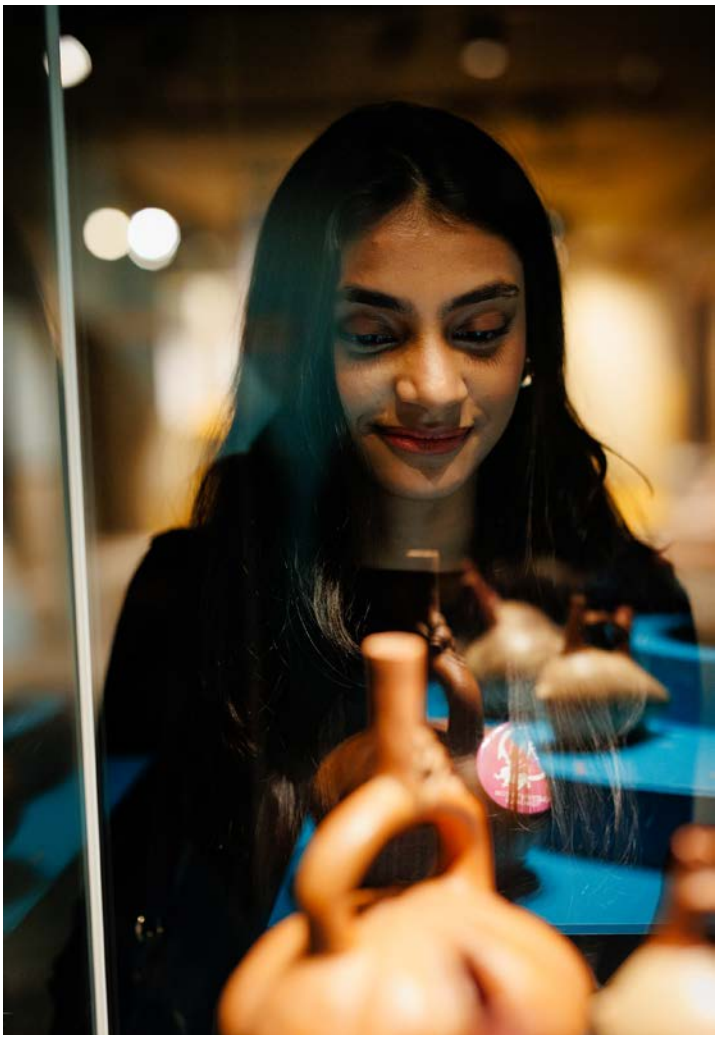

Photo by Sarah Race.

This resource is intended to support students' self-guided exploration of *Tupananchiskama* and to extend their learning into the classroom.

This package includes the following:

- **Selected BC Curriculum Connections** (pages 4–5)
- **In-gallery Worksheet** (pages 6–12)
- **Facilitation Guidance** (pages 13–14)
- **Teacher's Copy of In-gallery Worksheet** (pages 15–22)
- **Guidelines for Supervising Adults** (page 23)
- **Key Terminology** (pages 24–25)
- **Optional Post-visit Activity: Making Quipus** (pages 26–30)
- **Optional Inquiry Project with Andean Objects** (pages 31–32)
- **Additional Resources** (pages 33–34)

We welcome teachers to preview our exhibitions free of charge before their class visit. Proof of booking and valid BC school ID is required for entry.

For questions regarding this resource, please contact the MOA Education team at education@moa.ubc.ca.

To connect with exhibition curator Luis Manuel González, visit anth.ubc.ca/profile/luis-manuel-gonzalez

BC CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SOCIAL STUDIES 3

BIG IDEAS

- Learning about Indigenous peoples nurtures multicultural awareness and respect for diversity.
- Indigenous knowledge is passed down through oral history, traditions, and collective memory.
- Indigenous societies throughout the world value the well-being of the self, the land, spirits, and ancestors.

CONTENT

- Cultural characteristics and ways of life of local First Peoples and global Indigenous peoples
- Interconnections of cultural and technological innovations of global and local indigenous peoples
- Oral history, traditional stories, and artifacts as evidence about past First Peoples cultures
- Relationship between humans and their environment

SOCIAL STUDIES 7

BIG IDEAS

- Geographic conditions shaped the emergence of civilizations.
- Religious and cultural practices that emerged during this period have endured and continue to influence people.

CONTENT

- Human responses to particular geographic challenges and opportunities, including climates, landforms, and natural resources
- Origins, core beliefs, narratives, practices, and influences of religions, including at least one Indigenous to the Americas
- Scientific, philosophical, and technological developments
- Social, political, legal, governmental, and economic systems and structures, including at least one indigenous to the Americas

BC CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

COMPARATIVE CULTURES 12

BIG IDEAS

- Understanding the diversity and complexity of cultural expressions in one culture enhances our understanding of other cultures.
- Interactions between belief systems, social organization, and languages influence artistic expressions of culture.
- Geographic and environmental factors influenced the development of agriculture, trade, and increasingly complex cultures.
- Value systems and belief systems shape the structures of power and authority within a culture.

CONTENT

- Elements of culture and cultural expressions
- Role of value systems and belief systems in the development of cultures
- Interactions and exchanges between cultures
- Interactions between cultures and the natural environment

Photo by Sarah Race.

IN-GALLERY WORKSHEET

Write or sketch your responses below each question.

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

Find the label introducing the exhibition. What does "Tupananchiskama" mean?

ANDEAN WORLDS

Find the "Andean Worlds Through Time" timeline. This timeline shares information about the ancient Andean cultures shown in this exhibit. It follows the history of the Andean people from the earliest cultures to the powerful Inka Empire. The design of this timeline is based on a supernatural figure in the form of a snake with a feline head called in the Andes "Amaru".

List three significant milestones in agriculture found on the timeline, including their date(s). How does this milestone impact your life today?

The environment of the Andes mountains shaped how people lived, and the people of ancient Andean cultures adapted their local environments.

Find the "Adaptation and Ingenuity" label, describing ancient Andean environmental adaptations. Name a plant found at each elevation of the terrain:

1500–3000 M	
2000–2500 M	
3000–3500 M	
3500–4000 M	
4000–6000 M	

Find an object that you think connects to the landscape of the Andes. Explain why you made this connection.

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

ENDURING CULTURES

The objects in the "Enduring Cultures" section represent some of the many diverse cultures that have called the Andes home over thousands of years. Though many of these cultures are gone, their traditions still live on in the land, languages, and people of today.

Find your favourite object in this section.

LOOK: Draw a picture of the object. Look closely and include any details you find.

RECORD:

What kind of object is it?	
How old is it?	
What is it made of?	
What culture is it from?	
Write down a fact about the culture it comes from.	
Write down the collection number (e.g. 2990/1).	

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

REFLECT: What is your favourite object, and why did you choose it? What makes this object special or meaningful to you?

WONDER: What questions do you have about this object? If you could meet the person who made it, what would you ask them?

WAYRA / WIND

In Andean beliefs, wayra (the wind) is seen as a powerful force that connects the human world with the spirit world. People believed the wind carried prayers, messages, and energy between humans and Apus (mountain spirits) and other deities. Find the display of whistles, trumpets, whistling bottles and jars. These instruments helped people share messages, remember their ancestors, and connect with the spirits.

Listen to the sounds made by each instrument (an object will light up when its sound is played). Which sound is your favourite? How would you describe the sound and the object that made it?

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

COSMOVISION

Andean cosmovision is the Andean people's way of understanding the world and the universe. It teaches that nature is alive and that people, animals, plants, and the land are all connected. It also teaches the importance of balance, sharing, and respect for nature and sacred spirits.

There are three "pachas" (realms of existence) in the Inka worldview. Find an object that you think represents each of the three pachas.

Hanan Pacha (the sky world)

Object type:

Culture:

Age:

Explain why this object represents this pacha:

Ukhu Pacha (the underworld or interior world)

Object type:

Culture:

Age:

Explain why this object represents this pacha:

Kay Pacha (the world of everyday life)

Object type:

Culture:

Age:

Explain why this object represents this pacha:

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

CELESTIAL WORLDS

Constellations helped ancient Andean people know when to plant crops, hold ceremonies, and plan cities. Andean cultures documented and studied two types of constellations: light and dark. Light constellations are made up of groups of stars. Dark constellations are shapes seen in the dark patches of Hatun Mayu (the Milky Way).

What is the name of the most important light constellation? Why was it so important to the Inka?

Find the projection showing different dark constellations. This illustration of the Milky Way was created by Peruvian artist Miguel Araoz Cartagena. Choose your favourite and sketch it here (for an extra challenge, try to draw the constellation when it's not highlighted). Read the label to the right of the projection and write a description of the dark constellation you chose.

Find an object that represents the dark constellation you chose. What kind of object is it?

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

LOOK, RECORD, REFLECT, WONDER

These pages will help you look closely and learn from objects in the exhibition. Find any object in the exhibition that you want to spend some extra time with.

LOOK: Draw a picture of the object, including any shapes, patterns, and textures you can see.

TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION

RECORD:

What kind of object is it?	
How old is it?	
What is it made of?	
What culture is it from?	
Write down a fact about the culture it comes from.	
Write down the collection number (e.g. 2990/1).	

REFLECT: What made you choose this object? What about it stood out to you or interested you?

WONDER: What questions do you have about this object? If you could meet the person who made it, what would you ask them?

FACILITATION GUIDANCE

PRE-VISIT TIPS

- **We welcome teachers to preview our exhibitions free of charge before their class visit.** Proof of booking and valid BC school ID is required for entry.
- **Introduce the exhibition to your students in the classroom prior to your visit.** Explain that this exhibition explores the cosmovision of Ancient Andean cultures and features a collection of ceramic, textile, bone and wood works from the Andes. Share a map of South America and point out the Andes mountains and Peru.
- **Share the exhibition's big ideas:**
    - Ancient Andean Cosmovision endures through time and space, living on in the objects they created and in Andean descendants today.
    - Ancient Andeans understood that animals, plants, humans, the earth and the cosmos are all deeply interconnected. Our worlds are not separate, life and death as part of a continuous cycle.
- **Introduce key terminology** (pages 24–25) in advance as needed. For ELL students, share a list of important words and ask students to 1) provide a definition and 2) use it in a sentence.
- **Invite students to brainstorm what they expect to see and learn at the museum.** You can document these expectations (e.g. on a whiteboard) and return to them after your visit for comparison.
- **Ensure you have enough printed copies of the "In-gallery Worksheet" (pages 6–12), "Teacher's Copy" (pages 15–22) and "Guidelines for Supervising Adults" (page 23).** You can give your students all the worksheet pages or just a selection. The Admission staff will have a limited supply of clipboards and pencils available for use (first come, first served).
- **Review the optional "Post-Visit Activity: Making Quipus" (pages 26–30) and "Inquiry Project with Andean Objects" (pages 31–32) instructions prior to your visit.** If you decide to facilitate either of these activities, let your students know before their visit.

FACILITATION GUIDANCE

House Post by Susan Point (MOA Collection Nbz837). Photo by Anna Klochko.

DURING YOUR VISIT

- During your visit to MOA, we recommend you take a moment to discuss with your students what it means to learn on the **traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.** As they prepare to learn from Andean objects that are thousands of years old, invite students to reflect on the thousands of years of history of the Musqueam people on their traditional territory. There are historical and contemporary cultural belongings by Musqueam makers that speak to this history and the ongoing relationship the Musqueam people have with their unceded territories. Explore these works in advance on MOA's Online Catalogue: https://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/.
- **Students can use the in-gallery worksheet alone or in pairs.**
- **Distribute the Teacher's Copy (pages 15–22) and Guidelines for Supervising Adults (page 23) to all chaperones.** We offer free admission for supervising adults with the understanding that they will support students' learning needs during their field trip. The Teacher's Copy provides guidance on what successful answers to the in-gallery worksheet might entail, and photos of each section of the exhibition to support wayfinding.

TEACHER'S COPY

ENTRANCE TO TUPANANCHISKAMA

Find the label introducing the exhibition. What does "Tupananchiskama" mean?

ANDEAN WORLDS

Find the "Andean Worlds Through Time" timeline. This timeline shares information about the ancient Andean cultures shown in this exhibit. It follows the history of the Andean people from the earliest cultures to the powerful Inka Empire. The design of this timeline is based on a supernatural figure in the form of a snake with a feline head called in the Andes "Amaru".

List three significant milestones in agriculture found on the timeline, including their date(s). How does this milestone impact your life today?

Tupananchiskama means "until life brings us together again" in Quechua, an Indigenous language of the Andes. Today, in colloquial usage across the Andes, it is used much like "see you later."

The environment of the Andes mountains shaped how people lived, and the people of ancient Andean cultures adapted their local environments.

Student identifies three of the following milestones:

- *Oldest chili pepper in Perú – 8,000 BCE*
- *Domestication of beans – 7,000 BCE*
- *Oldest cotton in Perú – 7,000 BCE*
- *Oldest coca leaves in Perú – 6,000 BCE*
- *Domestication of squash – 6,000 BCE*
- *Oldest peanut – 5,000 BCE*
- *Domestication of quinoa – 5,000 BCE*
- *Domestication of potatoes – 5,000 BCE*
- *Domestication of llamas and alpacas – 5,000 BCE*
- *Oldest maize in Perú – 4,000 BCE*
- *Oldest cocoa in Perú – 3,000 BCE*
- *Domestication of guinea pigs – 2,000 BCE*

Student provides thoughtful personal reflections on how ancient agricultural innovations continue to benefit us today.

TEACHER'S COPY

Find the "Adaptation and Ingenuity" label, describing ancient Andean environmental adaptations. Name a plant found at each elevation of the terrain:

1500–3000 M	*maize, brown cotton, prickly pear, beans, squash*
2000–2500 M	*potatoes, oca*
3000–3500 M	*quinoa*
3500–4000 M	*potatoes for making chuño, bitter potatoes*
4000–6000 M	*Andean highland herbs*

Find an object that you think connects to the landscape of the Andes. Explain why you made this connection.

Student describes objects with designs and forms that represent animals, plants, and landscapes (e.g. mountains). Student may also describe objects used for serving or storing foods.

ENDURING CULTURES

The objects in the "Enduring Cultures" section represent some of the many diverse cultures that have called the Andes home over thousands of years. Though many of these cultures are gone, their traditions still live on in the land, languages, and people of today.

Find your favourite object in this section.

LOOK: Draw a picture of the object. Look closely and include any details you find.

Student demonstrates evidence of close looking, e.g. details of the object's shape, patterns, and textures.

RECORD: *Student provides appropriate responses to the following questions. Refer to MOA's online catalogue (https://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/) for information about each object, using the collection number to search.*

What kind of object is it?	
How old is it?	
What is it made of?	
What culture is it from?	
Write down a fact about the culture it comes from.	
Write down the collection number (e.g. 2990/1).	

TEACHER'S COPY

REFLECT: What is your favourite object, and why did you choose it? What makes this object special or meaningful to you?

Student explains why they made their selection, describing specific details or features of the object using clear and descriptive language. Student may also describe personal connections or interests as part of their motivation.

WONDER: What questions do you have about this object? If you could meet the person who made it, what would you ask them?

Student demonstrates curiosity by asking thoughtful questions about the object's history, purpose, materials, or meaning. Student considers the identities and experiences of the people connected to their chosen object.

WAYRA / WIND

In Andean beliefs, wayra (the wind) is seen as a powerful force that connects the human world with the spirit world. People believed the wind carried prayers, messages, and energy between humans and Apus (mountain spirits) and other deities. Find the display of whistles, trumpets, whistling bottles and jars. These instruments helped people share messages, remember their ancestors, and connect with the spirits.

Listen to the sounds made by each instrument (an object will light up when its sound is played). Which sound is your favourite? How would you describe the sound and the object that made it?

Student describes their favourite instrument sound and the object that produced it. Student demonstrates listening and observation skills by using descriptive language to explain the sound and the instrument's features.

TEACHER'S COPY

COSMOVISION

Andean cosmovision is the Andean people's way of understanding the world and the universe. It teaches that nature is alive and that people, animals, plants, and the land are all connected. It also teaches the importance of balance, sharing, and respect for nature and sacred spirits.

There are three "pachas" (realms of existence) in the Inka worldview. Find an object that you think represents each of the three pachas.

Student identifies objects representing each pacha and justifies their selections by explaining connections relating to the object's imagery, symbolism, or function.

Hanan Pacha (the sky world)

Object type:

Culture:

Age:

Explain why this object represents this pacha:

Ukhu Pacha (the underworld or interior world)

Object type:

Culture:

Age:

Explain why this object represents this pacha:

Kay Pacha (the world of everyday life)

Object type:

Culture:

Age:

Explain why this object represents this pacha:

TEACHER'S COPY

CELESTIAL WORLDS

Constellations helped ancient Andean people know when to plant crops, hold ceremonies, and plan cities. Andean cultures documented and studied two types of constellations: light and dark. Light constellations are made up of groups of stars. Dark constellations are shapes seen in the dark patches of Hatun Mayu (the Milky Way). They are unique to Andean astronomy.

What is the name of the most important light constellation? Why was it so important to the Inka?

One of the most important light constellations is Chakana, the Southern Cross. The Inka viewed it as a cosmic staircase — a bridge connecting the three worlds of Kay, Hanan and Ukhu Pacha. Its stepped-cross form is a recurring and deeply sacred motif replicated in architecture, ceramics, textiles, and other materials.

Find the projection showing different dark constellations. This illustration of the Milky Way was created by Peruvian artist Miguel Araoz Cartagena. Choose your favourite and sketch it here (for an extra challenge, try to draw the constellation when it's not highlighted). Read the label to the right of the projection and write a description of the dark constellation you chose.

Student lists one of the following dark constellations:

- *Yakana – the celestial llama and most important dark constellation, is a colossal dark shape stretching across Hatun Mayu, the Milky Way.*
- *Uña Llama – under Yakana's belly is a smaller, darker area, it is Yakana's baby suckling from its mother.*
- *Michiq – the shepherd has outstretched arms, as if protecting the cosmic llamas from predators like Atoq (the fox). Michiq is often interpreted as a woman, reflecting Andean traditions where women own the llama flocks while men care for them.*
- *Atoq – the fox, a figure of cunning and intelligence is seen chasing the baby llama.*
- *Yutu – a shy, ground-dwelling bird, and its celestial counterpart reflects this.*
- *Hamp'atu – the toad, close to the head of Yakana is most visible just before the onset of the rainy season in the Andes.*
- *Mach'acuay – the celestial serpent is associated with Ukhu Pacha and its appearance was linked to the agricultural cycle. It winds through the Milky Way like a dark river and is close to the Toad.*

Refer to 'The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire' (courtesy National Museum of the American Indian) for images of each dark constellation:
https://americanindian.si.edu/inkaroad/ancestors/creationstories/milky-way.html

Find an object that represents the dark constellation you chose. What kind of object is it?

Student identifies an object that represents the figure of their chosen dark constellation.

TEACHER'S COPY

LOOK, RECORD, REFLECT, WONDER

These pages will help you look closely and learn from objects in the exhibition. Find any object in the exhibition that you want to spend some extra time with.

LOOK: Draw a picture of the object, including any shapes, patterns, and textures you can see.

Student demonstrates evidence of close looking, e.g. details of the object's shape, patterns, and textures.

RECORD: *Student provides appropriate responses to the following questions. Refer to MOA's online catalogue (https://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/) for information about each object, using the collection number to search.*

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How old is it?	
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What culture is it from?	
Write down a fact about the culture it comes from.	
Write down the collection number (e.g. 2990/1).	

REFLECT: What made you choose this object? What about it stood out to you or interested you?

Student explains why they made their selection, describing specific details or features of the object using clear and descriptive language. Student may also describe personal connections or interests as part of their motivation.

WONDER: What questions do you have about this object? If you could meet the person who made it, what would you ask them?

Student demonstrates curiosity by asking thoughtful questions about the object's history, purpose, materials, or meaning. Student considers the identities and experiences of the people connected to their chosen object.

TEACHER'S COPY

ENTRANCE TO TUPANANCHISKAMA: ANCIENT ANDEAN COSMOVISION (LOCATED IN O'BRIAN GALLERY)

ANDEAN WORLDS

ENDURING CULTURES

TEACHER'S COPY

WAYRA / WIND

COSMOVISION

CELESTIAL WORLDS

GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISING ADULTS

Teachers, please review this information with all of your accompanying adults. These guidelines will help support an environment for students' learning and ensure a safe and enjoyable experience at MOA.

Requirements for Supervising Adults

Our goal at MOA is to support and facilitate students' learning during their visit to the Museum.

As a supervising adult, please stay with your student group for the duration of your visit. This includes when the students are in the galleries, the lobby, the MOA Shop, the Cedar Café, and the museum grounds.

We also ask that you actively participate in the supervising of your students. It is very exciting to visit somewhere new, and we need your help in assisting students to participate and behave in a way that doesn't disrupt others' learning and respects the Museum and our collection.

Museum Guidelines + Helpful Tips

- Please reinforce the importance of respecting the Museum and our collection.
- A few objects in the Museum may be touched gently. If an object does not have a sign indicating that it may be touched, please help us safekeep our important collection by reminding students to keep their hands to themselves.
- Our general rules are similar to other special places. Running, jumping, and shouting detract from others' experiences.
- If you spend time outside, please help us preserve our grounds and foster a safe environment by ensuring students do not throw rocks or other items.
- Non-flash photography is welcome throughout the Museum. Please refer to the teacher's established policy regarding phone use during class time.
- Please be advised that students must be supervised by an adult when visiting the MOA Shop. Staff may restrict the number of students who can enter the shop at one time.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting your students' learning and experience at the Museum of Anthropology! We couldn't do what we do without you.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

ANDES The world's longest mountain range, located in western South America. The Andes stretch from Venezuela to Chile, also passing through Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, Bolivia, and Argentina. The Andes are one of the most biodiverse regions on earth.

AYNI "Reciprocity" in Quechua. A key ethical principle in the Andean worldview, reciprocity is balance and mutual exchange between humans, nature, and the spiritual world. People care for the land and animals, practice ayni (reciprocity), and make offerings to Pachamama (Mother Earth). In return, nature provides food, protection, and favourable weather patterns. Likewise, animals participate in work and rituals; plants sustain diet and medicine.

CAMELID An animal in the family Camelidae, which includes even-toed ungulates (hoofed mammals), such as llamas, alpacas, and camels.

COSMOVISION Worldview, or way of knowing the universe. Andean cosmovision is the Andean people's way of understanding the world and the universe. It teaches that nature is alive and that people, animals, plants, and the land are all connected. It also teaches the importance of balance, sharing, and respect for nature and sacred spirits.

DARK CONSTELLATION Silhouettes or figures that various pre-Hispanic and Indigenous cultures identified not by joining bright stars, but by recognizing the shapes in the clouds of cosmic dust and gas that block the light of the Milky Way. They are not exclusive to the Andes; they are also observed by other cultures in the Southern Hemisphere, such as in Australia.

HANAN PACHA The sky world, in the Inka worldview. The upper world (heavens, gods, and celestial beings) governs the sky and the stars. It is the realm of the divine, home to powerful spiritual beings, associated with the sky, stars, and heavens.

INKA CULTURE One of the many Andean cultures, from 1400 until 1533 CE. The Inka created a vast empire by absorbing and conquering other peoples. This empire was called Tahuantinsuyo, meaning the Four Parts United.

KAY PACHA The world of everyday life, in the Inka worldview. It is the realm of human experience, where people, animals and plants must live in harmony with both the Apus (mountain spirits) and Pachamama (Mother Earth).

KEY TERMINOLOGY

PACHA In the Andean worldview, pacha is a fundamental concept that means earth, world, universe, space, and time. More than just a place, it represents the indivisible totality of space-time. The word "pacha" comes from Quechua, an Indigenous language of the Andes. In the Inka worldview, there are three pachas: "Hanan Pacha" (the sky world), "Kay Pacha" (the world of everyday life), and "Ukhu Pacha" (the underworld).

PACHAMAMA "Mother Earth" in Quechua.

PERÚ A country in western South America, home to many diverse Andean cultures who have lived in the Andes for thousands of years.

QUECHUA A family of Indigenous languages of the Andes region.

TERRACE Step-like platforms carved into mountain slopes. Andean cultures built terraces into hillsides to expand available farmland. This is an example of an ancient agricultural innovation, an important adaptation of the environment to support farming and sustain communities.

TUPANANCHISKAMA "Until life brings us together again" in Quechua, an Indigenous language of the Andes. Today, in colloquial usage across the Andes, it is used much like "see you later."

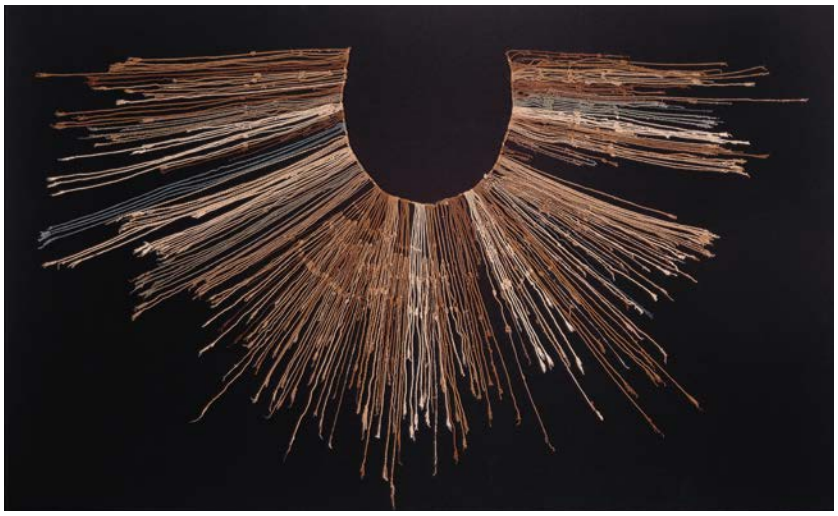
UKHU PACHA The underworld, in the Inka worldview. It is the realm of the ancestors and the underworld or the interior world, where the spirits of the dead reside and from which all life emerges.

WAYRA The Quechua word for "wind." In Andean cosmology, wayra is a powerful force connecting physical and spiritual realms.

YAKANA "Celestial Llama" in Quechua, the most important dark constellation. Its luminous figure protects shepherds and ensures that the springs do not dry up. Each night it descends to drink from lakes and rivers, maintaining the balance between sky and earth. When its silhouette appears clear in the sky, it signifies abundance; when it fades, it foretells droughts. Yakana reminds the Andes that the cosmos is alive and in constant dialogue.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: MAKING QUIPUS

In this hands-on activity, students will learn about quipus, an ancient Andean accounting system.



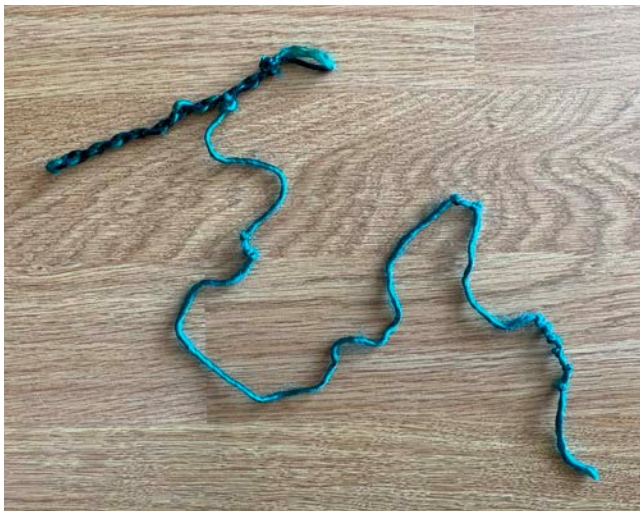


Photo courtesy Museo Larco – Lima, Peru.

Approximate Lesson Time: 65 min

Learning Objectives:

- Describe what a quipu is, identify its main parts, and explain how Andean cultures used quipus to record and communicate information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of place value by representing numbers using knots in a base-10 system.
- Create a personal quipu that communicates meaningful numerical information, and interpret and "read" the numbers represented in a peer's quipu.
- Recognize quipus as an important example of Indigenous knowledge and technology from the Andes.

Materials

- Yarn in varying colours, cut into pieces about 1–2 ft long
- Screen or projector to share video and instruction slides (see Slides 1–7 at the end of this resource)
- Planning Our Quipus worksheet (page 30), one copy per student

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: MAKING QUIPUS

STEP 1: HOOK

Time: 5 min

Remind your students of their field trip to *Tupananchiskama: Ancient Andean Cosmovision*. Share the photos of quipus (Slide 1), including the quipu displayed in the exhibition (MOA Collection 3177/12). Ask if any students recognize this small but important object.

Introduce your students to the quipu using the following information:

> *A quipu was a system of knotted cords used by the ancient Andeans to record and communicate information, particularly numbers. The word "quipu" means "knot" in the Quechua language. Different knots, colours, cord lengths, and spacing all carried meaning. Quipus helped record things like population counts, food supplies, taxes, and calendars. It is thought that quipus could also record other forms of information, such as historical narratives, though these have yet to be deciphered. Special officials called quipucamayoc ("knot keepers") created and read them. Researchers today are keenly interested in studying quipus and the knowledge they carry, but much of their meaning has not yet been fully understood.*

Share this video overview from National Geographic:

- **Threads That Speak: How The Inca Used Strings to Communicate**
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AmPyz1kCbOw

After the video, emphasize that quipus are an ingenious and complex system for documenting and sharing information. Explain that in this activity, students will create their own mini quipu to record and communicate numbers of significance to them.

STEP 2: STRUCTURE OF THE QUIPU

Time: 10 min

Explain the quipu knotting system using the information below:

> *A quipu is made from a long horizontal cord called the primary cord. Hanging down from the primary cord are many smaller cords called pendant cords. Each pendant cord could represent a different category of information, such as people, food, animals, or supplies. The knots on the pendant cords were used to show numbers using a base-10 system. The placement of the knots on the pendant cords was very important. Knots closest to the bottom of the cord showed the ones place (1s). Knots next up on the cord showed the tens place (10s), followed by the hundreds place (100s), and near the top represented the thousands place (1000s). One pendant cord could store large numbers, and with multiple pendant cords, a quipu could document lots of information.*

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: MAKING QUIPUS

A space with no knot meant zero. There were also different kinds of knots to represent different numbers (we'll only be using a simple knot for this activity).

Let's look at some examples (Slides 2–3). *Decode the number of these 5 pendant cords; for each cord, count the number of knots for each place*:

- *The thousands place (closest to the top where the pendant cord attaches to the primary cord)*
- *The hundreds place*
- *The tens place*
- *The ones place (near the bottom of the cord)*

The colours of the cords also carried meaning. The spacing between knots, the direction the yarn was twisted, and the way cords were attached may also have shared information. Again, quipus were a very complex system for recording and organizing knowledge, and scholars today have not yet decoded all the information they carry.

STEP 3: PLANNING OUR QUIPUS

Time: 10 min

Explain that the students will get to make their own quipus representing numbers of personal significance. Ask students to brainstorm numbers that are important to them that they want to represent, e.g. their birthday, your school's address, a family member's age, the jersey number of their favourite athlete, etc. For an extra challenge, students could choose to spell out a word by assigning numbers to each letter of the alphabet (i.e. A=1, B=2, C=3, etc.).

Once students have thought of their number, pass out the Planning Our Quipus worksheet (page 30). Have students use the worksheet to plot out the knots to represent the number. The numbers might fit on one pendant cord (e.g. if they're recording their grandparent's age, and their grandparent is 75, they put '7' in the tens place and '5' in the ones place on a single pendant cord). They may also span over multiple pendant cords (e.g. if they're recording their birthday, they can put the day, month and year on separate cords).

STEP 4: CREATING OUR QUIPUS

Time: 15 min

Once the students have finished their quipus diagrams, invite them to choose strands of yarn – 2 strands for their primary cord, and 1 strand for each pendant cord. Invite them to consider what their chosen colours might symbolize. For instance, if they're representing their birthday on their quipu, they might want to pick colours that symbolize where they were born.

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: MAKING QUIPUS

Instructions for Making the Primary Cord (Slides 4–5)

Tie two pieces of yarn together at the top, and twist them tightly together to the bottom to create a cord (ask a partner to hold the top of your yarn while you twist). Fold the twisted cord in half. The two halves should start to twist together on their own. Tie to secure at the ends.

Instruction for Making the Pendant Cords: (Slides 6–7)

Referring to the completed Planning Our Quipus worksheet, tie knots onto each pendant cord, using one strand of yarn per cord (make double knots if the width of yarn requires it). Make sure to tie the correct number of knots at each level of the cord. Remember: the knots at the bottom of the cord represent the lowest place value, and the knots closest to the primary cord represent the highest place value. Tie each pendant cord to the primary cord so they hang down.

STEP 5: READING OUR QUIPUS

Time: 15 min

Once everyone is finished, invite students to pair up and share their completed quipus with a partner. Explain that each student will take turns "reading" the knots on their partner's quipu to decode the numbers being represented. Encourage students to carefully observe the placement of the knots, starting from the bottom of the pendant cord and moving upward through the place values. Have students guess the significance of each others' numbers and colours. If students used multiple pendant cords, remind them that each cord may represent a different category or piece of information. After their partner guesses the meaning of their quipu, students can explain what each cord represents and why the numbers and colours are significant.

STEP 6: CLOSING CONVERSATION

Time: 10 min

After students have shared, bring the class together for a short reflection discussion. Invite a couple students to share their quipus with the class. Possible closing discussion questions include:

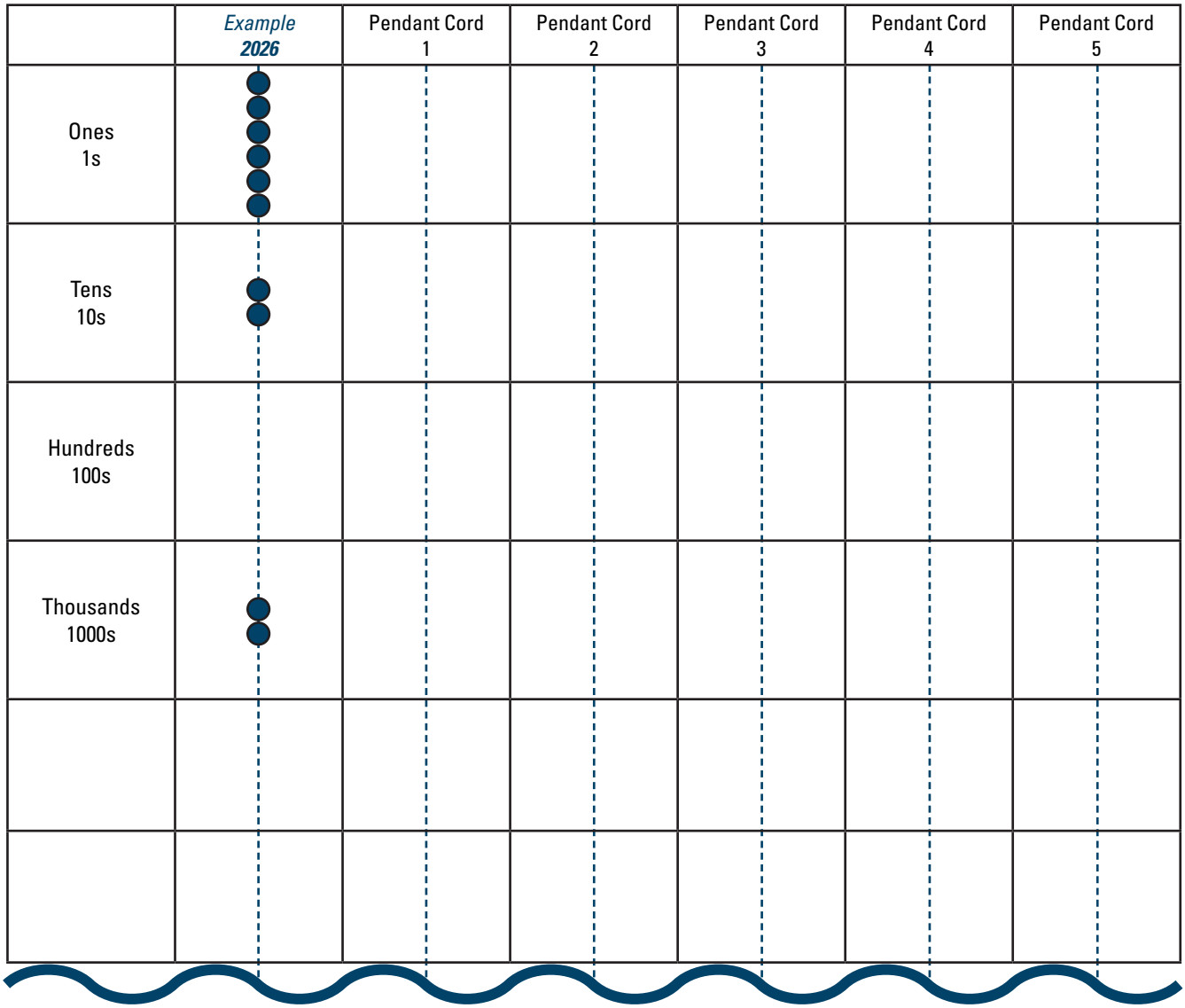
- *What was easy or challenging about making or reading a quipu?*
- *How did using knots compare to writing numbers on paper?*
- *How did this activity make you think differently about communication and record-keeping?*
- *Why do you think quipus were useful in the Andes?*
- *What kinds of information do you think quipus could communicate beyond numbers?*
- *Why is it important to study Indigenous knowledge systems like the quipu?*

POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: MAKING QUIPUS

Write your number here: _____
Why is this number important to you?:

Draw the knots of your quipu to represent your number.

- How many pendant cords will you use? Can your number fit on one cord, or do you need more?
- How many places do you need? E.g. ones, tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands...
- Remember: the larger place values are closest to the primary cord (shown at the bottom of this worksheet), and the ones are closest to the ends of your pendant cords.



INQUIRY PROJECT WITH ANDEAN OBJECTS

This inquiry-based learning experience invites students to explore an object from *Tupananchiskama: Ancient Andean Cosmovision* as a starting point for deeper investigation. Students will develop questions, use the Museum of Anthropology's online catalogue for research, and construct interpretations about the significance of their selected object. The following guidance is offered in a step-by-step format, but you can cycle back and forth between steps as the inquiry process unfolds.

1) KICK-OFF

Refer to pages 6–23 for materials to facilitate your students' visit to the exhibition. The Enduring Cultures section (page 7) will prompt students to select an object they can investigate beyond their MOA visit. Make sure they record the collection number (e.g. 3177/12) so they can search for the object later on. While at the museum, encourage students to start brainstorming at least three possible inquiry questions, focusing on "how" or "why" questions that can open a line of deeper inquiry.

2) DEVELOPING AN INQUIRY FOCUS

After their visit, ask students to review the observations, sketches and possible inquiry questions they made at MOA. Guide students to refine one or two of their possible questions into a focused inquiry question. Support them in shifting from descriptive to analytical questioning.

3) INVESTIGATING OBJECTS

Direct students to MOA's online catalogue (https://collection-online.moa.ubc.ca/) where they can search their chosen object using its collection number. Invite students to record any additional information available on the catalogue, as well as emerging questions that might further direct their research. The collections photos can also be used to refine the observations they made at the museum.

Invite students to search beyond MOA's online catalogue for more information about Andean ceramic objects. They may choose to reference other museums' collections, recent publications about Andean cultures, and videos and media from reputable sources.

INQUIRY PROJECT WITH ANDEAN OBJECTS

Extension – Thinking Critically About Museum Records: Museum catalogue records are helpful starting points, but they may be incomplete, reflect outdated research, or offer limited perspectives. As your students use MOA's online catalogue and other museums' records, invite them to consider:

- What information is included, and what might be missing?
- Who might have written this record, and when?
- What perspectives or voices might not be represented here?
- What other sources or types of knowledge could help fill the gaps?

4) ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

Direct students to start using the information they gathered to begin making inferences about their objects, crafting answers to their inquiry questions while also noting unanswered questions and gaps that might impact their interpretation. Students can also revise their inquiry questions based on new ideas and evidence that emerged through their research.

5) PRESENTING OUR LEARNING

Students can communicate their findings in a number of ways, such as a written essay, a presentation, a posterboard, or another means of communicating. Make sure to clearly communicate the boundaries and expectations for their presentation. Ensure students clearly communicate 1) their inquiry question, 2) a description of their chosen object, 3) key findings and 4) evidence to support their inferences. At this point, students can also start to reflect on how their thinking and questioning evolved over the course of the project.

6) REFLECTING ON THE INQUIRY PROCESS

In a group discussion or a written reflection, encourage students to reflect on their learning process. Possible reflection prompts include:

- How did your understanding of the object change over the course of your learning journey?
- What did you find challenging or surprising about doing this kind of research?
- How did your questions shape your learning, and how did your learning process impact your questions?
- What did you learn about using museum records as evidence?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE GREAT INKA ROAD: ENGINEERING AN EMPIRE

Produced by the National Museum of the American Indians, this online exhibition explores the foundations of the Inka Road in earlier Andean cultures, technologies that made building the road possible, the cosmology and political organization of the Inka world, and the legacy of the Inka Empire during the colonial period and in the present day.

https://americanindian.si.edu/inkaroad/index.html

REFLECTIONS ON DEATH IN PERU

(Lemlij & Millones, 2026)

Thinking about death is usually something we reserve for others' misfortune, while avoiding confronting it when it involves ourselves. Is it always this way? In this book, the authors explore the multiple ways in which human beings reflect on their own end: sometimes indirectly, sometimes as an underlying presence, but always as an inescapable reality. Throughout its pages, the book traces Peru's history from the Inca period to the present day, focusing on rural populations and the Christianized culture of societies with indigenous origins. In this journey, it examines the different conceptions of death that emerged from the encounter between Christianity—introduced in the sixteenth century—and the worldviews of the societies of Tahuantinsuyo. The book traces their evolution into the twenty-first century, where influences from Protestant Christian movements coexist with perceptions inherited from the initial evangelization and with elements that preserve pre-Columbian religious traditions.

WOMAN: POWER AND PRESTIGE IN ANDEAN SOCIETIES

(Lemlij & Millones, 2017)

This book examines the elusive subject of women's roles in Andean society, focusing primarily on Mochica culture and the Inca imperial elite. In the latter case, given the concentration of power that this pre-Columbian civilization attributed to the Sun and the Inca, female figures in available documentation remain relegated to secondary roles. However, an unconventional approach has made it possible to reexamine the texts of sixteenth-century observers and offer new lines of interpretation supported by psychoanalytical reflection and careful selection of historical sources. This work continues the inquiry begun in 1987 by Max Hernández, Moisés Lemlij, Luis Millones, Alberto Péndola, and María Rostworowski with the publication "Entre el mito y la historia," and brings together the current interests of authors Lemlij and Millones, along with the collaboration of assistants who made its completion possible.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE HUAROCHIRÍ MANUSCRIPT: A TESTAMENT OF ANCIENT AND COLONIAL ANDEAN RELIGION

(Salomon & Urioste, 1991)

One of the great repositories of a people's world view and religious beliefs, the Huarochirí Manuscript may bear comparison with such civilization-defining works as Gilgamesh, the Popul Vuh, and the Sagas. This translation by Frank Salomon and George L. Urioste marks the first time the Huarochirí Manuscript has been translated into English, making it available to English-speaking students of Andean culture and world mythology and religions.

The Huarochirí Manuscript holds a summation of native Andean religious tradition and an image of the superhuman and human world as imagined around A.D. 1600. The tellers were provincial Indians dwelling on the west Andean slopes near Lima, Peru, aware of the Incas but rooted in peasant, rather than imperial, culture. The manuscript is thought to have been compiled at the behest of Father Francisco de Avila, the notorious "extirpator of idolatries." Yet it expresses Andean religious ideas largely from within Andean categories of thought, making it an unparalleled source for the prehispanic and early colonial myths, ritual practices, and historic self-image of the native Andeans.

Prepared especially for the general reader, this edition of the Huarochirí Manuscript contains an introduction, index, and notes designed to help the novice understand the culture and history of the Huarochirí-area society. For the benefit of specialist readers, the Quechua text is also supplied.

CUENTOS ANDINOS / ANDEAN FOLKTALES: AS TOLD BY MY ABUELA

(Pabon Gabranovich, 2022)

Andean and Peruvian folklore is a rich and diverse tradition that includes a wide range of myths, legends, and stories. This collection of tales offers a glimpse into the world of Andean folklore, and is a great way to learn about the cultural heritage of the people of Peru that live in the Highlands. These stories are beautifully illustrated and written in both English and Spanish, making them accessible to readers of all ages and language backgrounds. All five tales were collected from the author's grandmother and some additional elements were added for the purpose of making the stories more engaging for the reader.