Civilizations in Context

Explore how geography shaped life in three empires.

6-9.WG.1.1 "Describe major aspects of the civilizations in regions throughout the world prior to European contact including government, religion/belief systems, arts/architecture, technology, physical geography, economics, and social order."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB In each paragraph, underline one detail about physical geography, circle one detail about government or beliefs, and put a star beside one detail about technology or the economy.

Three Empires, Three Settings

1. In the 1300s, the Mali Empire stretched across West Africa, from grasslands near the Sahara toward the Niger River. The river helped farmers grow food, while camel caravans carried salt from the desert to towns where merchants traded for gold. A ruler called the mansa governed with help from local leaders and collected taxes on trade. Mansa Musa practiced Islam, and mosques became centers of worship and learning. Yet many people kept older local beliefs. Farmers, traders, and skilled workers held different roles in Mali's towns and villages.

2. In the 1100s, the Khmer Empire centered on Angkor in present-day Cambodia. Seasonal rains filled rivers and flooded fields, but dry months made water less reliable. Khmer builders dug canals and built reservoirs to store water for rice farming. Kings directed large building projects and claimed sacred authority. At Angkor Wat, stone carvings showed Hindu stories and scenes of daily life. Hindu beliefs shaped its original design; later, Buddhist worship also became important at Angkor. Farmers grew rice, while artisans and laborers helped support the city and its temples.

3. In the 1400s, the Inca ruled a vast empire along the Andes Mountains of South America. Steep slopes made flat farmland scarce, so farmers built stone-walled terraces and grew crops such as potatoes and maize. A network of roads and rope bridges linked distant communities; runners carried messages along the routes. The emperor claimed a special connection to the sun god, and officials organized labor for roads, farms, and storehouses. Families farmed land in local communities and owed work to the state. Skilled stoneworkers fitted blocks tightly to build strong walls without mortar.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did people at Angkor and in the Inca Empire each change their surroundings to make farming possible?

2. Compare how the rulers of Mali and the Inca Empire organized people or resources.

3. How did beliefs shape a building or public place in Mali and at Angkor?

4. Describe one duty of Inca families and explain how a technology helped connect their communities.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Create a four-sentence label for an imagined museum display about daily life in one civilization from the passage. Describe its geography, connect that setting to a technology or economic activity, explain a government practice or belief, and include one plausible detail you infer about a person's daily life.

ANSWER KEY

Civilizations in Context

GRADES 6-9 · 6-9.WG.1.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

In each paragraph, underline one detail about physical geography, circle one detail about government or beliefs, and put a star beside one detail about technology or the economy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did people at Angkor and in the Inca Empire each change their surroundings to make farming possible?	**Khmer builders made canals and reservoirs to store water for rice during dry months. Inca farmers built terraces to grow crops on steep mountain slopes.**
2	Compare how the rulers of Mali and the Inca Empire organized people or resources.	**Mali's mansa worked with local leaders and collected trade taxes. Inca officials organized labor for roads, farms, and storehouses under the emperor.**
3	How did beliefs shape a building or public place in Mali and at Angkor?	**In Mali, mosques served as centers of Islamic worship and learning. At Angkor Wat, Hindu beliefs shaped the original design and carvings; Buddhist worship later became important there.**
4	Describe one duty of Inca families and explain how a technology helped connect their communities.	**Families owed work to the state. Roads and rope bridges linked communities, and runners carried messages along the routes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

This display shows a Khmer rice farmer beside a canal near Angkor. Seasonal rains brought water, while canals and reservoirs helped supply fields during dry months. Khmer kings directed large building projects, and farmers helped support the city. I imagine the farmer checking the canal before walking to a rice field.

Accept accurate comparisons and details supported by the passage. For the museum label, the inferred daily-life detail should be plausible and distinct from the stated facts.