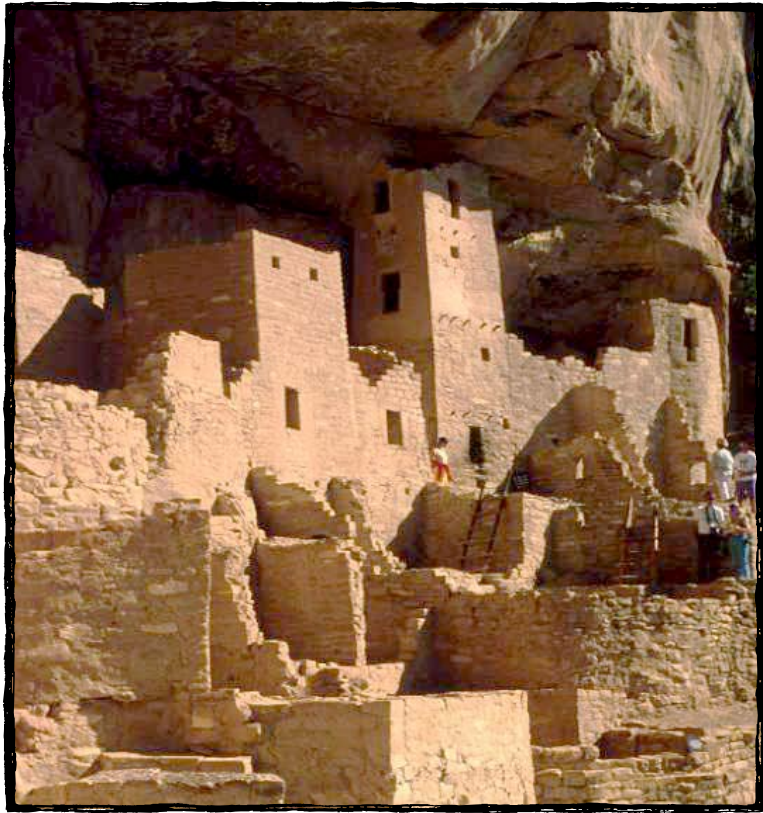


Discovery in the Americas?

A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,609



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Discovery in the Americas?



Written by David Meissner

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Front cover: A European painting of Columbus's arrival in the Americas

Back cover: Anasazi ruins at Cliff Palace, Colorado

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Level W Leveled Book
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Correlation

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Note: There are four maps in this book. They use names like “North America” and “Colorado” even though those places didn’t have those names when the events in this book occurred. The modern names are used so that you can use modern maps to see where things were a long time ago.

CHAPTER 1: Christopher Columbus



Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer.

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

This is a famous rhyme about a famous voyage. On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus set sail from Europe with a group of three ships. He was looking for a shortcut to a group of islands in Southeast Asia called the *Indies*. That’s why he tried to sail west across the Atlantic Ocean.

Columbus didn’t realize that large continents would block his way. He and his crew spotted land on October 12. They thought it was the Indies.

Do You Know?

Have you ever wondered where the word “America” comes from? America is actually named after the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci. He explored the American mainland in 1497. Then a German mapmaker labeled the land “America.” Ever since then, the name has stuck.

But instead, it was a place that Europeans had never seen before. These continents became known as the Americas.

Every year in October, the United States celebrates the feats of Christopher Columbus. Many people say that Columbus discovered the Americas. But other people disagree. They say that he wasn't the first to discover this land.

So did Columbus really "discover" the Americas? Discovery is when something is found or seen for the first time. But was Columbus really the first person to walk on the American continents? Had anyone come before him?

The Vikings

Some people say that Columbus wasn't even the first European to arrive in America. The Vikings, sailors and warriors from northern Europe, may have explored the northern part of the Americas years before Columbus set sail. The Vikings discovered many northern lands, including Iceland and Greenland. A possible Viking landing site has been discovered in Canada. It is nearly 1,000 years old.



On Columbus's first trip across the Atlantic, he visited the Caribbean Islands.

Early European drawing of Columbus's voyage showing the three ships, the King of Spain, and the Americas



Columbus was not the first person to set foot in the Americas. People had been living there for thousands of years. These people had already made pottery, built pyramids, and studied astronomy. Many different **civilizations** were already there.

In this book, you will learn about three groups of people—the Maya, the Anasazi, and the Inca. The Maya built cities in the rainforest. The Anasazi built houses in the sides of cliffs. And the Inca had cities high up in the mountains. You will read about how and where they lived in the Americas. You will also figure out when they lived. This will help us answer our question: Did Columbus actually discover the Americas?



A Mayan pyramid with stairs leading up to the temple at the top

CHAPTER 2: The Maya

Thousands of years ago, the Maya (MAH-yuh) built giant stone pyramids in the Central and South American rainforest. Some pyramids were as tall as ten-story buildings, with steps going all the way up. Priests walked up the steep steps with offerings for the gods. At the top were temples for religious ceremonies.

The Maya knew a lot about **architecture**, astronomy, art, math, and writing. They studied the stars and made calendars. They carved big sculptures and painted bright **murals**. Their math system used dots and bars instead of numerals. Their writing used pictures and symbols instead of words and letters. The Maya wrote on stone surfaces and in books made out of fig tree paper. A few of these books still exist today.

The Maya were farmers who grew crops such as corn, beans, and chili peppers. They liked to eat flat corn cakes, which are now called tortillas (tor-TEE-ahs). The Maya raised turkeys and hunted animals, such as deer. They traded jaguar skins, jade, and brightly colored bird feathers. At religious festivals, the Maya danced and had feasts.

Most Mayan cities had large ball courts. These courts had walls with stone rings high above the ground. They used these courts to play a sacred game in which players hit a rubber ball through the ring. But they weren't allowed to use their hands. They had to hit the ball with their hips, shoulders, and thighs.



The Maya lived in present-day Mexico and Central America. Today, over four million Mayan people still live there.

Remaining Ruin: Chichén Itzá

For hundreds of years Chichén Itzá (chee-CHEHN eet-SAH) was the most powerful Mayan city. It had a huge open plaza and a giant pyramid. There were also many other buildings, including a steam bath and an observatory for studying the stars. Chichén Itzá was also home to the largest ball court in the area.

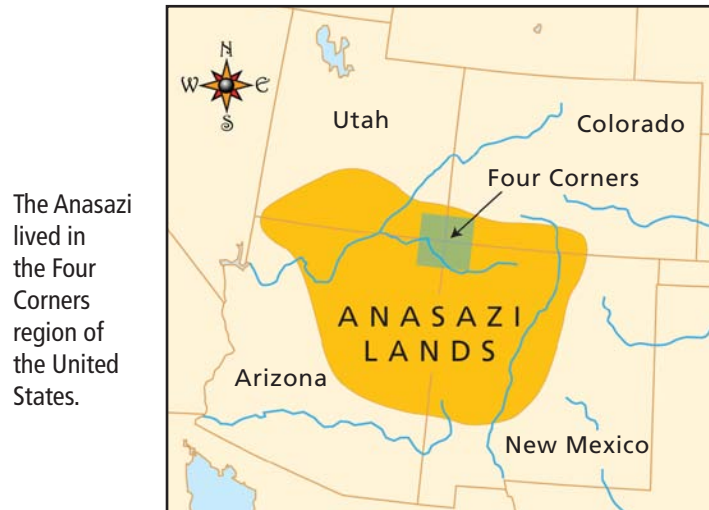
Chichén Itzá is not just a name from the past. You can still find it in southern Mexico. Many of its pyramids still exist. Tourists walk up these old pyramids. They also study the detailed stone carvings. Some sit by the ball court and imagine what the games were like. Nearby, there are even more **ruins**. But these are still buried under soil, plants, and trees.



Chichén Itzá is a popular tourist destination today.

CHAPTER 3: The Anasazi

The story of the Anasazi (ah-nuh-SAH-zee) is amazing and mysterious. The Anasazi were also known as the “cliff dwellers” or the “ancient ones.” They lived in the Southwestern region of today’s United States. These people lived as hunters and then as farmers, growing corn, beans, squash, and cotton. They built sandstone houses in the sides of cliffs. But about 700 years ago, the Anasazi simply vanished from their homes.



Do You Know?

The Anasazi lived in an area called the Four Corners. It is where the corners of four states meet—Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah. If you position your body properly at the Four Corners, you can be in four states at the same time.

Today we know about the Anasazi because they left many clues behind. It seems as if they left one day, meaning to come back. But they never did. Their sandstone houses were still **intact**. Clothes hung from hooks, and pottery lay on the ground. **Archaeologists** later found sandals, baskets, blankets, and garden tools. There were many pieces of beautiful pottery, such as jars and bowls with black and red designs. The Anasazi also left **petroglyphs** of people and animals carved into rock walls.

Why did these people leave their homes so suddenly? To this day, it is still a mystery. Some people believe that a long drought made it too hard to grow food there. Others believe that the Anasazi were suddenly invaded.

We do know that some Anasazi traveled southeast and settled there. Today’s Pueblo people in New Mexico are descendants of the ancient Anasazi.

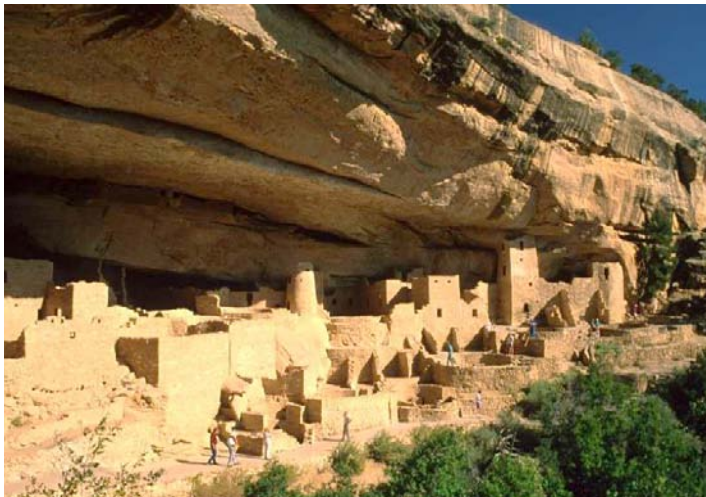


The Anasazi left behind clues about their culture, such as this piece of pottery.

Remaining Ruin: Mesa Verde

You can still find signs of the Anasazi today. Perhaps the most amazing Anasazi ruins are at Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. Many tourists visit this site every year. They walk through ancient houses built into the sides of cliffs.

The most famous ruin is called Cliff Palace. It sits under a big rocky ledge. There are stairs, courtyards, and rooms packed together. Circular rooms called **kivas** remain where the Anasazi held ceremonies. In the museum you can see authentic Anasazi pottery and baskets.



Tourists from all over the world like to explore Cliff Palace.



The Inca empire stretched down the Andean mountains to the coast for more than 4,020 kilometers (2,500 mi.).

CHAPTER 4: The Inca

The Inca lived along the western edge of South America. They built a large and rich empire. The Inca empire covered thousands of miles of jungles, mountains, and beaches.

The Inca were good builders and engineers. They built a network of stone roads that connected towns. They even built long **suspension bridges** over rivers and canyons. Before the age of telephones and cars, they kept in close contact. Messengers ran between towns to relay messages from far away.

The Inca were also master farmers. They cut **terraces** into steep mountainsides. This gave them flat places to grow food. They also dug irrigation canals that brought water to their crops. They grew corn, cotton, potatoes, and **quinoa** (kee-NOH-uh). Llamas helped the Inca carry things up the mountains.

Today relatives of the Inca still live high in the green Andes. On steep, sloping lands they grow foods like quinoa. Some still speak the ancient language, Quechua, and live like their Inca ancestors. Music groups play drums and make beautiful, haunting sounds with traditional flutes.

Today, musicians from Ecuador and Peru play popular Andean music all around the world.



The Inca used llama wool to make warm clothing.

Remaining Ruin: Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu (MA-choo PEE-choo) is one of the most impressive ruins in the Americas. It is an ancient Inca city built out of stone. It is perched high on a green mountaintop in Peru. Machu Picchu is so isolated that the outside world didn't know about it until 1911. Machu Picchu may have been a home for a royal family.

The "Inca Trail" is a famous stone path that still leads to Machu Picchu. Today, tourists from all over the world travel to Peru to hike the Inca Trail. They follow a four-day route over high mountain passes. They also walk by other Inca ruins. At the end, hikers arrive at a stunning view of Machu Picchu.

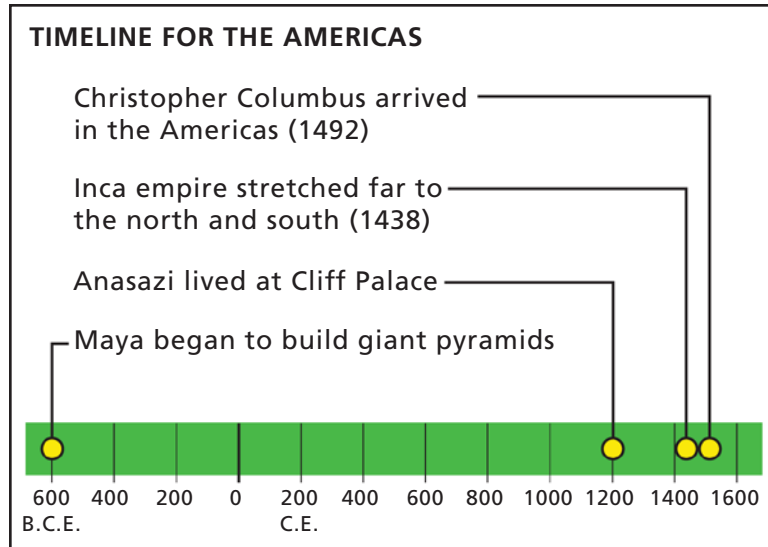


Machu Picchu is famous for its beauty and location.

CHAPTER 5: Point of View

Now you have learned about different people from the Americas. You know about the Maya, the Anasazi, and the Inca. So let's go back to our original question. Did Columbus really discover the Americas?

Let's look at the timeline below. On the right, you can see that Columbus arrived in 1492. More than fifty years before that, the Inca empire was already **flourishing**. In 1200, the Anasazi lived at Cliff Palace. And long before all of that, the Maya were building giant pyramids.



This timeline shows that people lived in the Americas long before Columbus arrived.



These ancient petroglyphs are from Anasazi land in Utah.

It is clear that many people lived in the Americas before 1492. Columbus himself even wrote about the local people he met. When Columbus first arrived, he thought he had landed in the Indies. That's why he mistakenly called the local people "Indians." For many years, the people from the Americas have been called Indians. But now more people call them **Native Americans**. This is because they are **native** to the Americas. Their families have lived here for many years.

If you want to learn more about Native Americans, you can study their ruins. You already know that Chichén Itzá is in Mexico, Cliff Palace is in Colorado, and Machu Picchu is in Peru. These ruins are proof of the people who lived in the Americas before Columbus. If you are lucky enough to visit the ruins, you may meet Native American people in those areas. It was their ancestors who built these cities long ago.

So why do people still say that Columbus discovered the Americas?

Well, the answer to this question probably depends on **perspective**. Perspective is the point of view from which you see something. From the perspective of the Europeans, Columbus had found new land. So for them, it was a discovery.

But from the perspective of the Native Americans, Columbus hadn't discovered their land. These people had already been eating, sleeping, and farming there for many years. So depending on the perspective, both sides could be right. Maybe we could better say that Columbus explored the Americas. That's probably more accurate than saying he discovered them.



Quechua porters serve as guides on the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu.

Explore More

There's a lot more to learn about Native Americans. You can read about the Maya, Anasazi, and Inca.

1 At the Library

Tell your librarian you're interested in learning more about these Native Americans. Ask where you can find books about them.

2 On the Web

- A. In the address window, type: *www.google.com*.
- B. Then type: *Native Americans* or the name of a particular group, such as *Maya*. Click on "Google Search."
- C. Read the colored links. Click on one that looks interesting.
- D. When you want to explore other links, click the back arrow on the top left.
- E. Or try some different searches: *Anasazi*, *Inca*, or *Christopher Columbus*.

3 Try To Decipher Maya Math!

The Maya used a different counting system than we do. Instead of numerals like “1, 2, 3,” they used dots and bars. One dot equaled “1” and one bar equaled “5.” See if you can guess what these numbers are:

A) 

B) 

C) 

D) 

E) 

F) 

Key:

● = 1

— = 5

A) 2 B) 4 C) 5 D) 7 E) 10 F) 14

Answer Key

Glossary

archaeologists	people who study things from long ago by looking at the items left behind (p. 12)
architecture	the design and construction of buildings (p. 8)
civilizations	the culture and way of life of particular places (p. 7)
flourishing	doing very well; at its peak (p. 17)
intact	put together; not broken or changed (p. 12)
kivas	underground rooms used by the Anasazi for ceremonies (p. 13)
murals	large paintings painted on walls (p. 8)
native	belonging to a country or location by birth (p. 18)
Native Americans	people who were living in the Americas before Christopher Columbus arrived (p. 18)
perspective	a point of view or way of looking at something (p. 19)
petroglyphs	an old rock carving (p. 12)
quinoa	a starchy, nutritious plant found in the Andean mountains (p. 15)
ruins	the remains of an old building (p. 10)
suspension bridges	bridges held up by cables or ropes, such as the Golden Gate Bridge (p. 14)
terraces	hillsides that are carved into large staircase shapes to make flat ground for farming (p. 15)