

ALBUM [QUIPU / KHIPU](#)

Album Description

This morning, I discovered the Peruvian, Incan Quipu (sometimes spelled khipu). (They are part of the British Museum's exhibition, Peru: A Journey in Time.) I had never seen or heard of Khipu before and was fascinated. It was a portable system of knots that were tied to stand for numbers and figures and, as such, used for accounting in ancient Peru. The color, material used, and the placement of the knots all had different meanings. Some scholars think that the knots were also used to tell stories and that different knots stood for different words. As such, they are also known as "talking knots." As a librarian, I think it is so interesting that a series of knots can be and was a source of information. So, I now want to incorporate quipu into a storytelling class. I think it would really grab students' attention to start a class by showing a picture of Khipu and doing a primary source analysis.

I started thinking that knot-tying itself is becoming a lost art for most. (I am fairly certain most of my elementary students can't tie their shoelaces much less tie a bowline or a figure 8.) So, I thought that I could incorporate quipu into a Library class about the Incas, Peru, knots, and their history. I also thought that primary sources about Quipu could be a good introduction to an activity about tying knots for this year's Summer Reading theme, Oceans of Possibilities, for public libraries.

I want to look into the book *Narrative Threads: Accounting and Recounting in Andean Khipu* edited by Jeffrey Quilter and Gary Urton.

Were others familiar with Khipu? [3 - 5](#) [Khipu](#) [Quipu](#) [Inca](#) [Peru](#)



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS BLOG POST: A BOOK TIED UP IN KNOTS

Teaching Notes:

I love the idea about not judging a book by its cover.



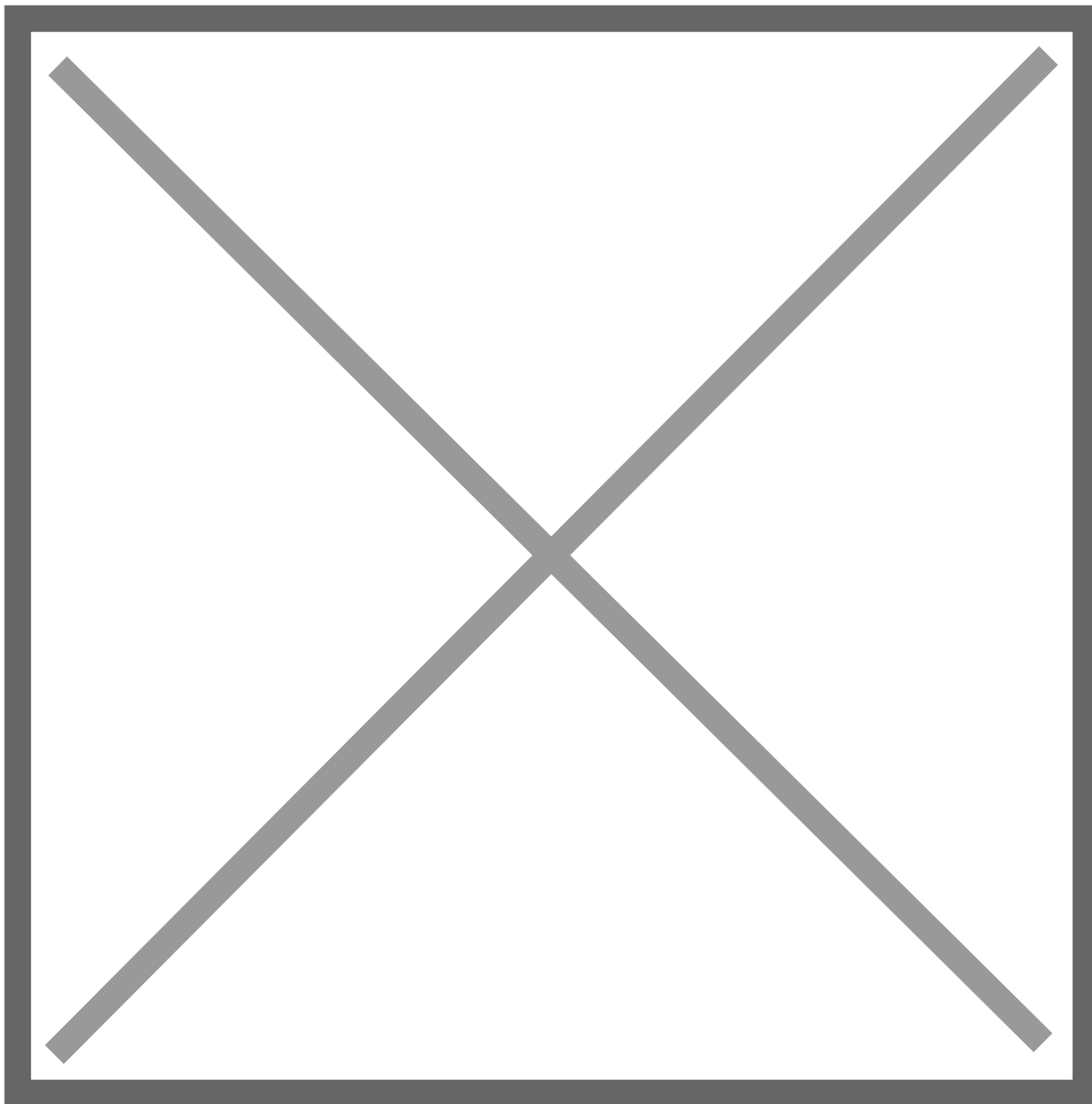
**BRITISH MUSEUM: DISCOVER KHIPU, THE ANCIENT INCAN RECORD & WRITING
SYSTEM MADE ENTIRELY OF KNOTS**

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Teaching Notes:

From the Library of Congress' Hispanic and Portuguese Collections (full page available at <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/guide/iberia.html>)



'THREADS THAT SPEAK: HOW THE INCA USED STRINGS TO COMMUNICATE | NATIONAL



'One of the great mysteries of ancient Peru is that the Inca did not have a system of writing, but communicated with a system of strings tied with knots. For the first time, centuries-old knotted textile accounting records known as quipus were found buried with well-preserved organic material. They were found at the archaeological site of Incahuasi, the base of operations for the Inca expansion along Peru's southern coast.

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The Inca Empire stretched from Colombia to central Chile and ruled more than 12 million people. They built organized cities and advanced road systems, yet they had no system of hieroglyphic writing, as the Maya did. Instead, they communicated via a system of knotted textile strings known as quipus. Deciphering how to read



At the site of Incahuasi in the Cañete Valley, archaeologists have found—for the first time—dozens of quipus buried alongside centuries-old produce. They appear to have been used for accounting in agricultural storage houses to record the amount of wood, beans, corn, chili peppers, and other items moving throughout the complex. Six-hundred-year-old beans are so well-preserved in this dry valley that they look like dried beans you would see in a market today. Archaeologists found beans and other produce so they knew they were excavating storerooms, and then they found knots.

National Geographic explorer Alejandro Chu explains that this is significant for quipu scholars because new discoveries could help bring them closer to understanding what the accounting records mean. “Usually you find quipus related to offerings, or funerary bundles in tombs. They are left and totally disconnected from their real use,” Chu says. “One of the main reasons why the discovery of quipus in Incahuasi is amazing is because it’s one of the first times we’re finding them in their original context. They are in the places where they were used.”

Quipus are made of a cotton or wool strings hanging from a main cord. The knots on the strings convey meaning through their location, direction, and type. Researchers already have a basic understanding of the numerical system incorporated in the quipus, where knots represent numbers. The hope is to move beyond mathematical operations to understanding non-numerical words or phrases from the agricultural product inventories. It is a whole new body of data to add to the Quipu Database Project and to understanding this interesting form of communication.

Incahuasi, or “House of the Inca,” is an important and strategic Inca city. It served as the agricultural base of operations and administrative center for the Inca expansion along southern coast in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. It transformed the valley into a thriving, productive area. In two archaeological excavation seasons led by Chu, the team has already found almost 70 quipus, and most of the vast storeroom complex at the site is yet to be excavated.

GlobalXplorer^o is a cutting-edge platform that empowers citizen scientists around the world to help reduce looting and encroachment at important archaeological sites—as well as discover and protect unknown sites—using satellite imagery. Find out how you can become part of the GlobalXplorer^o community and make a difference, beginning with our first expedition in Peru, at [GlobalXplorer.org](http://www.globalxplorer.org).
<http://www.globalxplorer.org>

Read more about the discovery of quipus in Incahuasi:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/03/world/americas/untangling-an-accounting-tool-and-an-ancient-incan-mystery.html>

Learn about the Quipu Database Project: <http://khipukamayuq.fas.harvard.edu/Researchers.html>

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Threads That Speak: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Inca | National Geographic
<https://youtu.be/AmPyz1kCbOw>

National Geographic
<https://www.youtube.com/natgeo>



MATHEMATICAL TREASURE: THE QUIPU

Teaching Notes:

The Quipu also remind me of Ada Lovelace, early computers, and coding. Quipu could also be used as an introduction to a lesson on coding.



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION: QUIPU



BRITISH MUSEUM: QUIPU


Teaching Notes:





UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS: NARRATIVE THREADS

Teaching Notes:

Your album reminded me of this fabulous post called [Knotty Doodles](#) written by  [Cate Cooney](#) . In addition to the beautiful illustrations, Cate shares a number of teaching ideas around knots, math, and doodling.

To accompany her post, Cate created an album, also called [Knotty Doodles](#). If you upload it, you could have an album within an album!




Teaching Notes:

I appreciate how you've thought through different ways to use this information. Now I'm interested-I'm going to have to take a look. [6 - 8](#) #worldhistory #indigenouspeople #communication



Teaching Notes:

I was not familiar with Khipu. Thanks for the interesting introduction  [Soline Holmes](#) and possible lesson idea! If you use this with students, let us know how it goes. I bet they'll love it and get a broader understanding of methods of communication.

Teaching Notes:



[Soline Holmes](#) So cool. As an archaeologist I approve!

Did you know a [college student](#) solved the mystery of the quipu?

This is a great video from [National Geographic](#) about the Inca and the quipu.

And instructions on [knot tying](#)!

Something cross-cultural that might be interesting to explore is the quipu and cuneiform tablets -- both really interesting ways of keeping records and conveying information.