

The Incas Worshipped Nature

Martin Cabrejo

BEFORE YOU READ: What does it mean to “worship” something?

I grew up on the Pacific coast of Peru. I used to go surfing, and I always saw fishermen fishing from small boats. The boats were made of reeds. People in my country have been making boats like this for thousands of years. When they fish from these boats, they take only the fish they need. They don’t catch lots of other fish in their nets. They don’t waste anything from the ocean. And they don’t pollute the ocean.

The Incas were Indigenous people living in Peru. Before the Spanish explorers arrived, they worshipped nature. They had two main gods: Wiracocha, the sun god, and Pachamama (Mother Earth).

According to the Incas, Wiracocha created the universe, the stars, the moon, and all the living things around them. He even created time because he commanded the sun to move across the sky. The Incas made statues of Wiracocha and put them in the temples. They believed that Wiracocha converted to a snake and appeared to people in different places. It was a signal that he was powerful and he can do whatever he wants.



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Pachamama means “Mother Earth” in Quechua, the Indigenous language. She is a fertility goddess. She provides the food. During the harvest, the Incas made rituals to thank her for all the food she created. People believe that if you take too much

from Pachamama, then Pachamama will be angry.

The fishermen in Peru practice a method of fishing passed down from the Incas. They fish with nets, but they also have another method: They dive into the sea with a bag and a bamboo stick with a sharp point to catch the fish. They are skilled at catching fish, but they also know how to preserve the fish. For example, they do not fish when the mothers are spawning or when the fish are babies. From the time of the Incas all the way to today, the fishermen show respect to nature. If they don’t, they know that Mother Earth could punish them later on.

AFTER YOU READ: What are some of the ways the fishermen show respect to Mother Earth? What practices in your life show respect to Mother Earth?



A sculpture at the Pachamama Museum in Argentina. Photo: Carlos Barrio <wikimedia.org>.

Study the Map



The shaded part of the map indicates Incan territory. Find a more detailed map of South America and identify which countries are in that area now.