INCAS, AZTECS & CONQUISTADORS

Indy is very interested in the people who lived in South and Central America before the Europeans arrived. And it's easy to understand why.

The Aztecs

From 1427 to 1521, the Aztecs controlled a large part of Central America. Their capital city, Tenochtitlan, was where Mexico City is today. Religion was very important to the Aztecs, and they built huge temples to their many gods. Aztec temples were pyramid-shaped with a flat top, just like the pyramid at Akator in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull.*
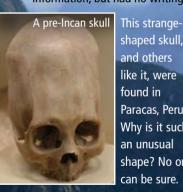
All Aztec children went to school, but very few people learnt to read and write. The Aztecs had a kind of picture writing which was very colourful but very difficult to use.

Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec sky god

The Incas

From their capital city in Cuzco, Peru, the Incas controlled the area of present-day Peru, Bolivia, north Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador from 1438 to 1533.

The Incas had very good roads and amazing bridges across the valleys of the Andes mountains. They used knotted ropes called *quipu* to record information, but had no writing.

A pre-Incan skull

This strange-shaped skull, and others like it, were found in Paracas, Peru. Why is it such an unusual shape? No one can be sure.

The Inca city of Machu Picchu, built high up in the Andes mountains.

Were there any great civilisations in your country in the past? What do you know about them?

The Conquistadors

In the sixteenth century, the Spanish conquistadors (Spanish for 'conquerors') sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to search for land and gold in the New World. The Aztecs and Incas were good fighters, but they couldn't win against the Spanish. The conquistadors had powerful weapons and horses. In a few short years, they had destroyed these two great civilisations.

Francisco Pizarro, conqueror of Peru (1532–1534)

El Dorado

The story of El Dorado (Spanish for 'the golden one') tells of the king of a South American people. He covered himself in gold and threw himself into a lake in the Andes mountains. Did he build a city called El Dorado too? Nobody really knows, but people have searched for it ever since.

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
temple   knotted   rope   conqueror   civilisation