

Reading Explorer 2, Unit 3: Inca Mummy

Narrator:

This girl is Quechuan. One of the native people of the Andes believed to be direct descendants of the Inca people. Clues to where she came from may lie with one of her ancient ancestors...

This body of a young Inca girl was discovered in 1995 by archeologist Johan Reinhard. She was found on an Andean mountain called Ampato. Some parts of her body were mummified, preserved in ice. They named the girl after Johan, calling her "Juanita."

Johan Reinhard:

"When we climbed the peak and found the mummy ... then we knew we were really onto something. That they had not just worshipped it from afar, but they had actually climbed to the summit and made these sacrificial offerings."

Narrator:

Reinhard and his team walked high into the Andes, the mountain range that runs from the north of Peru to the south ... Dividing the country in half. For the Inca people, these were more than just challenging places to climb. The mountains were thought to be gods.

According to Reinhard, the Inca believed that if they made offerings — in this case young girls — the mountains would treat them well. If they didn't respect the mountain gods, the people would have great problems.

After their success in finding the Inca girl, Reinhard's team went back to conduct a second exploration. Their findings this time were equally important.

On the ground lay six stone circles — patterns of rock used by the Inca long ago to show the location of burial sites. After carefully digging beneath one of these circles ... the body of another child was found. And not too far away ... yet another body. The discovery of more bodies implies that many people were sacrificed here.

Johan Reinhard:

"This site looks like they had ... multi human sacrifices, not just multi burials and so that makes it particularly unique."

Narrator:

It wasn't easy to free the bodies or the objects that they found in the ground. The ground was frozen, and the team had to use their fingers to slowly take out the ancient pots.

While the archeologists conducted their investigation the body of the original ice maiden, Juanita, was carefully analyzed in the Peruvian town of Arequipa. She was found covered in cloth. Scientists had to separate the outer layers of clothing which had become attached over the years.

A few months after she was discovered, Juanita was sent to Johns Hopkins University in the U.S., where a team of scientists looked for clues about her death. They used modern technology to deduce that a powerful blow to the side of her head had broken her skull. According to their theory, it was this injury that ended the young girl's life.

Like all mummified bodies found in the Andes, Juanita enables us to understand more about the ancient Inca people who once lived in these mountains. Juanita could be evidence of a connection with the people, like this little Quechuan girl, who live here now.