

Lesson 3: "Knot Your Data" Activity The Quipu

Name: _____ Date: _____

Materials:

- 1 "Main Cord" (a dowel, pencil, or thick piece of yarn)
- 3-4 "Pendant Cords" (thinner yarn, different colors if possible)
- Scissors

Part 1: The Quipu System The Quipu was the Inca's "operating system." It recorded census data, harvest numbers, and more. It used a base-10 system (like ours). Knots at the bottom of a cord were the "ones" place, higher up were the "tens," and so on.

Part 2: Your Task You are a *curaca* (a local leader). You must prepare a quipu for the census taker from Cusco.

Data to Record:

- **Cord 1 (e.g., Blue):** People in your *ayllu*. **Data: 13 people**
- **Cord 2 (e.g., Yellow):** Corn Harvest. **Data: 24 bushels**
- **Cord 3 (e.g., Red):** Llama/Alpaca. **Data: 5 llamas**

Instructions (Simple Method):

1. Attach your 3 pendant cords to the main cord.
2. We will use a simple knot type. A single knot = 1.
3. To show "13" (Cord 1):
 - Move up the string a bit to the "tens" position. Tie **1 knot**.
 - Move down to the bottom (the "ones" position). Tie **3 knots** close together.
4. To show "24" (Cord 2):
 - In the "tens" position, tie **2 knots**.
 - In the "ones" position, tie **4 knots**.
5. To show "5" (Cord 3):
 - In the "tens" position, tie **0 knots**. (Leave it blank).
 - In the "ones" position, tie **5 knots**.

Part 3: Analysis

1. Show your finished Quipu to a partner. Can they "read" your data?
 - Yes No
2. What is the biggest *advantage* of this system (compared to writing on paper) in the Andes?

3. What is the biggest *disadvantage*? What can't you "write" on a Quipu?
