Teacher Answer Key

Case Study

1. Maria's grandmother has both moral authority over community property and potentially the only existing knowledge needed to decode an important historical record. Academically, her refusal to allow photography protects against context being stripped from the object — the grandmother's reading practice may be inseparable from the physical cord in ways that digitization cannot capture. The ethical question is whether academic access to knowledge can override community sovereignty over heritage.

2. The metaphor of 'books without alphabet' suggests that the cords alone, without the oral-physical reading practice, may be unreadable. Maria's grandmother's practice suggests decipherment may ultimately come from living Andean communities who preserved fragments of reading traditions, not purely from pattern analysis of the cords themselves.

Multiple Choice

1. B

2. D

3. A

Matching

1-E, 2-C, 3-A, 4-B, 5-D

Fill-in-the-Blank

1) 900, 2) spreadsheet, 3) Inquisition

Short Answer (Sample Responses)

Q1: The numerical function — recording tribute amounts, census data, and agricultural yields — has been confirmed by analyzing surviving quipus against historical records. The narrative function (history, law, oral tradition in cord form) is described in Spanish accounts but has not been decoded from the cords themselves. The distinction matters because narrative encoding would mean the Inca had a complete writing equivalent — not just accounting records.

Q2: The numerical quipu could function as a multi-level administrative database: local data rolled up to regional totals, which aggregated to imperial figures. This allowed the Inca to track tribute payments, military readiness, agricultural inventories, and population data across thousands of kilometers and dozens of provinces. Empire-

scale administration requires exactly this kind of data management, and the quipu provided it without conventional literacy.

Q3: The living oral tradition of reading — the physical knowledge of which knots mean what in which context — was suppressed along with the quipus themselves. Without trained quipucamayocs, the cords are unreadable by analysis alone. Andean communities like San Juan de Collata may have preserved fragments of that knowledge in practice, making community collaboration potentially more valuable than pattern recognition software. The challenge is that community members may not want to share, and forcing the issue raises serious ethical concerns about sovereignty over Indigenous knowledge.