The Paracas culture is named after a desert peninsula on the southern coast of Peru. In translation, the word Paracas means, "sand falling like rain". During the 1920s, ancient desert cemeteries were discovered in the Paracas area. Since this coastal region of Peru is so extremely dry, the climate has preserved the bodies of the dead and their burial goods. Each of the bodies was wrapped for burial in layer upon layer of clothing and other textiles, forming what archaeologists call a "mummy bundle."

The Paracas culture is famous for the craft and beauty of these once-buried textiles, which, amazingly, have survived for over two thousand years. Look carefully at these textiles. What do you notice first? Identify the images that are repeated over the whole surface of many of the textiles.

A mantle is a large rectangular cloth worn over the shoulders like a cloak. The area without fringe would have been placed over the wrists. Each of the motifs is embroidered onto the woven fabric. Besides being very beautiful, this much stitchery took a great deal of time to complete. Do you think this piece of clothing was worn everyday or reserved for a special occasion? Explain. Since the mantle is so elaborate, the owner probably would not want to tear or soil it. Since it is large and took a long time to make, it must have been a precious item. Since it was buried with the dead, it must have been a special piece of clothing. A lord with great authority, a priest, or a ruler would have worn a mantle such as this. It probably was worn only for special occasions and would have been buried with the owner. The elaborateness of this mantle displayed his prestige and power to all who saw him.

Many of the birds on the textiles represent a large South American condor, a vulture whose wingspan can reach seven feet. Condors live in the Andes Mountains and are keen-sighted, strong creatures that soar in the skies. Refer to an encyclopedia for more information.

The chief, king, or priest who wore these mantles would have been covered in birds and would have been identified with the condor, lord of the skies. What condor qualities would be important for a man?
Look carefully at this textile mantle. What do you notice first? Identify the images that are repeated over the entire edge of the textile. How has the image of the heads been varied? Although there are several variations in the color and size of the figures, they all have diadems, wide wingspans, and long legs ending in heads. Here is a detail of one of these figures.

Ask the students to read The Leaping Llama Carpet by Marian and Ruth Waller. Identify the repeated images on the carpet. How has the artist used the images from Peruvian textiles for the illustrations? Design a repeat pattern border motif for a mantle of your own.

Have students conduct their own research about how a fabric is made—research through the library, Internet, fabric stores. Have them bring in samples if they can, which can be displayed. Look at the different kinds of construction techniques used such as knitting, tabby, netting, tapestry, looping, openwork, braiding, plaiting, feather work, beading, and embroidery. Make a chart and/or sampler of each of the techniques. Make detailed chart of drawings using designs from Chimú, Chancay, Nasca, Paracas, and Moche cultures—great flocks of pelicans, gulls, ducks, and fish. Various plant forms, monsters with huge eyes, head trophies, felines, birds and serpents.

**TEXTBOOKS**

*Unwrapping Ancient Mysteries*
Invitations to Literacy  
Level 6 Theme 3  
Houghton Mifflin 2001

*Discover Our Heritage*
The Ancient Americas  
Level 7 Chapter 6  
Houghton Mifflin 2001

**RESOURCES**


Ehlert, Lois. *Moon Rope/Un Lazo a la Luna.*  


Townsend, Richard F. *The Ancient Americas: Art From Sacred Landscapes.*  


INTERNET LINKS

*Ancient Peruvian Textiles and Pottery*
http://www.rain.org/~pjjenkin/textile/textile.html

*Ancient Peru*

*Clay and Cloth*
http://www.textilemuseum.ca/clay_cloth/

*Mummy Bundle Named Big Bird*
*California Institute for Peruvian Studies*
http://www.cipstudies.org/wallace.htm