

The Bridge They Rebuild Every Year

Every June, four villages cut down a perfectly good bridge.

7 min read

Before you read

- **gorge** — a deep, narrow valley with steep sides
- **span** — the distance a bridge reaches across
- **braid** — to twist strands together to make them stronger
- **anchor** — to hold something firmly in place
- **sag** — to sink or droop downwards in the middle
- **generation** — all the people of roughly the same age in a family



The grass rope bridge hanging across the Apurímac gorge

¹ The first thing they do is cut the bridge down.

² Four men lean over the edge with knives. The old cables give way, and a hundred years of knotted grass drops into the gorge and is carried off by the river. Nobody looks worried. This is how the work begins.

³ The bridge is called Q'eswachaka. It hangs above the Apurímac River, high in the mountains of Peru, and it is made entirely of grass.

⁴ Not soft garden grass. The grass is q'oya, a tough mountain grass that grows in thin soil where almost nothing else will. In the weeks before the rebuilding, every family in the four nearby villages cuts an armful of it, soaks it in water and beats it with a stone until the stems turn soft enough to bend without snapping.

⁵ Each family brings its grass to the gorge already braided into a thin rope. The ropes are braided together into thicker ropes, and those into six great cables, each one as thick as a man's leg.

⁶ Four cables become the floor. Two become the handrails. They are dragged across the gorge and anchored to stone blocks that have sat on either side for longer than anyone can remember.



Villagers braiding grass into thick cables on the gorge edge

⁷ The whole span takes three days. On the first day the cables are made. On the second they are stretched and tied. On the third, two weavers start from opposite sides and walk towards each other, weaving the floor and the sides as they go, until they meet in the middle.

⁸ Then somebody walks across, and the bridge is a bridge again.

⁹ There is a road nearby now, and a modern bridge of steel a short drive away. The villages rebuild Q'eswachaka anyway. They have done it every year for more than six hundred years, since the time of the Inca, and they have never missed one.



Two weavers meeting in the middle of the finished bridge

¹⁰ That is the strange thing about this bridge. It is one of the oldest bridges in the world, and not one piece of it is older than twelve months. The grass rots. The ropes sag. Left alone, the whole thing would be gone within two years.

¹¹ What lasts is not the grass. What lasts is the knowing — which grass to cut, how long to soak it, how tight to pull the cable before it is tied off. Each generation learns it by standing beside the one before and copying their hands.

¹² The bridge is not really made of grass at all. It is made of people remembering.

Part A Choose the best answer

Circle the letter next to the right answer.

1. What happens first when the villages rebuild the bridge?
 - A the stone anchors are replaced
 - B the old bridge is cut down into the gorge
 - C the six cables are stretched across
 - D two weavers start from opposite sides
2. Why is the grass soaked and beaten with a stone?
 - A to clean the dirt off it
 - B to make it dry faster
 - C to make it bend without breaking
 - D to make it float on the river
3. How many of the six cables are used for the handrails?
 - A one
 - B two
 - C four
 - D six
4. Why do the four villages still rebuild the bridge, even though there is a steel bridge nearby?
 - A the steel bridge is too far to walk to
 - B the grass bridge is quicker to cross
 - C they are paid to rebuild it each June
 - D it keeps a skill and a tradition alive

Part B Write your answer

Answer in two or three sentences.

5. Nobody looks worried when the old bridge falls into the river. Explain why not.

6. The passage says the bridge is one of the oldest in the world, but no part of it is older than twelve months. Explain how both of these can be true.

Part C Think deeper

There is no single right answer here. Say what you think, and show where in the passage it comes from.

7. Imagine the four villages decided to stop rebuilding the bridge. Using two details from the passage, explain what would be lost besides the bridge itself.

8. The writer says the bridge is made of people remembering. Think of something in your own family or community that is kept going by people doing it again and again. What would happen if one year everybody skipped it?

Answer key

For parents and teachers

Part A

1. B — the old bridge is cut down | 2. C — to make it bend without breaking | 3. B — two | 4. D — it keeps a skill and tradition alive

Part B

5. Because cutting it down is the planned first step of rebuilding it, not an accident. They already have the new grass ready. Accept any answer showing the child understood the bridge is replaced on purpose every year.

6. The design and the know-how are six hundred years old, but the materials are new every June, because grass rots. Accept answers that separate the age of the bridge from the age of its materials, however they word it.

Part C

These answers vary. Mark the reasoning, not the answer.

7. A strong answer names something from the text — the knowledge passed from one generation to the next, the four villages working together, a six-hundred-year record — and explains why losing it matters. A weaker answer only says the bridge would be gone. Prompt with: what do the villagers get from the work apart from a way across?

8. Any honest example counts if it is explained. The skill being practised is applying an idea from a text to the child's own life. Look for a reason, not just a list.

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