

Lesson 1: The Fertile Crescent

Vocabulary

civilization a group of people who live in a complex, organized society within a culture

fertile rich

plain a flat area of land

plateau an area of high, flat land

irrigation a system for watering crops

city-state a city with its own form of government, villages, and traditions

region an area of land with common physical features

artisan a craftsperson

Where Civilization Began

The earliest **civilizations** developed in southwestern Asia in about 3500 B.C. A civilization is a group of people who live in a complex, organized society within a culture. Civilizations developed in a part of southwest Asia that stretched from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. We call this area the Fertile Crescent because its land was very **fertile**, or rich, and shaped like a crescent, or curve. A flat area of land, or **plain**, stretched between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This plain became known as Mesopotamia, or “the land between the rivers.” One of the first civilizations appeared in Mesopotamia.

Climate and Rivers

The climate in parts of the Fertile Crescent was not good for farming. It was very hot and dry in the summer. It either rained too much or not enough. In about 5000 B.C., farmers began to look for better land and climate. They moved from a **plateau**, or area of high, flat land, in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent. They settled on the plain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The rivers gave them a permanent source of water for farming. During seasons of low rainfall, farmers used the rivers to set up **irrigation** systems. Farmers dug trenches and ditches that brought water from the rivers to their fields.

The People

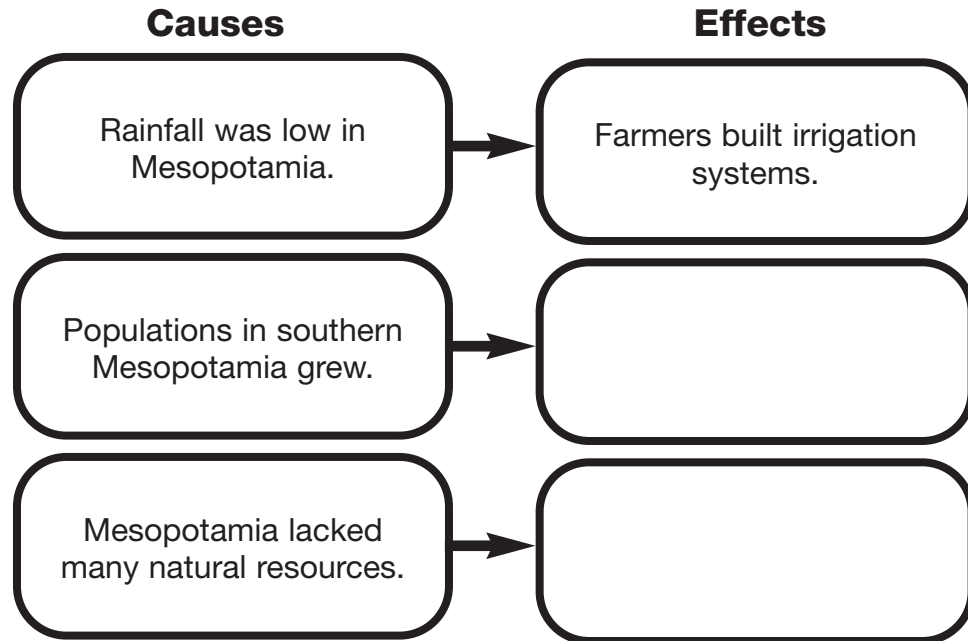
The people of southern Mesopotamia solved many problems. Mesopotamia did not have many resources. Yet the lack of trees and stones did not keep the people from building homes. They built huts out of reeds. Later they made bricks by mixing mud with straw. They used the bricks to build homes, temples, and palaces. They became expert farmers and developed better tools. They used the rivers to move goods. They were able to produce a surplus of food. The production of surplus food was a major step toward the rise of civilization in southern Mesopotamia.

Growth of City-States and Trade

The population in southern Mesopotamia grew as people became better farmers. New settlers arrived from different **regions** of the Fertile Crescent. By 3500 B.C., several villages became **city-states**. A city-state is a city that has become an independent state. A city-state has its own form of government, villages, and traditions. There was plenty of surplus food. People were able to work in other jobs besides farming. Some were **artisans**, or craftspeople, such as potters and weavers. Others were religious leaders, politicians, soldiers, or traders. Traders went on long journeys to trade with faraway peoples. They brought back goods that Mesopotamia lacked. Trade helped Mesopotamian culture spread to other parts of the world.

Lesson 1: Review

1. **Cause and Effect** Fill in the missing effects.



2. Where did the first civilizations arise?

3. How did Mesopotamian farmers use the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to solve the problem of low rainfall?

4. What was one of the major steps toward the rise of civilization in southern Mesopotamia?

5. **Critical Thinking: Make Inferences** Why do you think settlers from other parts of the Fertile Crescent came to southern Mesopotamia?

Lesson 2: Mesopotamia

Vocabulary

ziggurat a temple made up of a series of stacked rectangular platforms that form a pyramid-shaped structure

society an organized community with established rules and traditions

polytheism the worship of many gods

scribe a professional writer

cuneiform a form of wedge-shaped writing developed by the Sumerians

conquer to defeat and take over

empire a large territory that is controlled by one ruler

dynasty a ruling family

Sumer and Akkad

Early Mesopotamia was made up of the city-states of Sumer and Akkad. Sumer was in the south. Akkad was in the north. The Sumerians and Akkadians had similar customs, businesses, and religions. They spoke different languages. In about 3500 B.C., Sumer became more powerful than Akkad. Sumerian city-states built temple structures called **ziggurats**. A ziggurat was made up of a series of stacked rectangular platforms that formed a huge pyramid-shaped structure. Mesopotamians believed that ziggurats linked the heavens and Earth.

Religion and Government

Religion was an important part of Mesopotamian **society**. People in both Sumer and Akkad practiced **polytheism**. They worshipped many gods. The Sumerians believed that kings were chosen by the gods to carry out the gods' wishes. They also believed that kings passed the right to rule to their sons. These ideas about kingship would have an effect on later civilizations. Sumerian society was divided into classes. Wealthy people were at the top of the class system. Slaves were at the bottom. This kind of class system also affected later civilizations.

Writing

In about 3200 B.C., the Sumerians invented a system of writing. First they drew simple pictures that stood for objects or actions. Later

this picture writing was made even simpler. A professional writer, or **scribe**, pressed a reed into wet clay to form wedge-shaped markings. These marks stood for objects, activities, or sounds. This new form of writing was called **cuneiform**. People used writing to keep records, tell stories, write letters, and set down laws.

The Rise and Fall of the Akkadian Empire

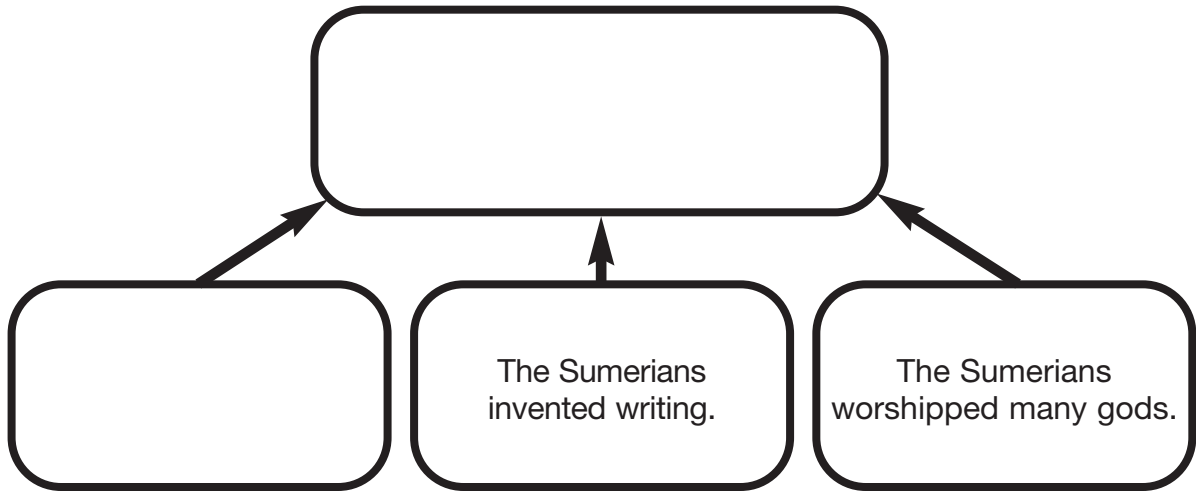
Sargon was an Akkadian ruler. He and his army **conquered**, or defeated, Sumer's city-states in about 2334 B.C. All of Mesopotamia came under Sargon's rule. This formed the world's first **empire**. An empire is a large territory of many different places controlled by one ruler. The Akkadian **dynasty**, or ruling family, was in power for about 150 years. By 2100 B.C., the Sumerian city-state of Ur rose to power.

Sumer's Final Days

Between 2100 B.C. and 2000 B.C., the city-state of Ur in Sumer controlled Mesopotamia. Farming, business, and culture thrived. The oldest known written law code was created at this time. Many important structures, such as the Ziggurat of Ur, were built during this period. The Ziggurat of Ur is thought to be one of the largest ziggurats ever built. In about 2000 B.C., Sumer lost power. The contributions of the Sumerians helped other civilizations to rise. These contributions include cuneiform, ziggurats, and the wheel.

Lesson 2: Review

1. **Main Idea and Details** Fill in the missing main idea and detail below.



2. How were Sumerian religion and government connected?

3. How did the Sumerian writing system develop and change? Use the word **cuneiform** in your answer.

4. Describe an example of an idea or invention that shaped Mesopotamian civilization and influenced other civilizations.

5. **Critical Thinking: Recognize Point of View** After Sumer rose again, does it seem that the Mesopotamians continued to make important advances? Explain.

Lesson 3: Babylonia and Assyria

Vocabulary

conquest the defeat of another group

The Rise of Hammurabi and Babylonia

Babylon was located between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, in southern Mesopotamia. In 1792 B.C., Hammurabi became king of Babylon. By 1754 B.C., he controlled all of Mesopotamia and its surrounding city-states. His empire was called Babylonia. Hammurabi taxed people's properties. He used the tax money to support his large army. He also used the tax money to pay for many new construction projects. He was considered a shrewd, or clever, ruler.

Babylonian Civilization

Life under Hammurabi did not change much. People still irrigated their crops. They still traded. Babylon became a center of culture and learning. There were advances in mathematics, literature, and law. Hammurabi established a set of laws that helped him rule his empire. The Code of Hammurabi contained 282 laws. This set of laws protected weak people. Hammurabi's code also called for punishments that fit the crime.


The Assyrians

In northern Mesopotamia, the Assyrian culture grew from 1900 B.C. to 600 B.C. This culture was influenced by Babylonian culture. Yet Assyrian culture placed a higher value on wars and **conquest**. Conquest is the defeat of another group. From 688 B.C. to 627 B.C., the Assyrian Empire controlled almost all of the Fertile Crescent. It was ruled by King Ashurbanipal during this time. The king built a great library at Nineveh.

Babylonia Grows

In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar II became king of Babylon. He took over much of the former Assyrian Empire. He started projects to make Babylon powerful again. He built many temples and buildings. Babylon was once again an important center of learning. Babylonians made important discoveries in mathematics. Babylonian astronomers were able to correctly judge when the eclipses of the moon and the sun would occur. The Babylonian Empire was taken over by the Persians in 539 B.C.

Lesson 3: Review

1.  **Sequence** The following events are not in the correct order. List them in the correct order.

_____ Nebuchadnezzar II starts a series of building projects in Babylon.

_____ Hammurabi establishes his code of law.

_____ Ashurbanipal builds his library at Nineveh.

2. Who was Hammurabi?

3. What was the Code of Hammurabi?

4. How did Assyrian culture differ from Babylonian culture? Use the word **conquest** in your answer.

5. **Critical Thinking: Make Generalizations** What contributions did the Babylonians make to civilization?

Lesson 4: Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Lydians

Vocabulary

covenant an agreement

monotheism the worship of one God

slavery the practice of one person owning another

descendant a person who is born later into the same family

barter to exchange one kind of goods and services for another

The Hebrews

Abraham is considered to be the founder of Judaism. The Hebrew Bible says that God spoke to Abraham and told him to leave his homeland and go to a land called Canaan. According to the Hebrew Bible, God and Abraham made an agreement, or **covenant**, in about 1800 B.C. Abraham promised to worship only one God. In exchange, God promised to look after Abraham and his people—later known as the Hebrews. **Monotheism** is the worship of one God. Judaism was one of the first monotheistic religions. Later the Hebrews moved from Canaan to Egypt. The Egyptians forced them into **slavery**. Slavery is the practice of one person owning another person. According to the Hebrew Bible, God chose Moses to lead the Hebrews to freedom. The Hebrew Bible also states that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments guided people in how to worship. It also set down rules to help people live good lives. All of Abraham's **descendants**, as well as people who were escaping from Egypt, were to follow the Ten Commandments.

The Hebrew Bible

The Torah contains the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. These books provide guidance and laws for the Jewish people. They also contain historical information and stories important to Judaism.

Israel and Judah

The Hebrews in Canaan lived in about 12 different tribes. The tribes defeated the Canaanites sometime between 1200 B.C. and 1125 B.C. In about 1000 B.C., King David united the Hebrew tribes. He founded a kingdom called Israel. Its capital was Jerusalem. David's son, Solomon, built a temple in Jerusalem to house the Torah and to be a place of worship. After Solomon's death, the kingdom split into two. Israel was in the north. Judah was in the south.

Judaism Today

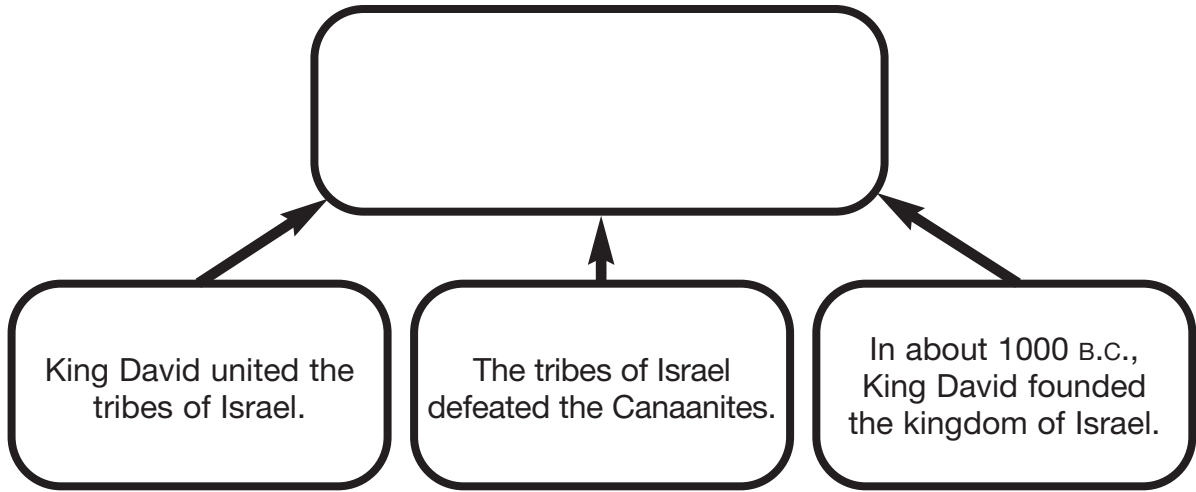
Today, millions of people practice Judaism. Jewish people still read the Torah. They celebrate Jewish holidays such as Passover. Passover honors the escape of the Hebrews from Egypt. Rabbis teach Jews how to read the Torah. In Hebrew, *rabbi* means “master” or “teacher.”

Phoenicians and Lydians

The Phoenicians lived along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea during the time of King Solomon. They were great sailors and traders. Through trade, they linked various parts of the ancient world. New ideas as well as goods were exchanged through trade. The Phoenicians helped develop the modern alphabet. People during this time usually **bartered**, or exchanged one kind of goods and services for another. The Lydians invented the region's first coins by 500 B.C. Coins made trading simpler and easier.

Lesson 4: Review

1. **Main Idea and Details** Fill in the main idea below.



2. What was one of the first monotheistic religions?

3. What was the purpose of Solomon's temple?

4. What did the Lydians invent that we use today?

5. **Critical Thinking: Make Generalizations** How did the Phoenicians help spread new ideas from one part of the ancient world to another?
