

Teacher Introduction

These Common Core History Assessments are designed to help your students develop key literacy and history thinking skills as they learn about the Mesopotamia. The assessments are intended to be *formative* more than *summative*. That is, they are meant to be part of the instructional process itself, providing you and your students with information at a point when timely adjustments in teaching and learning can be made.

Similar sets of assessments are available (or planned) for each unit in a typical world history class.

★ *Historical Thinking and the Challenge of the Common Core*

This set includes nine assessments aligned with the first nine Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards. We have left out the tenth Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard, which does not lend itself to assessments of the sort provided here. The set also includes two writing tasks aligned with two key Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards.

These Common Core standards challenge history teachers to develop in students the complex literacy skills they need in today's world and the ability to master the unique demands of working with historical primary and secondary source texts. The Common Core standards are supportive of the best practices in teaching historical thinking. Such practices include close reading, attending to a source's point of view and purpose, corroborating sources, and placing sources in their historical context. These are the skills needed to make history less about rote learning and more about an active effort to investigate and interpret the past.

These assessments are also useful in many ways for ELA teachers. They assess many of the skills specified in the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, which put a good deal of emphasis on the reading of informational texts. The Anchor Standards form the basis for all of the various Common Core standards for English Language Arts.

★ *What Are These Assessments Like?*

- **A group of nine reading skills assessments and two writing tasks for each major era of world history**

Each reading skills assessment is based on one of the key Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards—Assessment 1 addresses Common Core Reading Standard 1, Assessment 2 addresses Common Core Reading Standard 2, and so on. Two writing tasks are based on the first two College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing, which are the basis for the Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards. The two writing standards focus on writing arguments to support claims and writing informative/explanatory texts.

- **Based on primary or secondary sources**

In most cases, one primary source is used. In some cases, an assessment is based on more than one primary source or on a primary and a secondary source. The sources are brief. In most cases, texts have been slightly altered to improve readability, but without changing meaning or tone. Links to online versions of print media are available in the Bibliography. Please note that these links were valid at the time of production, but the websites may have since been discontinued.

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- **Brief tasks promoting historical literacy**

For each assessment, students write brief answers to one or two questions. The questions are not tests of simple factual recall. They assess the students' mastery of the skills addressed by that assessment's Common Core History/Social Studies Standard.

- **Two versions of each of the nine reading standards assessments**

A *basic* and an *advanced* version of each assessment are provided. The *basic* assessment addresses the Common Core Standard for grades 6–8. The *advanced* assessment is based on the Common Core Standard for grades 9–10 and grades 11–12 combined. Each version uses the same source or sources. In some cases, sources have been somewhat shortened for the *basic* version.

- **Easy to use as both learning and assessment tools**

These assessments do not take valuable time away from instruction. The primary sources and background information on each source make them useful mini-lessons as well as tools to assess students' historical thinking skills. The sources all deal with themes and trends normally covered when teaching the relevant historical era.

- **Evaluating student responses**

Brief but specific suggestions are provided, defining acceptable and best responses to each question asked in the assessment. The suggestions are meant to aid in evaluating students, but even more importantly, they are a way for teachers to help students better understand and master the skills on which the assessment is focused.

Assessment 1 *Basic Level*

The Floods of Mesopotamia

★ Key Ideas and Details

- 1. (6–8)** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

★ Using This Assessment

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Assessment 1 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 1 for grades 6–8. It asks students to cite specific textual evidence from two documents. It also challenges students to adapt that reading skill to the unique demands of thinking historically as they carefully interpret textual evidence in a primary source from a time in the past and a secondary source account of that same time in the past.

★ Evaluating Student Responses to This Assessment

[This section is not available for review on sample pages]

The Floods of Mesopotamia

Directions: This exercise asks you to read one secondary source and one primary source document carefully and answer questions about specific details in the documents. In order to better understand the documents, read and make use of the source information located just below each document. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the two assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Document 1: A Secondary Source

“Mesopotamia” is Greek for “the land between the rivers.” The rivers in this case were the Tigris and Euphrates. Each year, the rivers flooded, carrying silt from the nearby mountains. This kept the land extremely fertile. But the flat topography meant that floods could bring vast destruction as well as fertile new soil. Unlike the Nile in Egypt, Mesopotamia’s floods were not easy to predict. They could sweep away crops already growing in the fields. Only with a system of levees and canals could the waters be controlled and the land put to use. Such a system required a high degree of cooperation and skillful organization. Also, each city turned to its god or gods for help in the face of what was an uncertain and challenging environment.

Sumer’s flat, empty plain was good for raising barley and wheat, and for grazing sheep, goats, and other animals. But it lacked key resources, such as timber and the copper and tin needed to make bronze. This meant that Sumer had to carry on a great deal of trade. It depended on a steady surplus of agricultural goods to trade for minerals and timber with peoples in the Zagros Mountains, Asia Minor, and along the Mediterranean coast. This trade encouraged the growth of cities, usually at temple sites along the trade routes. These cities, in turn, became political and religious centers for their surrounding regions. The city-states of Sumer were built both for trade and for its priests and temples needed to appease Sumer’s unpredictable deities.

Source Information: This is a secondary source document about the role played by the Tigris and Euphrates in the rise of the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations. A secondary source is an account of past events written later by someone who did not experience or take part in those events. This passage is from *Ancient Mesopotamia* by Jonathan Burack, History Unfolding (Culver City, CA: MindSparks, 2009).

Document 2: A Primary Source

The rampant flood which no man can oppose,
Which shakes the heavens and causes earth to tremble,
In an appalling blanket folds mother and child,
Beats down the canebrake's full luxuriant greenery,
And drowns the harvest in its time of ripeness.
Rising waters, grievous to eyes of man,
All-powerful flood, which forces the embankments
And mows down mighty trees,
Frenzied storm, tearing all things in massed confusion
With it in hurling speed.

Source Information: In time, the development of agriculture made more complex societies possible—such as the ancient city-states along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This passage describing floods on those rivers is from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, perhaps the most famous of all Sumerian myths. This part of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is quoted by Thorkild Jacobsen in “Mesopotamia,” which is included in *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, by Henri Frankfort (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 139.

Assessment Questions

1. How do both documents offer evidence of why floods were especially fearful and threatening to ancient Mesopotamians?
2. Did the floods have any positive effects on the growth of civilization in this region? Cite specific details from either or both documents to support your answer.

Assessment 7 *Advanced Level*

The Assyrian Empire

★ *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

- 7. (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.
- 7. (11–12) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

★ *Using This Assessment*

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Assessment 7 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 7 for grades 9–10 and 11–12 combined. It asks students to do something historians must do all the time—integrate evidence found in a wide variety of primary sources presented in many visual and textual formats. It also asks them to judge the relative strengths and weaknesses of visual as compared with written sources.

★ *Evaluating Student Responses to This Assessment*

[This section is not available for review on sample pages]

The Assyrian Empire

Directions: This exercise asks you to study three documents carefully and answer two questions focused on what these sources have in common. In order to better understand the documents and their importance as historical evidence, read and make use of the source information located just below or next to each document itself. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 7: (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text. **(11–12)** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Document 1: A Secondary Source



Image source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Source Information: Assyria grew and declined several times during its entire history. It was at the height of its power from 934 to 612 BCE. This map shows the Assyrian Empire at its greatest extent.

Document 2: A Primary Source

Ahiababa, the son of nobody, whom they had brought from Bit-Adini, I took captive. In the valor of my heart and with the fury of my weapons I stormed the city. All the rebels they seized and delivered them up. My officers I caused to enter into his palace and his temples. His silver, his gold, his goods and his possessions, iron, lead, vessels of copper, cups of copper, dishes of copper, a great horde of copper, alabaster, tables with inlay, the women of his palaces, his daughters, the captive rebels together with their possessions, the gods together with their possessions, precious stone from the mountains, his chariot with equipment, his horses, broken to the yoke, trappings of men and trappings of horses, garments of brightly colored wool and garments of linen, goodly oil, cedar, and fine sweet-scented herbs, panels of cedar, purple and crimson wool, his wagons, his cattle, his sheep, his heavy spoil, which like the stars of heaven could not be counted, I carried off.

Azi-ilu I set over them as my own governor. I built a pillar over against his city gate, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, and others I bound to stakes round about the pillar; many within the border of my own land I flayed, and I spread their skins upon the walls; and I cut off the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. Ahiababa I took to Nineveh, I flayed him, I spread his skin upon the wall of Nineveh.

Source Information: This excerpt is from the records of the Assyrian Empire during the rule of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BCE). It tells of a revolt in Sura, a city ruled by Assyria. During the revolt, the rebels killed Hamatai, the official governor of the city. A man named Ahiababa then took control there. In this passage, Ashurnasirpal II explains what he did to put down this revolt. The excerpt can be found in *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol. 1, edited by Daniel David Luckenbill (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 144–45.

Document 3: A Primary Source



Photo source: By Stephen G. Johnson (CC-BY-SA-3.0 or GFDL, via Wikimedia Commons)

Source Information: This is one scene from the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. The obelisk is a relief sculpture commemorating the accomplishments of Shalmaneser III, who ruled the Assyrian Empire from 858 to 824 BCE. The entire obelisk shows several defeated kings bringing tribute and bowing before the Assyrian ruler. Many scholars believe this particular scene shows Jehu, King of Israel, bowing and giving his tribute to Shalmaneser III.

Assessment Questions

1. Consider this statement: "During the years 934–612 BCE, Assyria became a vast, powerful, and highly feared empire." How do *all three* of these sources provide evidence in support of this statement?
2. As powerful as this late Assyrian Empire was, it fell apart very quickly late in the seventh century BCE. Do these sources suggest reasons as to why this was so? Why or why not?