

- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, possibly the world's first novel, was written on clay tablets more than 5,000 years ago. Read a children's version of the epic to the class. What does the epic hero's character traits reveal about Sumerian values?

Internet Resources

- www.oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/RA/ABZU/YOUTH_RESOURCES.HTML — The Oriental Institute's web pages offer students and teachers information and related links on ancient Mesopotamia and the Near East.
- www.carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/NEAREAST/homepg.html Odyssey Online: The Near East page has sections for kids on archaeology, cuneiform writing, daily life, mythology and more.
- members.aol.com/donnandlee/index.html#meso Mr. Donn's History Pages give lesson plans for a unit on Mesopotamia aimed at sixth-grade students.
- www.aina.org/aol/link4.htm — Assyria Online. The Ancient History section links to dozens of sites on ancient Mesopotamia.

Suggested Print Resources

- Deedrick, Tami. *Ancient Mesopotamia*. Raintree Steck-Vaughn, Austin, TX; 2002.
- Fitterer, Cynthia. *Ancient Mesopotamia*. Compass Point Books, Mankato, MN; 2002.
- Moss, Carol. *Science in Ancient Mesopotamia*. Franklin Watts, New York, NY; 1999.

TEACHER'S GUIDE CONSULTANT

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ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

Grades 3–7

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting this program. The guide provides you with a summary of the program, pre-viewing and follow-up questions, activities, vocabulary and print and Internet resources.

Before Viewing: Give students an overview of the program. Use the program summary to help provide this introduction. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary and discuss what students learned. Use follow-up questions and activities, and encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Historical Overview

Mesopotamia, which in Greek means “between the rivers,” is known as the birthplace of civilization. Located on the fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in what is today Iraq and southern Syria, Mesopotamia is where farming gave rise to the world’s first cities around 3500 BC. The first archaeological expeditions to Mesopotamia were made in the 19th century, as historians searched for evidence of biblical stories. After excavations at famous biblical sites such as Babylon and Ur, archaeologists discovered the earlier civilization of Sumer. The first farmers and city dwellers, Sumerians were the inventors of writing, mathematics and the wheel. As Sumer declined, the Assyrians from the north built a powerful empire around 1000 BC which included Mesopotamia. The Babylonians were the third great civilization to control the land of Mesopotamia, ruling until they were conquered by the Persians in 539 BC.

Vocabulary

archaeology — In Greek, “study of beginnings”; the science that studies past cultures by analyzing their remains.

Mesopotamia — The fertile land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers considered to be the birthplace of civilization.

Tigris and Euphrates Rivers — Two rivers that flow into the Persian Gulf; their flood plains form Mesopotamia.

Sumerians — A people of Mesopotamia who built the world’s first cities.

Assyrians — An accomplished, warlike people who dominated Mesopotamia after the Sumerians.

Babylonians — A people who ruled Mesopotamia after the Assyrians; they were known for their architecture and laws.

city-state — A city and the surrounding area it ruled.

lyre — A stringed instrument of the harp family.

lapis lazuli — Opaque blue precious stones found on relics and jewelry excavated from archeological digs in Mesopotamia.

fertile — Containing the nutrients needed for growth.

irrigation — A system for watering crops.

ziggurat — A tall temple with many levels built by the ancient people of Mesopotamia.

lugal-gal — Meaning “big man,” a man who would lead his city-state into battle, eventually becoming king.

cuneiform — The writing system of the Sumerians consisting of wedged-shaped symbols impressed in clay tablets.

stylus — A cuneiform writing instrument with a wedge-shaped point.

scribe — A person whose job was to copy written records by hand.

Timeline

3500 – 2000 BC Sumerian civilization

2000 – 605 BC Assyrian civilization

2000 – 539 BC Babylonian civilization

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Discuss with students what is meant by the term “civilization.” Literally, “civil” means “pertaining to cities.” A necessary component of any civilization is that its power and organization is centered in cities. Do students know where the very first cities developed on earth?
- Locate Mesopotamia on a map of the Near East. Indicate that the world’s first cities developed along two very famous rivers — the Tigris and Euphrates. Explain that this area of the world is known as Mesopotamia, which means “between the rivers.” Today, this region of the world is very dry. Ask students to identify features of the land between the rivers that would have attracted the world’s first farmers.
- Ask students to brainstorm what other components a culture needs to be considered a civilization. They might mention organized government, religious and educational systems, writing and mathematics, science and technology, art and literature. Under the Sumerian people, Mesopotamia was the first place on earth to have them all. Students may be surprised at how many “firsts” they will find in the history of Mesopotamia. Ask them to keep a list of firsts as they view the video.

Focus Questions

1. Archaeologists first excavated in Mesopotamia looking for clues to the Bible. What are some sites in the Bible that are set in Mesopotamia?
2. How did the need for cooperation to control flooding and irrigate crops lead to the development of civilization in Sumer?
3. How did Sir Leonard Woolley’s expedition discover the Sumerian city of Ur? What amazing treasures were found in the royal tombs of Ur?
4. The use of irrigation by the early Sumerians improved farming conditions. How did this affect the people? What kinds of specialized jobs were created?
5. What is a ziggurat?
6. Why were clay and mud-brick important resources in Sumer? How were they used?
7. Describe the lifestyle of the people in ancient Sumer. How does it resemble life in the Near East today?
8. Name some of the numerous inventions created by the Sumerians.
9. Describe the Sumerian method of writing called cuneiform.
10. What was education like for Sumerian children?
11. What are some reasons for the decline of Sumer?

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12. What characteristics of the ancient Assyrians made them notorious for creating fear and destruction?
13. What lands did the Assyrian empire conquer?
14. Why does the discovery of the tomb at Nimrud give archaeologists a more balanced picture of the ancient Assyrians?
15. Why was Babylon, built by King Nebuchadnezzar, considered to be one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World?

Follow-up Discussion

- Have students share with the class their lists of first accomplishments made by the Sumerians. What would the world be like if the Sumerians had not made these contributions? Do students think other cultures would have eventually made the same discoveries?
- Compare and contrast the three civilizations covered in this program. Which one would students want to belong to and why?

Follow-up Activities

- Have students research the great Babylonian Hammurabi and the code of laws he established for his people.
- The Sumerians are thought to be responsible for developing the world’s first board game, which looks similar to backgammon. Unfortunately, the rules have not been found. Ask students to study the board and come up with their own set of rules and write them down.
- Cuneiform, the world’s first writing, was made by pressing symbols into damp clay tablets. Ancient Sumerians used a reed pen called a stylus to make the designs. Students can use a straw with the tip cut diagonally to press cuneiform symbols into clay. Have them write a cuneiform message to a classmate. (See Suggested Teacher Resources for cuneiform alphabet.)
- The Sumerians built the world’s first cities and drew the first known city maps. The Assyrians and Babylonians followed up with splendid public buildings, temples and gardens watered by irrigation. Discuss with the class what components a city needs to provide a good environment for its citizens. Have students work in groups to design maps of their ideal cities. Label public buildings, cultural centers, neighborhoods and recreation areas.
- A class research project: Design a museum of “Firsts in Civilization.” Have groups of students each choose an important first accomplishment made in Mesopotamia, conduct research and build a model or make a visual display for the museum. Students can write museum notes to accompany their display and serve as museum guides as other classes or parents visit.

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