The Beginning of Civilization in Sumer: The Advent of Written Communication

Joan Parrish

A Unit of Study for Grades 5-8

World History
Era Two: Human Beings Almost Everywhere (200,000–10,000 Years Ago)

National Center for History in the Schools
University of California, Los Angeles

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Carole Collier Frick, *Scribes writing in alphabetic script and cuneiform from a wall painting at* Tell Almar.

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Introduction

Approach and Rationale

The National Center for History in the Schools and the Organization of American Historians have developed the following collection of lessons for teaching with primary sources. Our units are the fruit of a collaboration between history professors and experienced teachers of United States History. They represent specific "dramatic episodes" in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning-point in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, and literature from the period under study. What we hope you achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to have your students connect more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

Content and Organization

Within this unit, you will find: 1) Unit Objectives, 2) Correlation to the National History Standards, 3) Teacher Background Materials, 4) Les-

son Plans, and 5) Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for grades 5–8, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The teacher background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific "dramatic moment" to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The lesson plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories, and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview

The purpose of this unit is to introduce students to the achievements and historical significance of the Sumerian civilization, located in the "land between the rivers," Mesopotamia, the region known today as modern Iraq, and reaching back in time to approximately 3500 B.C.

The unit is divided into five sections. The first three sections concentrate on historical readiness activities and concepts, geographical-historical awareness, and an overview of recognized "firsts" in Sumerian civilization. The last two sections focus upon the most significant achievement of the Sumerians, the development and use of a written language, and provide an in-depth exploration of this ancient writing system and the life of an average scribe.

The unit aims to help students develop an awareness of and an appreciation for the uniquely human achievement of written communication, and provides students with a concept of historical "firsts," guiding the students to understand the interrelationship between geography, human adaptation, human lifestyles and historical change. The unit should encompass a 4-6 week period of time and is directed at a student audience of ages 11-14.

All events prior to the innovation of writing have been labeled "prehistory." With the invention of a conventional system of writing, human knowledge was no longer dependent upon the capacity of an individual's memory. It became possible to accumulate a record of human experience, transcending specific time and place limitations of oral speech. In developing the ancient system of cuneiform, the Sumerian culture provided a foundation upon which all subsequent intellectual and technological progress has been built.

II. Unit Context

This unit should follow a unit on Prehistory, examining man as a hunter and gatherer and the subsequent advent of agriculture and farming. It should precede unit studies of other ancient civilizations and/or early Mediterranean civilizations.

III. Correlation to National Standards for United States History

The Beginning of Civilization in Sumer: The Advent of Written Communication provides teaching materials that address standards as outlined in *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 2**. Lessons in this teaching unit specifically address **Standard 1A** that asks students to compare forms of writing that developed in early civilizations and explain how written records shaped political, legal, religious, and cultural life.

This unit likewise integrates a number of Historical Thinking Standards including: "draw upon data in historical maps" (**Standard 2, Historical Comprehension**); "draw comparisons across eras and regions" (**Standard 3, Historical Analysis and Interpretation**); "obtain historical data from a variety of sources;" and "support interpretations with historical evidence" (**Standard 4, Historical Research**.)

IV. Unit Objectives

1. To explore the concepts of continuity, change and historical firsts by creating and discussing personal and / or familial timelines.

2. To examine maps of the present day Middle East and then identify the general area of the ancient Fertile Crescent and the specific area known as ancient Sumer.

3. To discuss climatic conditions, land forms and water sources of the and discover the physical, social, and economic ramifications of these geographical conditions, including the development of an extensive irrigation system, the adaptation of shelter needs to existing natural resources, and the formation of city-states.

4. To learn the importance and unique nature of written communication by participating in activities and discussion.

5. To examine a moment in time via primary source documents on the life of a scribe. Make generalizations on the role and use of writing in the Sumerian civilizations by participating in a role-playing activity.

6. To study the evolution of the ancient writing system, cuneiform, and explore writing systems in general by creating their own communication codes.

V. Lesson Plans

1. Readiness: What Is History?

2. Geographical Discussion

3. Achievements of Sumer

4. The Life of a Scribe

5. The Beginnings of Written Communication

VI. Introduction to The Beginning of Civilization in Sumer: The Advent of Written Communication

Between the development of villages and the development of cities, man made some great technological advances. So}e of these have been described in the unit on the Neolithic Revolution. Early farmers formed mud and clay into mudbricks for building houses and walls; they manipulated and fired clay to form pottery; they learned to burn limestone and gypsum to 'nix with water to form plaster; they walled in their settlements for protection; they made finer and more complex stone tools. The developments took place slowly, over hundreds or thousands of years, but in each case 'man was becoming more skillful at manipulating for his own use the materials available in the environment.

A major step forward came when villagers discovered how to divert water from rivers and springs to irrigate their crops. This released men and women from the necessity of living in areas with abundant rainfall. Some of them moved into river valleys with dry climates, which were the eventual sites of almost all the major early civilizations of the world, such as that of Egypt on the Nile, Mesopotamia between the 'Tigris and Euphrates, India on the Indus, and China on the Yellow River.

By 5000 B.C. small settlements dependent on irrigation agriculture were established throughout southern Mesopotamia. The effort of digging and maintaining canals would have been too great for one man or even for one family; a community effort must have been required. However, this was not in itself adequate incentive (as was once thought) for urban culture to develop. The small settlements continued for hundreds of years before the beginnings of urbanization.

Between approximately 4000 and 3000 B.C. a series of major technological changes took place in the southern settlements, ultimately leading to urban civilization. The plow was invented, permitting each farmer to support a larger number of people through his efforts; the wheel made possible wagons and greater pottery production; metals were smelted and formed into tools, utensils, and weapons, the shapes of which had been impossible in stone. Meanwhile, existing technologies were developed on a larger scale: mudbrick was used to build monumental fortifications and structures, wider

and deeper canals were dug and maintained. By the end of the period scribes throughout Mesopotamia were using a uniform written script to record the details of administration of the new cities.

The order in which these changes took place is unclear, as is the stimulus for them. As is true of all historical events, it is highly unlikely that a single cause can be determined. A set of conditions, including, no doubt, the climate, the natural resources of the region, the technological sophistication of the inhabitants, the productivity of the soil, and so on, combined to entice men and women to live in larger communities and to join forces for their common good. Behind all their cooperative effort we can detect a central government in each city, organizing manpower and resources in the interests of the welfare of the city and its gods.

The earliest Mesopotamian documents are written in pictographic script which could represent any language. The script later became partly syllabic; that is, writers attempted in some places to render the sounds of the language, and at this point historians can recognize the language as Sumerian. Sumerian was the predominant written language until after 2000 B.C. From earliest times, however, it is clear that not all Mesopotamians spoke Sumerian. Some of the names in the texts are of people who spoke a Semitic language called Akkadian. Akkadian is related to modern Arabic and Hebrew and became the principal written and spoken language in Mesopotamia after 2000 B.C. Throughout the third millennium B.C., the Akkadian speakers and Sumerian speakers seem to have shared the land in harmony with one another, the Sumerians dominating the southern half of the country, and the Akkadians dominating the north.

In this unit students will learn about the principal achievements of early Sumerian city-dwellers, and especially about their system of writing which was spread throughout Mesopotamia and ultimately beyond by means of what seems to have been a standardized school curriculum.

DRAMATIC MOMENT
An Argument Between Two School Rowdies (Primary Source)

Two school graduates, named Enkimansi and Girnishag exchange insults:

Enkimansi:

> You dolt, numbskill, school pest, you illiterate, you Sumerian ignoramus, your hand is terrible; it cannot even hold the stylus properly; it is unfit for writing and cannot take dictation. And yet you say you are a scribe like me.

Girnishag:

> What do you mean lam not a scribe like you? When you write a document it makes no sense. When you write a letter it is illegible. You go to divide up an estate, but are unable to divide up the estate. When you go to survey the field, you can't hold the measuring line. You can't hold a nail in your hand; you have no sense. You don't know how to arbitrate between the contesting parties, you are one of the most incompetent of tablet writers. What are you fit for, can anyone say?

Enkirnansi:

> You are the laziest of scribes, the most careless of men. When you do multiplication it is full of mistakes. In computing areas you confuse length with width. Squares, triangles, circles and sectors: you treat them all without understanding.

Girnishag:

> Me I was raised on Sumerian. I am the son of a scribe. But you are a bungler, a windbag. When you try to shape a tablet you can't even smooth the clay. When you try to write a line your hand can't manage the tablet. Yet you claim to know a Sumerian like me!

Lesson I
Readiness: What is History?

A. Lesson Objectives

1. To be able to create accurate timelines.

2. To identify the relative importance or insignificance of events and turning points in their own history.

3 To recognize that some events are determinants of others.

4. To recognize that some events in our lives are constants in spite of other conditions.

5. To define vocabulary words.

B. Background Generalizations

1. Our lives represent a succession of irreversible events.

2. We can categorize our personal lives into periods (infancy, toddler, etc.)

3. Events which rely on memory alone are more difficult to reconstruct.

4. Events in our lives are often determined by People and Place.

5. Some events are more important than others.

6. Some events determine subsequent events in your life because they are historically significant. (Historical “firsts.”)

7. Some parts of our lives continue regardless of the people or place. Some parts of our lives change as events, people and places change.

C. Lesson Activities

Assign the students to create a pictorial or narrative timeline of their lives. During the first class period, discuss the assignment. They will need to include at least two major (do not define the word major, allow the definition to emerge as they think about the assignment) and at least four minor events. They should identify the major and minor events in some visual manner, i.e. color code. They should include the people and the place involved in each event. Encourage them to look through their old photographs and school

papers or diaries. If time allows, they should interview an older person in their household and create a similar timeline for him or her. They should complete their timelines before the second class. On the second day, students should share timelines in small groups and then discuss them as a whole class.

D. SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. How many people had a difficult time with the assignment? Why? Was it difficult to remember? Why was it difficult? Which events were easiest to remember? Did anyone have a scrapbook to refer to? A diary? Old letters?

2. Which events did you decide to label major events? Why? Which events were minor? Why?

3. How did major events affect your life? Did things change? Did your life change after the minor events?

4. Who were the people involved? Would the event have taken place if the cast of characters had been different?

5. Where were you during the major events? Would the events have occurred if you had been at a different place? Why?

6. Have any things stayed the same (continuity) for you during your life? (e.g. People, places, friendships, concerns, opinions, physical needs, social needs)

7. What generalizations can you make about change and continuity in your life? What generalizations can you make about the relationship between people, places and events in time?

8. Optional: If any timelines were done that went back one or two generations, have students examine major past events which might have affected their lives today.

E. VOCABULARY

time
history
continuity
change
significant
events

F. EVALUATING THE LESSON

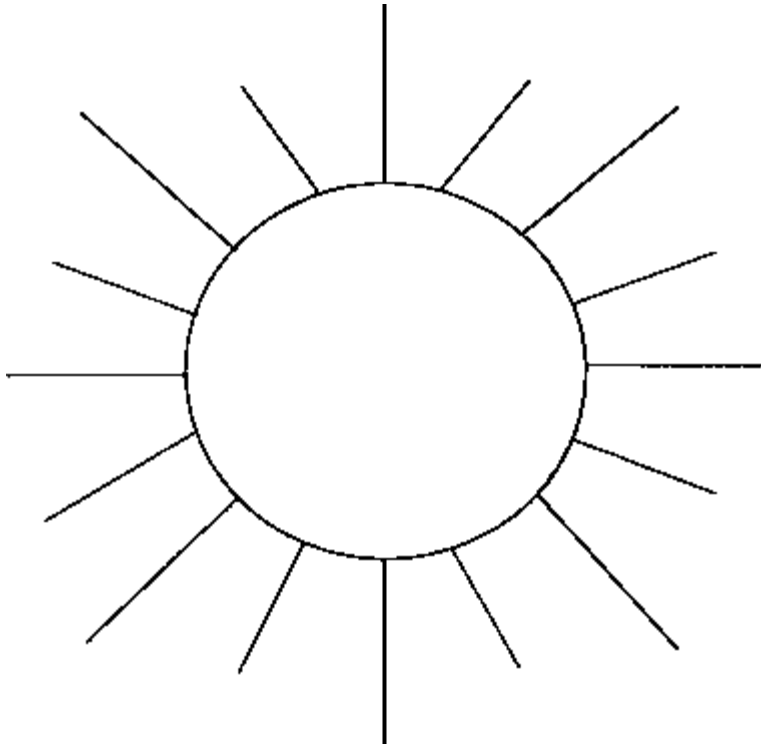
1. Check for understanding by having students brainstorm on ideas, feelings, concepts that relate to history.

2. Encourage students to cluster ideas together and write a one to five sentence statement defining history. (**Student Handout 1**)

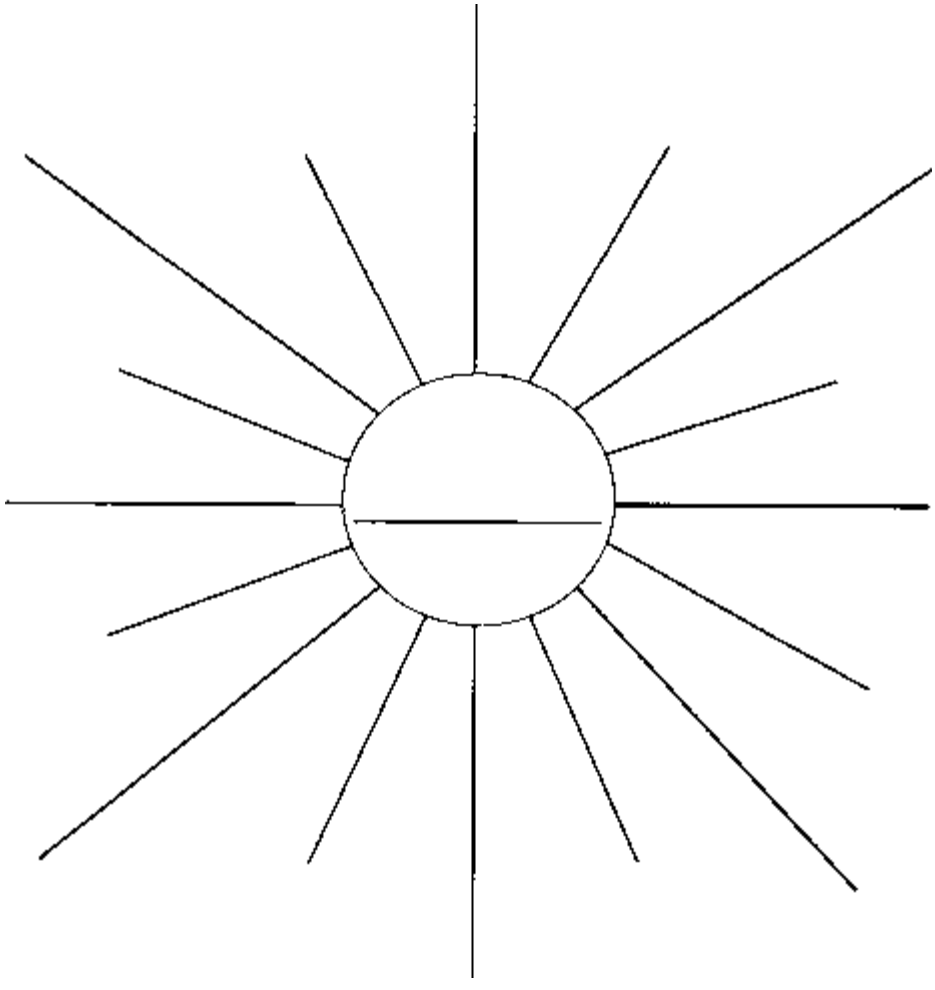
3. Spin Wheel: Brainstorm about your subject on an associative basis. (**Student Handout 2**)

4. Use **Student Handout 3** to list and classify information from the categories on the Spin Wheel.

CLUSTER DIAGRAM



SPIN WHEEL



List information from the Spin Wheel (Student Handout 3)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

Generate major categories. Then classify and subordinate information from the wheel.

I. _____ *Category I*

_____
_____
_____
_____

II. _____ *Category II*

_____
_____
_____
_____

III. _____ *Category III*

_____
_____
_____
_____

IV. _____ *Category IV*

_____
_____
_____
_____

LESSON II
GEOGRAPHIC DISCUSSIONS

A. LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to identify Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East on a world map.

2. To define vocabulary words.

3. To be able to describe the ancient Fertile Crescent, ing the life-style of its inhabitants.

B. BACKGROUND GENERALIZATIONS

1. People have physical needs that must be met for survival. These needs include food, water and shelter.

2. People depend on their natural geography to meet these needs.

3. People seek fertile land to help them meet their physical needs.

4. The first civilizations occurred in the Middle East.

5. The Middle East is an area which borders upon Asia, Africa, and Europe.

6. People adapt to the natural environment but, if able to cooperate with other people, they can effect change and control natural conditions and forces. Such cooperation is a sign of a civilization.

7. Much of the Middle East is a desert.

8. The first civilizations are thought to have started in an area of the Middle East known as the Fertile Crescent

9. Two rivers cross the Fertile Crescent: The Tigris River and the Euphrates River.

10. The land between these rivers was known as Mesopotamia.

11. It is believed that the early peoples of Mesopotamia organized to regulate and control the flooding of the rivers by building and maintaining great irrigation and dike systems.

12. The area known as Mesopotamia in ancient times is today the country of Iraq.

13. The geography of the Mesopotamian region affected the development of civilization.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Students should read and discuss **Student Handout 4** in small groups and define the vocabulary words.

2. Students need to look at modern globes, global projection maps, and flat maps (political and physical) to locate the Middle East and present day Iraq. Have them compare these **to Student Handout 5** "Ancient Mesopotamia, 3100 B.C. 1600 B.C." Students should study photographs of the Middle East and discuss desert environments, and ways in which man can adapt to a desert environment. Have them color code areas of a blank world map Asia, Africa, Europe, The Middle East, Iraq, The Tigris River, The Euphrates River, The Fertile Crescent; Mesopotamia.

D. SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. While looking at various maps and photographs:

   a. Describe what you see.

   b. Where is _____?

   c. What areas surround it?

   d. What physical features are shown?

   e. How might these physical features affect the lives of the people there?

   f. How are the physical features the same or different from where you live?

   g. Which area would be most desirable for living? Why?

h. What might be some problems you could encoun ter in the area known as Mesopotamia?

i. How might you solve the problem of geographical undesirability of an area? Could you do it alone?

E. Vocabulary

desert
valley
continent
Europe
Asia
Africa
Middle East
Fertile Crescent
Mesopotamia
irrigation
dike
reservoir
civilization
natural resource
interdependent
cooperation
adaptation

F. Evaluating The Lesson

1. Check for understanding of the vocabulary words. (i.e. match the word to a definition or a picture.)

THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATION: GEOGRAPHY

The earliest civilization of man arose thousands of years ago in an area of the Middle East known as the "Fertile Crescent." This is an area shaped like an arc, starting on the Eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, curving northward, then south and ending at the Persian Gulf.

Most of the land in the Middle East is desert with little rainfall or food supplies. The eastern area of the Fertile Crescent, however, lies between two large rivers, the Tigris River and the Euphrates River. The land in between the rivers at their southern ends is a low valley. In ancient times the valley was known as Mesopotamia ("land between the rivers"). Today that land is called Iraq.

These two rivers, it is believed, played an important role in the development of man s first civilization. The Tigris River, in the North, is the deeper of the two rivers and it carries a larger amount of water. The Urban civilization developed between 3500 and 3000 B.C. in the Southern tip of Euphrates; in the South, carries large amounts of soil in its water. This soil often sinks to the bottom of the river and makes the river more shallow. Then the river over flows and floods the surrounding valley.

The flat valley land of Mesopotamia was often dry but the flooding would bring it rich soil, and make the land fertile and suitable for farming. The floods though were difficult to predict and would cause much damage to crops and homes.

Ancient people wanted to take advantage of the fertile land, but they need ed to develop ways to control the rivers. And this they did. They built a large irrigation system with a network of canals and dikes. The canals led the water to the fields and the dikes kept the rivers away from new crops and homes. They built reservoirs to store water for the dry seasons.

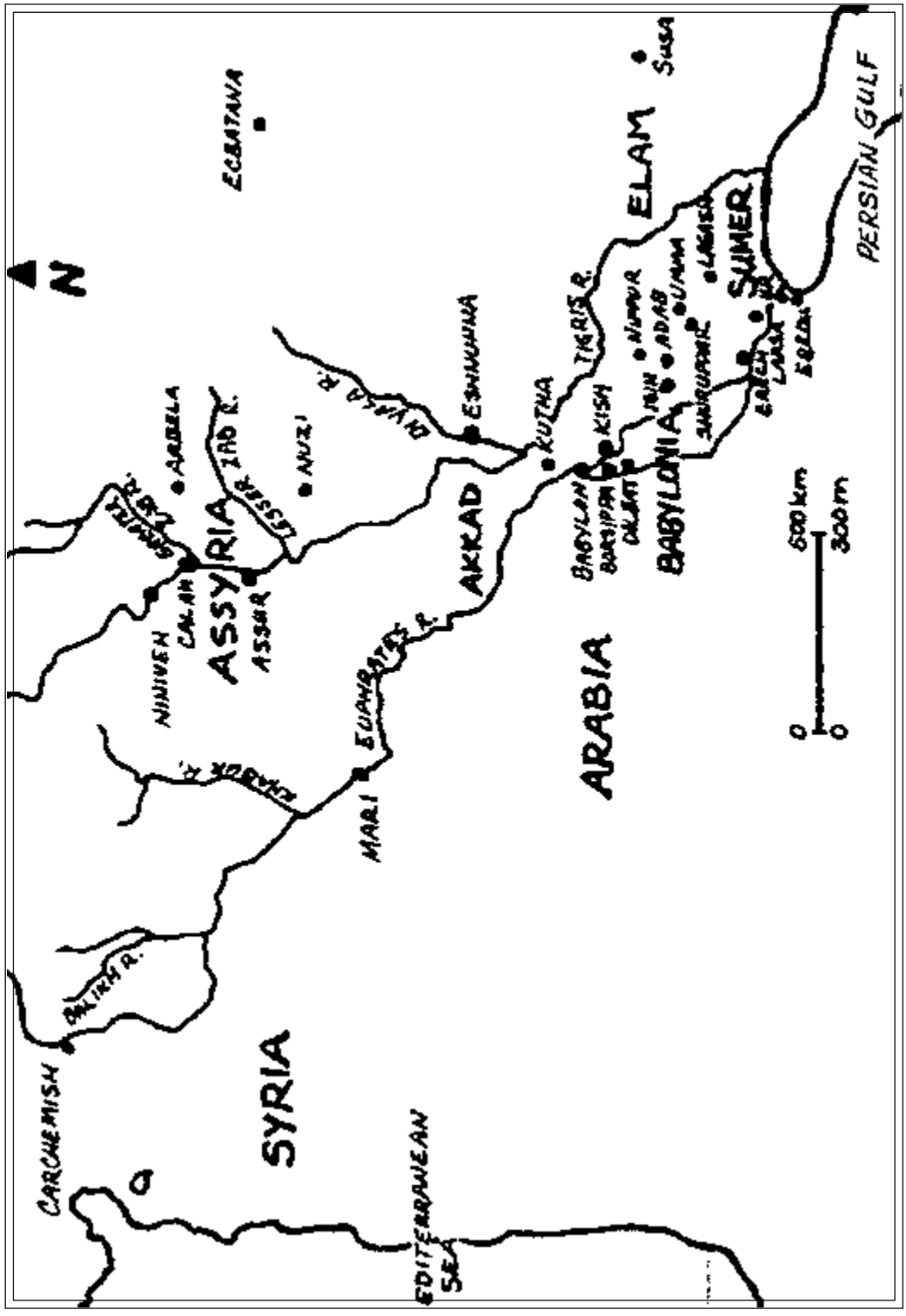
The irrigation system grew large and complicated and it took much cooperation and many different types of workers to keep the system clean and in good repair. Some historians believe that the results of the need to maintain and control the rivers caused the ancient people of Mesopotamia to become interdependent and form and organize the first city-states of mankind: a civilization began.

Urban civilization developed between 3500 and 3000 B.C. in the Southern tip of the Fertile Crescent. This is near the Persian Gulf. The region was called Sumer and its people were known as Sumerians. The land in Sumer

had no good stones or timber for building. The people needed to adapt the region s natural resources to their purposes. For shelter they bundled reeds together to form columns. The bun dles were then tied and set into holes in the ground. The tops were bent and tied together to form arches. More reeds were used as cross es and then woven into mats for roofs. The people in Sumer also used bricks made from natural clay to build elaborate buildings. For pot tery, they baked and glazed the clay as earlier people had, and in addition, they learned to use potters wheels and produce large quantities of pots and bowls.

Another plentiful natural resource was the date palm tree. They used the fruit of these trees for food and the leaves and trunks of the trees for fuel and thread.

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA, 3100 B.C.—1600 B.C.



Illustrated by Carole Collier Frick

LESSON III: ACHIEVEMENTS OF SUMER

A. LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the conditions which led to the formation of the city-state.

2. To identify three facets of the Sumerian belief system.

3. To explain the significance of the invention of Cuneiform writing.

4. To define the vocabulary words.

B. BACKGROUND GENERALIZATIONS

1. Efficient irrigation systems led to food surpluses which in turn led to a differentiated society and the formation of cities (the city state).

2. Sumerians believed that their gods controlled all conditions of human life.

3. Belief in the Sumerian gods played an important role in the development of Sumerian civilization.

4. Pleasing the gods was the basis of authority for Sumerian priests and kings.

5. Sumerian civilization was responsible for the formation of many ideas and the invention of many tools

6. The Sumerians were the first people to leave written records.

7. Written language is a uniquely human form of communication.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Students should read and discuss **Student Handout 6** (see questions below for guidelines to use during discussion).

2. Students should play a game of "telephone:" The teacher relays a prepared message about the importance of trade, commerce, writing, government, etc. (not subject matter of personal importance to the students) and whispers the entire message in one student's ear. This student passes it along (orally) to the next student. The last student will repeat the message heard. Compare the first and last message. Then the teacher should relay a second message on a note card. Each student copies the message on a note card and passes it down. The last student reads the last note card. Discuss with the students what they observed from this experience. Ask: How might writing affect the lives of human beings? H•• might it have affected the lives of people in ancient Sumer?

3. Have students try to remember (make a record in their minds) all events which take place within a given set of time (10-15 minutes). The next day have them describe the events. Then have them record all events in a new 10-15 minute period by taking notes. The following day they should refer to their notes and share the events. Compare the two processes of recording information. Ask the students to consider again the questions listed in activity two above.

4. Bring clay into the classroom. Give students an opportunity to use a pointed stick and write messages in the clay to simulate Sumerian clay tablets (see **Student Handout 7**.)

5. Students, in small groups, can design a ziggurat, make small clay bricks and build a model temple (use **Student Handout 8** as a guide.)

D. SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. What physical needs would have prompted the people of Sumer to show interest in astronomy and the movements of the heavenly bodies? (Refer back to **Lesson Two** on Geography)

2. How did the cuneiform writing system reflect the available natural resources of Sumer?

3. How do you think we know about pre-history? (History before written communication.)

4. How do you think writing changed our knowledge of history and ancient people?

5. How do animals communicate?

6. What other forms of communication do people use? (Besides written communication.)

7. What other animals communicate with written systems?

8. Why do you think the people of Sumer felt the need to create a writing system?

9. What types of information do you think they wrote down?

E. VOCABULARY

city-state
surplus
ziggurat
textiles
numeration
cuneiform
archaeologist

F. EVALUATING THE LESSON

1. Check for understanding of the vocabulary.

2. Students should generate examples of the above concepts that they have experienced from their own daily life (i.e. textiles such as cotton, wool). Pose the question, “How is the numeration system devised in ancient Mesopotamia similar to our own Hindu-Arabic numeration system?”

THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIZATION: ACHIEVEMENTS OF SUMER

In early Sumer, most people were farmers. As the people learned to control and maintain the irrigation systems, their food supply became more plentiful. Surplus grain could be stored. It was no longer necessary for everyone to farm. Many people developed new skills and new jobs. They became carpenters, potters, metal workers, boat builders, jewelers and fishermen. Eventually the farming villages developed into cities. By 3000 B.C., the land of Sumer consisted of a dozen city-states, each having a large walled city, surrounded by small villages and farms.

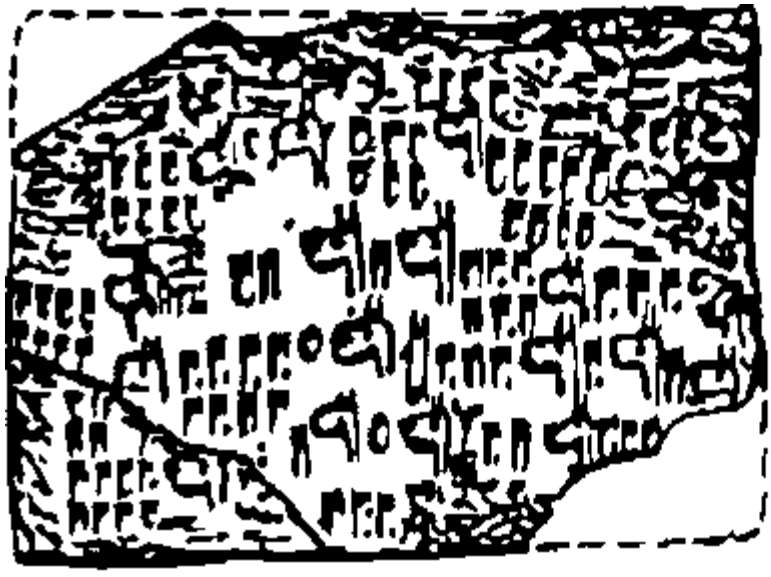
By 2000 B.C., the main feature of the city-state was its temple, called a ziggurat (ZIG-uh-rat). These temples were built of mud bricks and had several stories, each one smaller than the one below forming a pyramid shape. The lower stories were platforms of solid mud brick. The ziggurat was the tallest and most important building in the city. Some were perhaps 150 feet high and could be seen for miles. The top story of the ziggurat was devoted to worshipping the city god and goddess. The temple had storage areas for grain, gems and textiles which were kept for the comfort of the gods and to support the temple dependents. The Sumerians believed that each city belonged to a main god, to whom the city had been assigned on the day the world was created. They believed that the people were slaves of the gods. The people needed to please the gods or risk great harm.

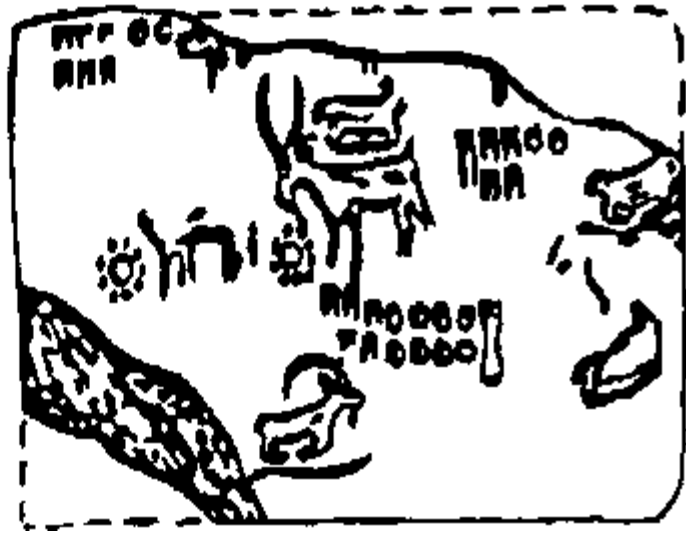
The ruler of each city had authority because he was considered to be the representative of the god who owned the land. It was the responsibility of the priest or the king to interpret what the gods wanted and communicate this to the people. Many people were ordered to build temples, roads and irrigation projects. The people would obey both to please the gods and because service was required by the government.

The people of Sumer achieved many other great things. They were probably the first people to use a wheel. They invented the arch, a curved structure built to support weight over an opening in a building. They also invented a calendar based on the 28 day cycle of the moon. They created a numeration system based on the number 60 leading to such measurements as the 60-second minute, and the 60-minute hour.

But the greatest creation of the Sumerians was the invention of the first system of writing. The system is called cuneiform (kyoo NEE uh fawrm) and is based on a set of written symbols made with wedge shaped marks on wet clay. Archaeologists have found over half a million Sumerian clay tablets which have survived over time. These tablets have helped us learn much about this ancient civilization.

CLAY TOKENS





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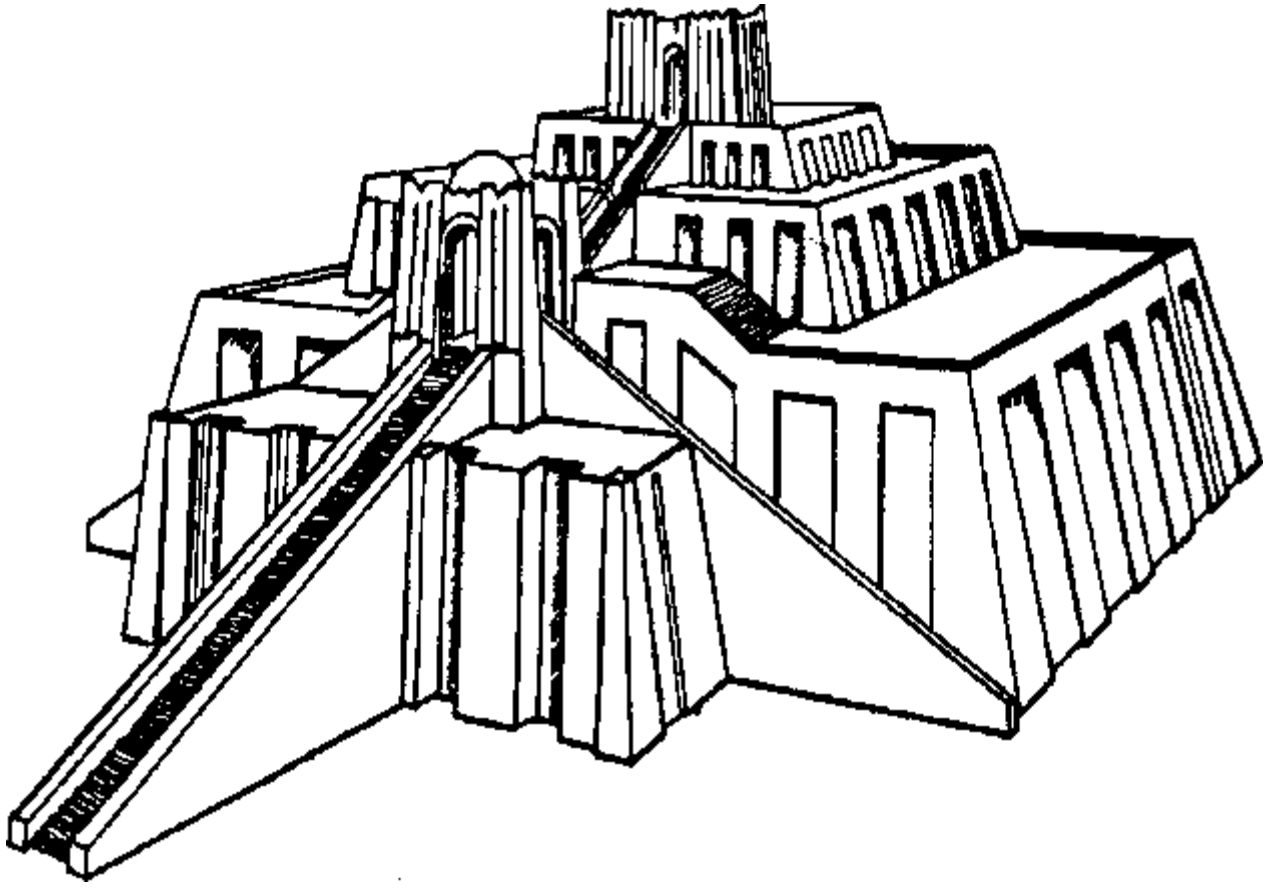
SUMERIAN ZIGGURAT



Illustrated by Carole Collier Frick

LESSON IV: THE LIFE OF A SCRIBE

A. LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the life and educa tion of a scribe.

2. To compare the curriculum of a Sumerian school with his / her own curriculum.

3. To define the vocabulary words.

B. BACKGROUND GENERALIZATIONS

1. Literacy was not a right in Ancient Sumer; it was a profession.

2. Those who mastered the art of cuneiform writing were held in high regard by Sumerians.

3. Those who mastered the art were called scribes.

4. Scribes began their schooling at an early age and studied under strict discipline for many years.

5. The schoolhouse was called the Edubba.

6. The education system had two purposes: a) to train scribes to satisfy the economic and administrative needs of the temple and palace and b) to copy and memorize literary works.

7. Most students came from wealthy families where the fathers worked as city officials (governors, ambassadors, temple administrators, accountants, and military officers) or especially, as scribes.

8. The school's headmaster was called the Ummia ("expert professor" or "school father"). Pupils were called "school sons" and assistant professors were called "big brothers."

9. The main aim of the school was to teach the scribe how to write.

10. The daily training consisted of copying and memo rizing written forms prepared by teachers.

11. The written forms began with mastery of syllabic symbols, (tu ta ti, nu na ni, bu ba bi, zu za zi), moving on to mastery of lists of words, then mas tery of a collection of words, short sentences, proverbs, fables, and legal contracts.

12. The Sumerians prepared massive numbers of lists which classified, categorized and accounted for names of observable animal parts, birds, fish, trees, plants, stones, stars, objects made of a particular material (e.g. wood, metal, leather), types of pottery, food, cities, rivers, canals, and fields.

13. Scribes were prepared for different specialized areas—administrative bureaucrats, recorders of weddings, contracts, letter writers, accountants.

14. Kings were usually illiterate. They had scribes in charge of royal correspondence.

C. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Students should read the **First Primary Source** (**Student Handout 9**):

   a. They should pretend that they are historians who have found and deciphered the writings. After reading the sections they can list everything they have learned about schooling and the life of a scribe in Ancient Sumer.

   b. They can then take parts (Teacher, Student, Moni tors,) and act out the daily life of a scribe.

   c. Teachers can simulate a typical day of a scribe. Prepare a list of words, or a piece of writing (these can be vocabulary words from the unit or a section of one of the Primary Sources.) Students should copy the list or essay, memorize it, then recopy it and recite it.

2. Teachers should share, in a direct lesson, the information presented in background generalizations. Discussion should include sample questions from the list in section **D** ("Sample Questions for Discussion of Background Materials").

3. Answer to the riddle: *A Schoolhouse*.

4. Students should act out the **Second Primary Source**. (This could be the section that they copy, memorize and recopy.)

5. Students should create a journal entry for either a scribe in training or a professional scribe who reads and writes daily royal correspondence.

D. SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. How is the purpose of schooling in Ancient Sumer different from or the same as the purpose of schooling today?

2. Why was literacy limited to a few people?

3. Do you think the Scribes wished to extend knowledge of cuneiform to the general public? Why might they want to be the only literate people?

4. How is the curriculum of the Sumerian School different from or the same as the curriculum in your school?

5. How is discipline in the Sumerian School different from or the same as discipline in your school?

6. How is the conversation between the two scribes different from or similar to conversations between students in your school?

E. VOCABULARY

literacy
Ummia
administrative
illiterate
correspondence
Edubba

F. EVALUATING THE LESSON

1. Use the journal activity (**Lesson Activity #4**) for evaluation.

2. Encourage the students to use the vocabulary words in their journal entry.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SUMERIAN SCHOOL BOY
FROM A SUMERIAN ESSAY "SCHOOL DAYS"
First Primary Source

Characters:

Ummia—the School Head Master, the School Father
The Old Man—a Scribe and School alumnus
School Son—pupil training to be a scribe
Big Brother—an assistant professor

Place:

Edubba—the school house

One evening an old man, now working as a recorder of observable trees and plants within the city-state of Sumer, visits his old Edduba to chat with a young boy. The child wonders of the past of this old man and asks:

"Old Grad, where did you go when you were young?"
The Old Man replies, "I went to school."
The boy continues, "what did you do in School?"
And the old man begins to reminisce:

> I recited my tablet, ate my lunch, prepared my new tablet, wrote it, finished it; then my model tablets were brought to me; and in the afternoon my exercise tab lets were brought to me. When school was dismissed, I went home, entered the house, and found my father sitting there, I explained my exercise-tablets to my father, recited my tablet to him and he was delighted and full of joy. Often I would turn to my house servants and say, 'I am thirsty, give me water to drink; I am hungry, give me bread to eat; wash my feet, set up my bed, I want to go to sleep. Wake me early in the morning, I must not be late lest my ummia cane me.'
>
> When I arose early in the morning, I faced my mother and said to her: 'give me my lunch, I want to go to school.' My mother gave me two rolls and I set out to school. In school the fellow in charge of punctuality said: 'Why are you late?' Afraid and with pounding heart, I entered before the ummia and made a respectful curtsy.

My headmaster read my tablet and said There is something miss and he caned me. The fellow in charge of neatness said, you loitered in the street and did not straighten up your clothes, and he caned me. The fellow in charge of the assembly said, 'Why did you stand at ease without permission?' and he caned me. The fellow in charge of Sumerian said, 'Why didn t you speak Sumerian?' and he caned me. My Big Brother said, 'Your hand is unsatisfactory,' and he caned me.

And so I began to hate the scribal art and neglect the scribal art. My Big Brother took no delight in me, stopped teaching me his skill in the scribal art and would not prepare me in the matters of being a young scribe or the art of being a big brother.

So I turned to my father and asked that he give my teacher a bit of extra salary so that he will be more kindly toward me; free the teacher from arithmetic so later when he counts up all the school affairs of the students, let him count me and not neglect me any longer.

And my father did just that. My teacher was brought from school to my house and was seated in the biggest chair. I attended and served him while he talked with my father.

Then my father said to the teacher, When my little fellow opened his hand, you made wisdom enter there; you showed him all the fine points of the scribal art; you made him see the solutions of the mathematical and arithmetical problems, you taught him how to make the cuneiform script.

Then my father told his servants, Dress the teacher in a garment, give him some extra salary and put a ring on his hand.

Later on the teacher spoke to me, He said:

> "Young fellow, because you hated not my words, neglected them not, may you complete the scribal art from beginning to end. Because you gave me everything without stint, paid me a salary larger than my efforts and have honored me, may Nidaba, the queen of guardian angels be your guardian angel; may your pointed stylus write well for you, may your

exercises contain no faults. Of your brothers, may you be their leader; of your friends may you be their chief; may you rank the highest among the schoolboys. You have carried out well the school s activities, you are a man of learning. You have exalted Nidaba, the queen of learning, O Nidaba, praise.'

A Sumerian Riddle

What is it?
A house which like heaven has a plow,
Which like a copper-kettle is cloth-covered,
Which like a goose stands on a base,
He whose eyes are not open enters it,
He whose eyes are wide open comes out of it?

An Argument Between Two School Rowdies
Second Primary Source

Two school graduates, named Enkimansi and Girnishag exchange insults:

Enkimansi:

You dolt, numbskill, school pest, you illiterate, you Sumerian ignoramus, your hand is terrible; it cannot even hold the stylus properly; it is unfit for writing and cannot take dictation. And yet you say you are a scribe like me.

Girnishag:

What do you mean I am not a scribe like you? When you write a document it makes no sense. When you write a letter it is illegible. You go to divide up an estate, but are unable to divide up the estate. When you go to survey the field, you can't hold the measuring line. You can't hold a nail in your hand; you have no sense. You don't know how to arbitrate between the contesting parties, you are one of the most incompetent of tablet writers. What are you fit for, can any one say?

Enkimansi:

You are the laziest of scribes, the most careless of men. When you do multiplication it is full of mistakes. In computing areas you confuse length with width. Squares, triangles, circles and sectors; you treat them all without understanding.

Girnishag:

Me, I was raised on Sumerian. I am the son of a scribe. But you are a bungler, a windbag. When you try to shape a tablet you can't even smooth the clay. When you try to write a line your hand can't manage the tablet. Yet you claim to know Sumerian like me!

LESSON V: THE BEGINNINGS OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the events which lead to the development of cuneiform.

2. To identify the uses to which cuneiform was put in Sumeria.

3. To identify Sir Henry Rawlinson and his role in deciphering cuneiform.

4. To define the vocabulary words.

B. BACKGROUND GENERALIZATIONS

1. The first system of writing developed in Mesopotamia at the same time as the development of cities.

2. Writing systems developed to meet the needs of mankind.

3. Writing systems descended from a system of accounting that used clay tokens to indicate amounts of goods and possessions.

4. As the needs of the Sumerian culture increased, the variety and amounts of goods and services increased. To meet increased demands the accounting and writing Systems became more descriptive$_1$ and more efficient and uniform.

5. The people of Sumer believed that recording information in writing was a way to achieve immortality.

6. Writing in the state of Sumer was used for the service of the state and the gods, as well as for literary works, private contracts and personal letters.

7. Signs in written language can represent words (logograms and pictograms), sounds (phonetic syllables or alphabetic letters), or be helpful clarifiers of ideas (determinatives).

8. Codes must be deciphered.

9. Much of our knowledge about the ancient past comes from documents written in languages that have been deciphered only in the past 150 years.

10. Cuneiform was deciphered in the nineteenth century by a British army officer and scholar, Sir Henry Rawlinson.

11. Many ancient scripts have yet to be deciphered.

C. STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Assign students **Student Handout 11** for background reading.

2. Have students examine the charts of Sumerian pictograms (**Student Handout 12**) and Egyptian hieroglyphs (**Student Handout 13**) which were also a form of pictographic written communication). Students should try to copy many of the symbols and discuss the possible meaning of each sign. They should put their interpretation of each symbol in the space available on the charts.

3. Students should then create pictograms of their own. They should write the pictograms with as many writing tools as possible (with pencil, marker, paint, computer graphics, using a pointed stick on clay) to realize that available tools could affect the style and design of pictograms.

4. Students should create pictographic symbols for supplies in the classroom and try to create tokens (clay if possible, paper or raw pieces of potatoes if clay is not available) for each object. Their task is to keep an account of the amounts of each commodity in the room. (i.e. I chalkboard, 5 erasers, 30 pencils, 100 pieces of paper). Have them discuss the pros and cons of a system which has a separate token for each object. They should then create a symbol chart (or preferably a clay tablet), after the style of **Student Handouts 12** and **13** to represent a record of existing supplies in the room. They should create the first row of the chart or tablet using impressions from the tokens. (If clay is not avail-

able the students could make symbols on potatoes and print them to simulate the impressions.) Then, come up with a progression of symbols which represent different quantities of items (for example, a symbol or combination of symbols that represents 10 pencils or 25 pencils instead of only one.)

3. Give out **Student Handout 14** on the Morse code. Have students decipher the messages.

4. Give out **Student Handout 15**. Have them use the codes to write a message. Students can then exchange papers and try to decode each other's messages.

5. For more code work, have students attempt to write prose using "rebus" pictograms. As they realize the limitations of pictogram writing, encourage them to create a code to represent the sounds of syllables. Ask them to write a letter to a friend using their code. They should provide a key to their code and have a friend decipher the letter.

6. Encourage students to do independent research on famous code-breakers such as Henry Rawlinson or Georg Grotefend, (cuneiform), Thomas Young or Jean Francois Champollion, (hieroglyphics), Michael Ventris, (Linear B). Report findings to the class.

D. SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

After students have had extensive hands-on practice with codes, have them refer back to **Student Handout 11**. Lead a discussion with the following questions as a guide.

1. What difficulties might be associated with writing that is made up of pictograms alone?

2. Does a pictogram system tell us about the spoken language of a group of people?

3. Ho• would a uniform written language encourage trade?

4. How did the natural geography of Sumer affect the development of its writing system?

5. Why might the Kings of Sumer believe they were achieving immortality when they kept records of their possessions and exchanges of goods and services?

6. Why do you think it is said that "writing facilitated the organization of civilization but did not cause it?"

E. VOCABULARY

accounting
logogram
pictogram
determinative
decipher
immortality
impressions
symbol
stylus
commodity
deed
contract
domesticate
wedge
code

F. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

1. Check understanding of the vocabulary words by matching the words with definitions or pictures.

THE FIRST WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

It is believed that the writing system invented by the Sumerians around 3200 B.C., called cuneiform, was developed so that temple priests could keep track of goods entering and leaving the temple storehouses. For each item, a different combination of wedge shaped mark was made on a wet clay tablet, to be kept as a permanent record.

As far back as 8000 B.C., people kept track of the exchange of goods and services. Clay tokens represented each bushel of grain. As people began to domesticate different animals, the tokens began to take on various shapes and sizes to represent the differences. Tokens were stored in containers. As quantities of food and animals increased, the number of tokens needed became awkward to accumulate. A change in the system developed was needed soon, instead of carrying a large amount of different tokens, an impression of the tokens was made on one flat piece of clay. Then the people needed only a few day tablets in which to create their record of goods. Eventually a symbol was created to represent the amount of the specific object. For example, instead of having a clay tablet with thirty impressions of the "sheep token," a uniform symbol for thirty was developed and impressed next to a symbol of the sheep token. Finally, the symbol for the amount and the symbol for the specific commodity were drawn with a stylus directly onto the clay tablet. These symbols were pictures of the object, or designs to represent the word. This is called pictogram or logogram writing. Such writing worked well when temple storehouses were small, but as the cities grew, the types of objects to be recorded grew in variety and number. New marks continually had to be invented. It soon became necessary for another change in the system of written communication. Eventually, the people of Sumer began to use symbols to represent separate sounds. A name of an object was then represented by a combination of sound symbols. They were placed inside boxes sketched into the clay. Eventually the symbols became simpler in their line, shape and form. This made the work of the scribe less tedious and time consuming.

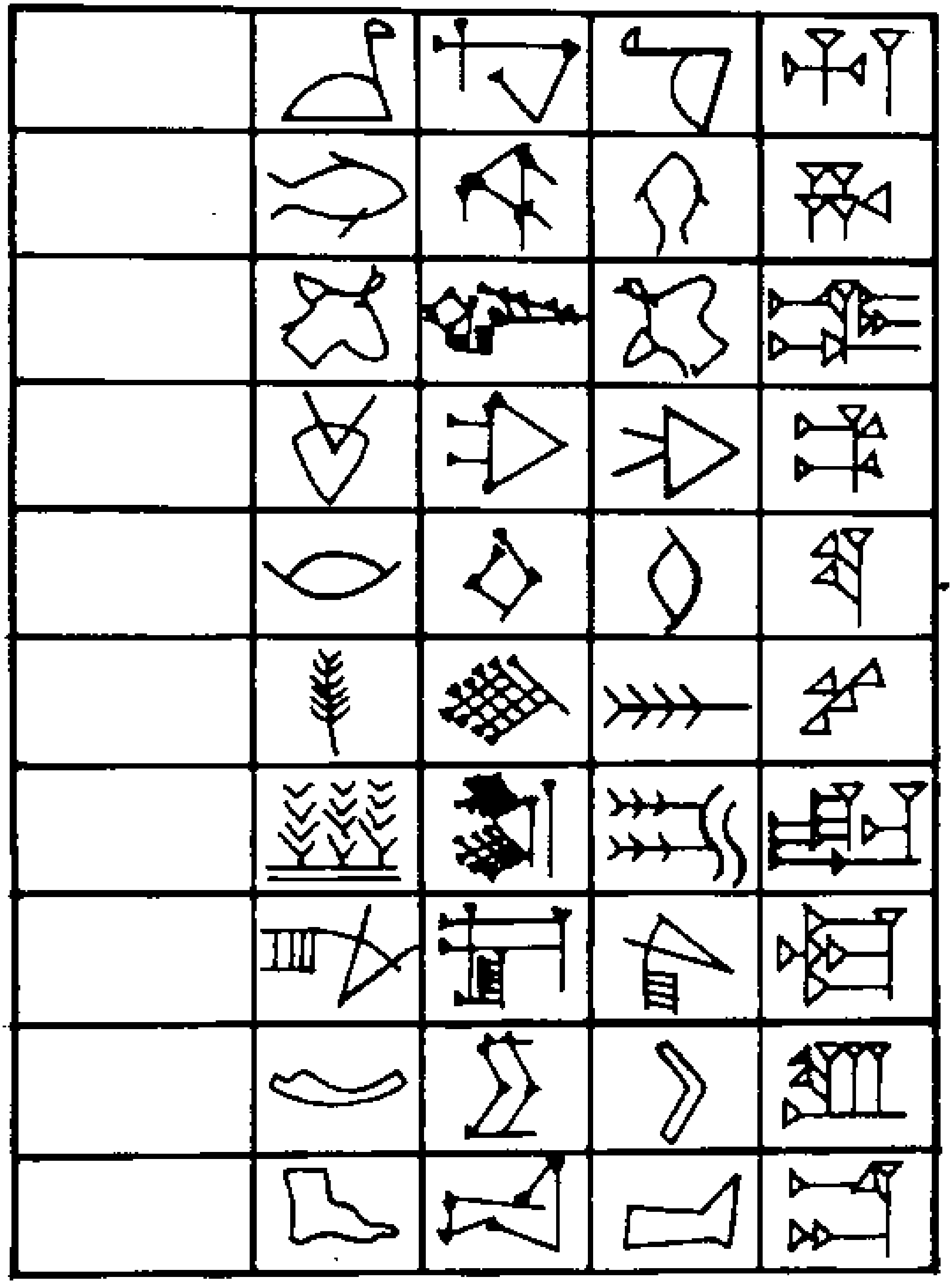
Cuneiform has about 600 signs representing objects and sound syllables, enabling the Sumerians to write entire sentences. Most Sumerian clay tablets that have been found are administrative documents such as deeds, re-

ceipts, contracts and massive lists of goods, services, and observable information. The Sumerians also wrote myths, epics and narrative poetry celebrating the deeds and adventures of the gods and heroes.

In the nineteenth century, after years of painstaking work, a British army officer and scholar named Sir Henry Rawlinson deciphered cuneiform (an act of codebreaking.)

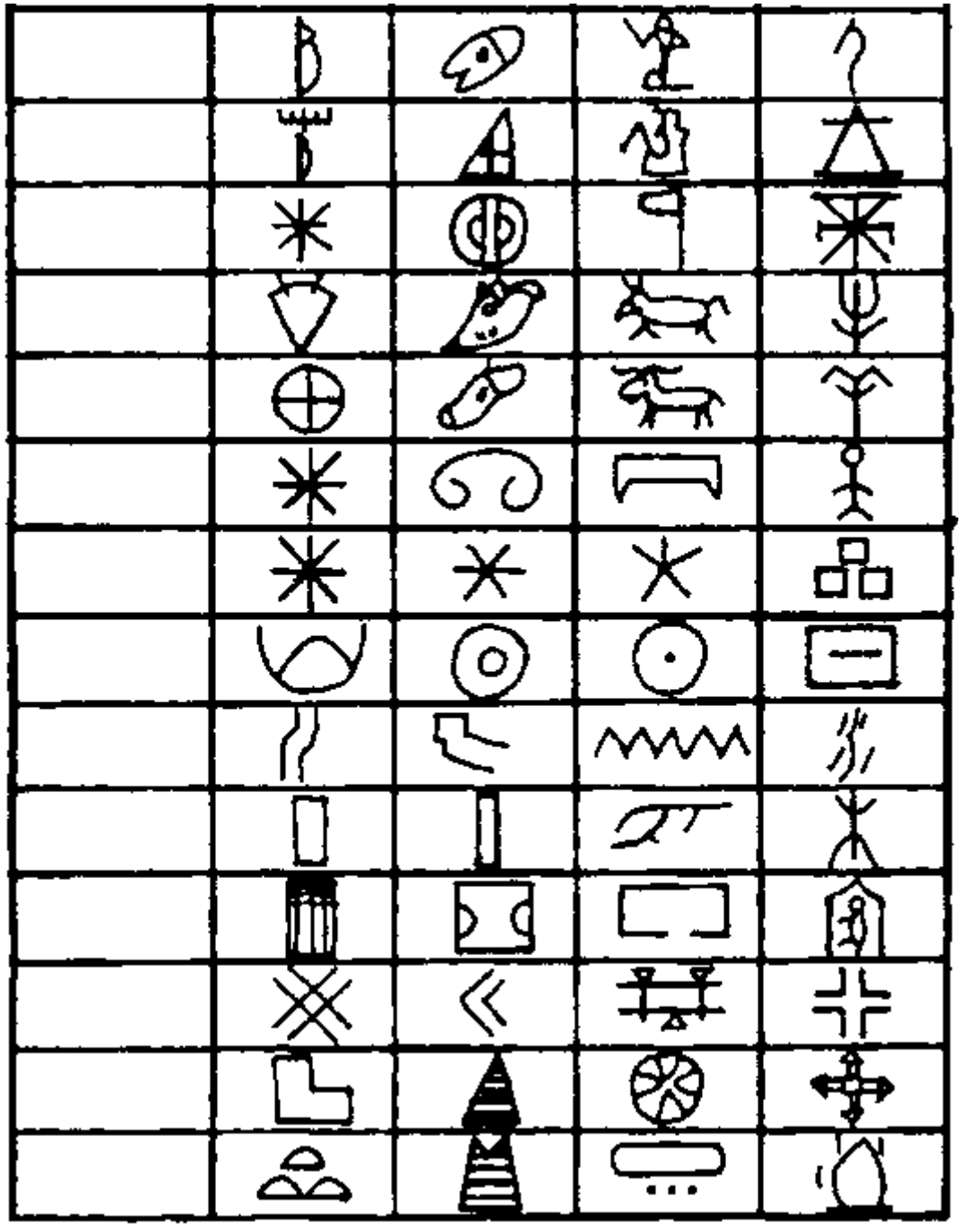
PICTORIAL ORIGIN OF TEN CUNEIFORM SIGNS

What do you think the original sign meant?	ORIGINAL PICTOGRAM (SIGN)	→	→	RESULTING CUNEIFORM SIGN



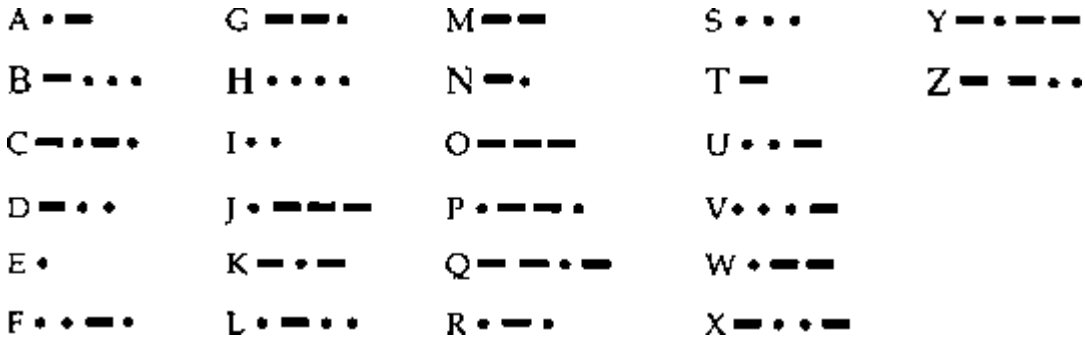
PICTORIAL ORIGIN OF FOURTEEN EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHICS

What do you think the original sign meant?	ORIGINAL PICTOGRAM (SIGN)	→	→	RESULTING HIEROGLYPHIC

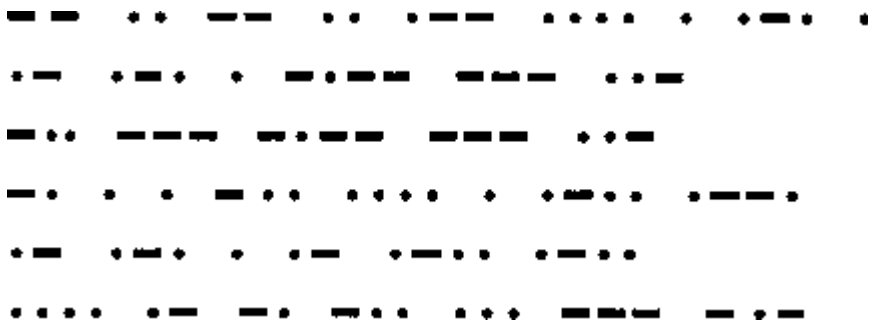


MORSE CODE

Morse Code: Below is the Morse Code alphabet of dots and dashes used by ships all over the world.

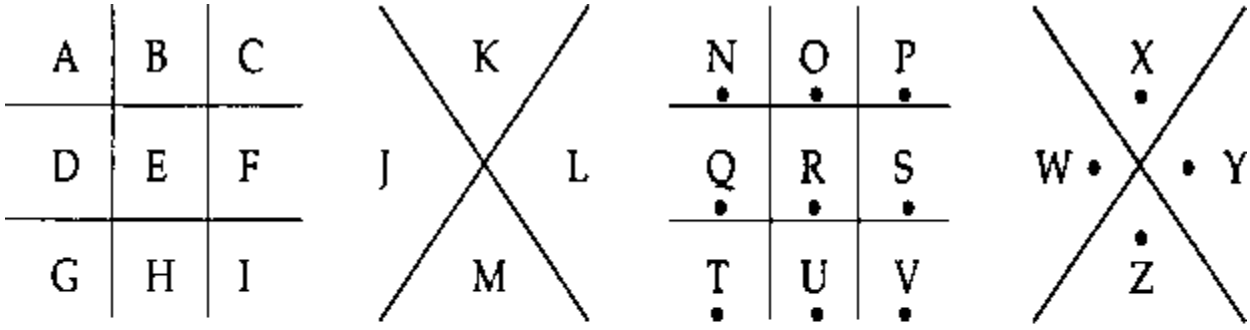


Use the Morse Code to decode the following message:

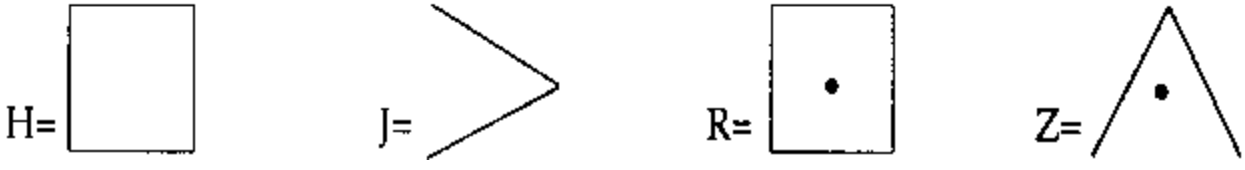


OTHER CODES

Here is a key to a code called *Pigpen*:



The symbol for each letter of the alphabet is the part of the diagram where it appears. For example:



Write a message using the *Pigpen* code. Exchange with a partner and try to decipher each other's messages.

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