

BETWEEN THE RIVERS

Vocabulary

In this unit you will learn about:

- > the geography of the Fertile Crescent
- > the Sumerians
- > the Babylonians, the Assyrians and the Persians

I. Geography

1. Read the text, then look at the maps carefully. Use the maps to write out the basic geographical information about Mesopotamia.

One of the world's earliest civilizations grew up on the fertile plains between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates which rise in the Armenian mountains. The land between the two rivers became known as Mesopotamia. The name comes from two Greek words, 'meso' meaning 'middle' and 'potamos' meaning 'river'. Nowadays this part is called Iraq.

Mesopotamia is sometimes called
The land between two rivers or
Cradle of Western Civilization

Geography of Mesopotamia - My notes



Vocabulary

1. Why would anyone wish to settle down in the middle of the desert in what is now lower Iraq?

2. Think of what the river could provide to the earliest civilizations.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

II. The Sumerians

Vocabulary

1. Read the following article and answer the questions.

The way to the city-state.

Some time between 5000 and 3500 BC, mountain folk from the north speaking a language called Sumerian moved into this plain. The Sumerians gave up hunting and began to farm. They learnt how to control the river floods, building earth banks, channels and ditches to direct water where they wanted it to go. They became very skilled farmers growing wheat, barley, vegetables and dates, craftsmen and builders of houses of dried mud. This was not able for one inhabitant even for one family. The families joined together to create a **village** that controlled the surrounding area. Some villages became political and commercial centres of a neighbouring territory and they also controlled smaller villages there. Gradually these centres changed into **cities** surrounded by walls made of clay. The cities were ruled by the **Council of Elders**. There was a large **temple** in the centre of each city. The temple was mainly religious centre, even the commercial and cultural centre and the place where the production was put down. The temple had its own fields farmed by slaves or servants. Priests and writers could write and so they could record commercial agenda, political events and observe the celestial bodies to foresee the floods. They also organised the work in the city, take care of

religious ceremonies and divided the production of the city among its inhabitants **moneyless**. Later this became the role of a king. The king lived in a **palace** that now became the centre of the city. The king and his officials / priests, writers and warriors / directed the city, organised work, supervised the irrigation work, divided the production, decided who should farm which land and defended the city against the enemies. The first cities called **city-states** were established by the Sumerians around 3500 BC. The cities of Sumer fought between each other constantly, mainly because of water supplies and land. Sometimes one city was the most important, sometimes another. For a time Kish was the strongest city, then Ereh, whose mysterious **King Gilgamesh** became the hero of many later stories, then Ur and finally Lagash.

1. Explain how the city-states were created.
2. Write out the well known Sumerian city-states.
3. Write out the centres of a city and the role they played.
4. Why were the cities surrounded by walls?

.. Draw a pyramid showing the structure of the Sumerian society. Then write what role each group of the Sumerian society had.

3. Read the article about the Sumerian architecture and religion.

Architecture

The greatest example of the Sumerian architecture was the temple, the centre of the city. The Sumerians built stepped temples called the **ziggurat**. One of the best known is the ziggurat at Ur built around 2100 BC and worshipped as the home of the **Moon God, Nanna**. The Ziggurats were built of clay bricks or wood brought from Libanon.

Religion

The Sumerians created polytheistic religion which later adapted Babylonians and Assyrians. They believed that the Gods created the world and a man, that they were responsible for fertility, famine, storms and wind. The kings were considered to be the descendants of the God and was worshipped as the God.

4. Look at the picture below and write out the main parts of the ziggurat.

The ziggurat at Ur in southern Iraq as it is now.



The ziggurat at Ur as it appeared c. 2100 BCE.

5. Return back to the Stone Age. Which buildings were used as shrines in the Paleolithic and then in the Neolithic Age?

6. Try to write in your own words what a polytheistic religion is?

7. Before you start reading the following story, find the meaning of these words.

quayside, a paved courtyard, cemetery, royal court, a harpist, a harp, to clutch, to

harness oxen, scattered cups, the tomb, a port, sacrifice, shrine

The mystery of Ur

The Sumerian city we know most about is **Ur**. It was found by an English team, led by **Leonard Wooley** between 1924 and 1934.

Ur, between 3200 BC and 2500 BC, was a rich and powerful **port**. The remains of lengthy quaysides have been found and inside fortified walls many of the houses were two storeys high with a large room facing on to a paved central courtyard. At the city's centre lay the **Sacred Area** where a palace, public buildings and temples stood. Towering over all else was the pyramid-shaped **ziggurat**. At the top of the ziggurat was the **shrine** of Nanna, the Moon God. On New Year's Day a procession of priests mounted to the top of the ziggurat and there made sacrifices to Nanna so that he would protect the city and its lands throughout the coming year.

Beside the Sacred Area, Wooley found the **royal cemetery**. As well as many beautiful and precious objects, he found the remains of an astonishing and terrible event.

In the tomb of the Queen Shub - Ad were more than sixty **female skeletons**. The fragments of their clothes and jewellery revealed that they were noblewomen from the royal court. Nearby were soldiers with their spears beside them, a harpist clutching his harp and oxen still harnessed to their wagons. The hands of most of the skeletons were raised as if to their mouths and little clay cups were scattered on the floor of the tomb. It seems that the servants of the dead king or queen followed the body to the tomb. There they took poison because their master or mistress could not continue **after - life** alone. Leonard Wooley called this area the **Death Pit**.

Who was Leonard Wooley?

10. Now read the article about the Sumerian inventions and write the basic ones out.

The Sumerian inventions

Sumerian craftsmen were very skilful. Firstly they began to use the **wheel** but it is not completely clear how it was invented. By 3250 BC the Sumerians had **wheeled carts** and, soon after, **pulleys** for raising water from their wells. Secondly they discovered how to make **bronze** by mixing copper and tin.

The Sumerians also used **sailing boats** on Tigris and Euphrates. They were also excellent **mathematicians** and **astronomers**. Though they could count in tens and hundreds, they preferred to use **60** as their basic **arithmetical unit**. From them came our **360 degree circle**, **60 minute hour** and **60 second minute**.

They also developed a complex **legal system**, a set of laws dealing harshly with wrongdoers. For example, if a house fell down because it had been badly built, and the owner was killed, then the builder was likely to be put to death. If a doctor through carelessness was responsible for his patient losing his eye, then he could expect to lose his hand.

Around 3000 BC the Sumerian traders started to make **picture signs** on **clay tablets** so that they had some record of their sales and purchases. This was the beginning of **writing**. The Sumerian writing is called **cuneiform**. The word also came from latin word '**cuneus**' meaning 'wedge'. For writing they used **soft clay tablets** on which they wrote with **reed pens**. If they wished to keep what they had written, they baked the clay tablets. **The cuneiform was a picture writing**, but as time passed their writing included fewer pictures and **more symbols**. The letter could be drawn quickly and clearly in wedges. Later signs were used for syllables which when combined together made another word. Eventually there were more than **six hundred cuneiform signs**. The cuneiform was first used by traders and by tax collectors to keep accounts. Then it came to be used by priests and kings. The Sumerians had **schools** and a special training course for those who wished to master the skill of writing. The deciphering of cuneiform came in the 19th century. It was not deciphered by one man as in the case of hieroglyphics. Mostly it was due to a German schoolteacher **George Friedrich Grotefend** and later to **Henry Rawlinson**.

Vocabulary

Sumerian inventions

11. Complete the following sentences about the Sumerian writing.

The Sumerian writing is called.....

It was writing including about..... symbols.

The Sumerians used for writing and they wrote on.....

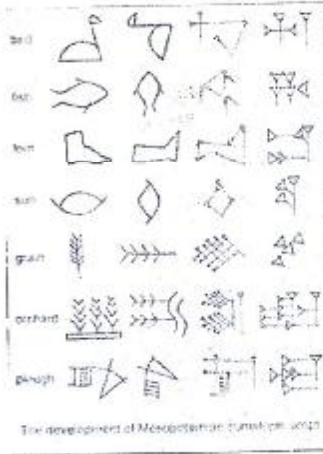
Later on the cuneiform sign stood for a instead of word.

The cuneiform was used firstly by for.....

The Sumerians had special to master the skill of writing.

The cuneiform was deciphered by.....

12. Look at the below cuneiform symbols.



Cuneiform tablet

13. Explain what the meaning of writing was.

.....

14. Write out the basic principalities of the Sumerian legal system.

.....

15. Think of why the people needed a set of laws. Talk about it in the class.

.....

16. Read about the oldest literary work.

The story of Gilgamesh

The story of Gilgamesh, based upon older stories that had been passed from generation to generation, was first written around 1700 BC on clay tablets. The story tells about all sorts of adventures Gilgamesh experienced while looking for his ancestor Utanapishim. When at last he found him, Utanapishim told him the story of the catastrophe which he only survived. The story was remembered by later generations in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

For one day the South Wind blew, gathering speed, submerging the mountains, overtaking the people like a battle. Adad's rage reached the heaven, turning all light to darkness. Six days and six nights raged the wind and the flood and the cyclone devastated the land. When the seventh day came, the cyclone, the flood, the battle was over. All mankind was turned to clay. The ground was flat like a roof.

17. Do you know any similar stories about the Great Flood?