MESOPOTAMIA

Grade 5
Mesopotamia was not a country. In the same way that the Midwest in America refers to a specific group of states, Mesopotamia names a specific region in the fertile crescent. The word means, roughly, "land between two rivers." Mesopotamia was the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Mesopotamians were the people who lived there.

In the beginning, small nomadic groups settled into independent city-states. They built high walls around the cities to protect them from one another. Much of the area around the fertile crescent was desert. Mesopotamians had access to water with which to grow crops, so they were fortunate compared to the desert nomads. They used their relative prosperity to build beautiful buildings and carve sculptures. They are best remembered for inventing writing. Sumer is credited with being the first city-state to think of recording information on clay tablets. Later, the Assyrians and Babylonians would use writing to record their conquests—and poetry and myths such as the story of Gilgamesh. It is for these reasons and others that Mesopotamia is also known as the birthplace of civilization.

1. Name three cities along the Euphrates River.

2. Which one of the Euphrates cities was almost certainly the capital of one of the early empires?

3. Based on the map and the information above, which city is likely to have a greater population: Ashur or Jarmo? Explain.

4. List all of the cities shown between the 35th and 40th parallels.

5. List all of the cities shown between the 35th and 40th meridians.

6. Describe the location of the fertile crescent in terms of latitude and longitude.

7. What does the gray area of land represent on the map? Why were Mesopotamians fortunate to live there?

8. If a traveler walked straight from one city to the next, which would be a longer journey: from Jerusalem to Ebla or from Thebes to Memphis?

9. Which sea is north of the Persian Gulf?

10. What is the approximate distance from Babylon to Ur?
Seven thousand years ago, wandering tribes settled in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley in what is now Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. The land was called Mesopotamia, which means "land between two rivers." The Sumerians were the first civilization of people in Mesopotamia. The Sumerians built cities that held beautiful palaces and temples. They were masterful craftsmen, and created goods that were sold in neighboring lands. They built huge walls around their cities as protection from invaders.

The most powerful city-state in the region was Ur, a trade center located on the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf. Ur, as well as other Sumerian city-states, were ruled by a lugal, or king. The most important duty of the lugal was to win wars, which were fought often. There were some wealthy aristocrats, but most of the people worked for the king, in the army, in the ziggurat temple, or at a trade.

Sumerians developed the first known written language, called cuneiform, which means "wedge-shaped." Thanks to ancient scribes, we can
see cuneiform writing on hardened clay tablets. The wedge-shaped symbols tell us about daily life in Sumeria.

Like Ur, Babylon was another large city-state in Mesopotamia that became very powerful. Hammurabi, an important king of Babylon, conquered the separate city-state of Sumeria to unite the two cities into a single nation. He also wrote down the laws stating the rights of the individual, known as the Code of Hammurabi.

The Babylonians were highly organized people. They studied astronomy and mathematics, and they developed the decimal system. The Babylonians designed the first calendar and divided years into weeks. They also divided the days into hours, minutes, and seconds.

The earliest records in Mesopotamia date back to around 3200 B.C. when Sumerians kept cuneiform accounts of their business dealings. In 2800 B.C. the Akkadians conquered Sumeria. The Semite tribes, who were the ancestors of Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Arabians, ruled the region for almost two thousand years. In 539 B.C., Mesopotamia was conquered by Alexander the Great.
Geography

There is no country called Mesopotamia today. Seven thousand years ago it included the area that is now eastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and most of Iraq. It ranged from the Tarsus Mountains in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south and from the Zagros Mountains in the east to the Syrian Desert in the west.

The main section of this region was called the Fertile Crescent. If you looked at a map and drew an upside-down horseshoe starting at Israel, up through Syria, and down through Iraq, you would form the crescent. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers run through the area and converge at the Persian Gulf. This area was called "fertile" because ancient farmers used the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates to irrigate their crops, thus making the land fertile. The name Mesopotamia means "the land between two rivers."

The geography and climate varied in the region. Northern Mesopotamia was a plateau with a mild climate. Summers were long and hot in southern Mesopotamia. Its alluvial plains were flooded each year by the Tigris and Euphrates and refertilized by rich silt. It was the most valuable farmland in the Arabian area and many tribes fought over it.
1. Identify the following on your map (refer to a map of Mesopotamia in an encyclopedia):
   - Tigris River
   - Euphrates River
   - Red Sea
   - Persian Gulf
   - Mediterranean Sea
   - Caspian Sea
   - Indian Ocean
   - Tarsus Mountains
   - Zagros Mountains
   - Syrian Desert
   - Arabia
   - City of Sumer
   - City of Babylon
   - City of Ur

2. Color the water blue, the land tan, and the area included in the Fertile Crescent light green.

3. Why was this area known as the "Fertile Crescent"?

4. Why was Mesopotamia also known as "The Land Between Two Rivers"?

5. If you had been a farmer in Mesopotamia, place an X on the map where you would have liked to live. Why would you have wanted to live there?
Appendix C

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia was a land of many resources.
1. Trace the Tigris River with a red crayon.
2. Trace the Euphrates River with an orange crayon.
3. Locate Mesopotamia in the area between the two rivers.
4. Put the symbols of their resources on the map.

![Map of Mesopotamia with symbols for wool, mud, spices, copper, grain, wood, and fish.](image-url)
Mesopotamian Government

In the early days of Mesopotamia, the free citizens met, discussed, and made decisions for themselves in a democratic assembly. As the villages grew into large cities, however, the citizens found it necessary to elect one of their most capable citizens to lead them through troubling times. At first the lugal, meaning "big man" or "king" in Sumerian, was appointed only for the time of crisis, but soon one war led to another and the lugal made himself permanent ruler, or king.

The king had many important jobs. He built temples, settled disputes between his people, and maintained the complicated system of canals that irrigated the farmlands. The most important job of the king was to lead his people to victory in war.

Because the Sumerians went to war often, the army had a powerful influence in the government. Generals advised the king on military decisions.

The king was also head priest in the ziggurat, or main temple. Priests were respected in Sumeria because they were the servants of the gods and advisors of the king.

The king could not maintain peace and manage the trade of Sumeria at the same time. He appointed bureaucrats to regulate trade and agriculture and then report their findings to him.
Gods and Goddesses

Mesopotamians looked to religion to answer their questions about life and death, good and evil, and the forces of nature. They believed that each city and larger city-state belonged to a patron god or goddess who owned everything and everyone in the city. The people trusted the priests and the priestesses in the temples to tell them what the gods wanted, and they followed the holy leaders' commands without question. In this way, the leaders in the temples had almost as much power over the people as the kings, who were also the high priests.

Mesopotamians believed that the gods, called dingir in Sumerian, looked and acted much like humans. They had feasts, marriages, children, and wars. They could be jealous, angry, joyful, or kind.

The dingir controlled four realms in the universe: An was the god of heaven, Enlil was the air-god, Enki was the water-god, and Ninhursag was the mother earth-goddess. Enlil was also called the "father of the gods." He set up the me, or laws of the universe, but he broke the laws and was banished to the underworld. Enki, the water-god, was then put in charge of the me, and organized the universe.

There were other important deities in Mesopotamia. Utu, the sun-god, lit the world with rays shooting from his shoulders. He moved across the sky in a chariot. Ur's patron god, Nanna, was the moon-god, who used a boat to travel by night.
Daily Life

Society in Mesopotamia was divided into three classes: the aristocracy, the working class, and the slaves.

The aristocracy was composed of rich and powerful families who owned much land. The king appointed members of the aristocracy as high priests, counselors, and generals in the army. The aristocracy lived in two-story brick homes made up of many rooms built around an open court. The men performed their official duties, boys went to school, women ran the household, and girls learned from their mothers. Fathers arranged all marriages in all classes. For fun, people were entertained by singers; musicians; and games, such as checkers.

The largest group of people in Sumeria was the working class. Architects, scribes, merchants, farmers, cattlemen, and fishermen labored in the cities. They were paid in goods and food, not money. The men taught their sons the family trade. When they were not helping their husbands, mothers trained daughters to run a household. Depending on their wealth, working-class families lived in modest single-story homes of mud and brick. Men of the upper and middle classes shaved their heads and wore kilts around their waists. Women braided their hair and wore loose-fitting dresses fastened at the shoulders.

Slaves were either prisoners of war or families sold into slavery to pay off debts.
Daily Life Word Search

R S O M F A R M E R S X C E B T C E F
S B H W I C J K K P C J M N B S A J A
P Z J U S Q Z J V B H A D L B E B Y M
Z I L O H Q G U V G E N E R A L S S I
N X G P E B F L G H C T B P K I N G L
S C Y A R M Y U G F K I B H N V R W I
M B P H M K Y G E B E Y Y Z K O D Z E
Y X O V E B E A J A R C H I T E C T S
Q C O U N S E L O R S A O G D P O N C
R H W P K V Q I W I Q T U G G M M N R
W M E R C H A N T S V T S U L V P O I
Y O C I F Z P G G T J L E R V N O W B
M O D E S T P Y P O Q E H A K N S P E
G V V S T G O Q W C P M O T Q Y E R S
T T O T V K I L T R A E L L N D D Q T
J O A S X C N F C A C N D M K G R G G
I R Z J K R T A R C U M S G X T D K I
Q R Y X W K E B I Y R W K T B J V R K
W R Q I N M D W Y P J S T W X J N X R

Can you find these words?

ARISTOCRACY
ARCHITECTS
HOUSEHOLDS
COUNSELORS
FISHERMEN
CATTLEMEN
MERCHANTS
APPOINTED
ZIGGURAT
CHECKERS
GENERALS
FAMILIES
COMPOSED
FARMERS
SCRIBES
PRIESTS
MODEST
LUGAL
KILT
ARMY

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The City of Ur

The most famous and powerful city in ancient Sumeria was the city-state of Ur, located on the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf. Ur was a major center for commerce and trade from 3500 to 1850 B.C.

Many wealthy landowners and some slaves lived in Ur, but the largest group was the working class. The city became wealthy because of the working class, who were accomplished textile workers, ship builders, weapon makers, potters, jewelers, metal workers, artists, and fishermen. If they were not involved in trade, the working class labored on huge farms. Major crops were wheat, barley, dates, and vegetables. The main export from the area was wool cloth, which was made from the wool of sheep.

Other people in the city worked in service to the king or the priests. The king lived in a palace of multiple rooms and required many servants. The largest structure in the city was the ziggurat, or temple to the gods. The three-tiered, seventy-foot-high temple created many jobs for builders and bricklayers and for the temple staff when it was finished.

The city of Ur declined for two reasons. As time went on, a shift in the course of the Euphrates River isolated Ur from river traffic and trade. The city was weakened further in 2000 B.C. when invaders from the southeast, called Elamites, conquered Ur.
Cuneiform Writing

The Sumerians were accomplished traders and businessmen. As their business dealings became more complex, they needed a way to keep track of their goods and payments. They developed the first known written language, called cuneiform, to keep business records and accounts.

The name cuneiform means "wedge-shape"—cuneiform characters are wide at one end and pointed at the other. Developed around 3000 B.C., the characters were made by pressing a wedge-shaped tool, or stylus, into a damp clay tablet. The tablets were dried in the sun until they hardened. Cuneiform was also written in metal and stone.

Boys in school labored long hours to memorize cuneiform characters. There were five hundred possible combinations of cuneiform characters to stand for words, phrases, and complete sentences.

Because cuneiform was difficult to master, not everyone knew how to read and write in Sumeria. A young man was guaranteed a good job in government, law, trade, or in the zigguart if he could understand cuneiform.

Hundreds of thousands of cuneiform tablets were discovered in Iraq. They tell us about Sumerian politics, literature, economy, law, and religion.
Cuneiform Rebus

Here is a chart of cuneiform symbols and their meanings.

Write a short story using as many cuneiform symbols as possible in your sentences.

Example: A swam in the .

T.S. Denison & Co., Inc. 22 Ancient Civilizations—Mesopotamia
Archeologists have found beautifully detailed statues, jewelry, helmets, and bas-reliefs (figures carved into walls) on archeological digs in Mesopotamia. In the earliest days of Mesopotamia, statues and murals were used only in the temples to please the gods. As trade with foreign lands developed, the demand for works of art increased. Craftsmen formed guilds to regulate and protect their crafts.

Sumerian art had a distinctive style. Men were pictured bald-headed and broad-shouldered, wearing skirt-like kilts around their waists. Artists portrayed women with ankle-length straight gowns and various headdresses. Figures were often seen in profile. The most unusual feature of Sumerian figure art was that the eyes of a person were opened very wide, staring straight ahead.

Sumerians were famous for two handmade products. One was wool cloth, woven on looms using wool from sheep. The other was carved stone cylinder seals. These were small, round cylinders of stone carved with the owner's signature or symbol. The seal was rolled in ink and pressed on to documents as an official seal or trademark.
Mesopotamia had the hardest job of all civilizations. They had no one to teach them, so they did everything for themselves. Use the pictures below and list the "firsts" that were invented by the people of Mesopotamia. Draw each of the inventions in the cradle above.

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Artifact Dig!

You are on an archeological dig in Mesopotamia near the city of Ur with the world-famous archeologist, Dr. Mississippi Mudd. Today you and Dr. Mudd found ancient artifacts at your site and you can't wait to share your findings with the rest of the world! Dr. Mudd asks you to draw a picture of each artifact and write a one-sentence description of it in the box below.
Hammurabi, King of Babylon

Ur was not the only famous city in Sumeria. Babylon, located northwest of Ur on the Euprates River, also rose in power. One of its greatest rulers was named Hammurabi.

When Hammurabi took control of Babylon in 1792 B.C., Mesopotamia was made up of separate, warring city-states. Hammurabi's goal was to conquer all of Mesopotamia and unite the city-states into one country. He spent the first thirty-one years of his reign building his military power and making allies. In 1761 B.C., he began a military campaign to conquer the surrounding city-states and within five years he controlled all of Mesopotamia.

Once he had brought peace to the region, Hammurabi turned his attention to law and order. He collected all existing codes of laws and set down a detailed document known as the "Code of Hammurabi." Written in 1750 B.C., it contained three hundred laws on such topics as false accusation, witchcraft, military service, land and business, family, taxes, wages, loans, and debts. The main message throughout the code was that the strong should not hurt the weak. The code stated the rights of the individual and was the model for many law systems in later years.

Hammurabi was known as a warrior and a strong king who ruled his people with fairness. He died in Babylon in 1708 B.C.
Directions: Find your way to the top of the maze.

A maze is a type of puzzle with a solution that requires

Words to Choose From:

- Law
- Hammurabi
- Justice
- Babylon
- Code
- Reform
- Right
- History

Across:
1. a body of law
2. protection
3. a rule of Hammurabi

Down:
1. court
2. a young man
3. land
4. a writer
5. the king of Babylonia
6. the king of law administration
7. he was
8. who is
9. to improve by

LAW CODE

Hammurabi's Code of Laws
Achievements

In some respects the Mesopotamians had the hardest job of all the ancient civilizations. The Romans learned from the Greeks, who learned from the Egyptians, who learned from the Mesopotamians. But there was no one to teach the Mesopotamians, so they figured out everything for themselves. Besides being known as the Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamia is often called the Cradle of Civilization.

The world's first written language was discovered in Sumeria. Cuneiform tablets give us a detailed look at daily life five thousand years ago.

Mesopotamians discovered many of the basic tools we use today. The wheel, arch, chisel, saw, lever, and pulley were all invented during Mesopotamian times. These discoveries led to a knowledge of architecture, which was used in the ziggurats and Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

The Mesopotamians organized their world. They created the first calendar and divided the year into weeks. They did not stop there. Mesopotamians divided the days into hours, minutes, and seconds. They even invented the world's first clock: the sundial.

Time was not the only thing Mesopotamians organized. They developed the first government system to run a city, which led to written laws concerning the rights of the individual.
Timeline of Mesopotamian History

8000 B.C. First development of agriculture.

2500 B.C. Sumerians begin to develop their civilization; Ur major center for trade 3500–1850 B.C.; earliest writing found 3200 B.C.

2800 B.C. First Semitic (ancestors of Hebrew, Phoenician, and Arabian) people settle in Mesopotamia.

2360 B.C. Akkadian Empire founded by Sargon.


1750 B.C. Babylonian Empire

721–705 B.C. Assyrian Empire at height of its power.

689 B.C. Babylon destroyed by Assyrians.

539 B.C. Mesopotamia conquered by Alexander the Great.