**PROJECT ASSESSMENTS**

**Description of Authentic Assessments**

**Throughout the unit, authentic assessments were identified that would help the teacher determine if the students met the unit goals. Authentic assessments ask students to apply their skills and knowledge in meaningful ways. This unit includes a variety of authentic assessments, including rubrics to assess project, group work, and participation, a student self-evaluation, and exit slips. The authentic assessments used in this unit are further described below.**

**Pre-assessment**

According to Heacox (2010), “Formal pre-assessments are not graded because you are using them for diagnostic purposes only. You are seeking information to identify the entry point in learning for your students and to refine your unit plan based on student needs” (p. 28). In our unit, a pre-assessment is used in this way. Students identify what they already know, what they want to know, and what they are interested in. The teacher uses this information to determine misconceptions that need corrected, determine which information only needs reviewed and which information is lacking and needs to be taught, determine what information the unit will focus on based on student answers, and determine student interests and perhaps group placements based on interest. This allows the teacher to use this pre-assessment as an important tool to learn about students (and their knowledge levels and interests) without the pressure of students receiving a grade. This tool can also be used again at the end of the unit for students and the teacher to reflect on how much their knowledge levels have grown and to perhaps identify additional curiosities students would like to investigate now that they know more about the civilization.

**During-Unit Assessment(s)**

According to Heacox (2010), “there are both formal and informal strategies for formative assessment…informal strategies are quick, on-your-feet methods of data collection. They demand little or no teacher preparation or time for scoring or entering of data. Informal formative assessments are simply quick checks for understanding, but they have the same effect on your instructional planning” (p. 39). In this unit, the teacher informally assesses student understanding through checking student answers on exit slips, paying attention to comments made in whole class and group discussions, and making observations throughout the unit while monitoring students. Exit slips are based on the objectives for each lesson they are included in, thus giving the teacher a view of student learning for each lesson. If the teacher discovers students hold misconceptions, this information can be retaught in small groups or whole class if needed. If the teacher determines that students thoroughly understand the information, the teacher could also provide opportunities to extend and challenge student learning on these concepts, either in small groups or whole class as well. Observations during class assignments and discussions also provide these opportunities. If these informal assessments were not used, one of the only ways students would be assessed is at the end of the unit. Waiting this long to assess student learning would be a mistake because if students inaccurately understand the content, the entire unit may need retaught. By informally assessing throughout, the teacher can ensure students successfully learn and apply the important concepts and will thus also likely be successful on the final assessment(s). As Heacox (2010) explains, one cannot “underestimate the importance of these informal kinds of data collection in planning for differences” (p. 31).

On day four of this unit, a formal assessment tool, the “Venn Diagram Rubric”, is provided for the teacher to assess the Venn diagram and thinking question(s) students complete with this day’s lesson. This assessment tool is provided so that the teacher can help students determine if the work they are completing is exemplary, acceptable, unacceptable, or incomplete. Students can also see if the information they are learning is accurate. While this feedback could be provided informally, using a formal assessment partway through the unit will remind the students and teacher of the kind of work that is expected in the classroom and also provide a further check on student understanding. The information that is to be included on the Venn diagram and graded by the rubric is based on themes and objectives of the day’s lesson.  
While students will not receive a class participation grade until the end of the unit, the observation for this assessment takes place during the entire unit. Throughout the lessons, the teacher will monitor student participation by marking checks on a class roster each time a student contributes to class discussion. By using this completed roster and the “Class Participation Rubric” at the end of the unit, the teacher will assign each individual student a participation grade. Participation in class is an important skill because when students are actively involved, they are more likely to learn, remember, and understand content. By monitoring student participation throughout the unit, students will be encouraged to participate, and by hearing all students’ voices and ideas, the teacher will have a better understanding of the entire class, not just the same one or two students who often raise their hands.   
  
**Final Assessment(s)**

The final and most important part of assessment in this unit is the authentic assessment of the artifact box project. Once important concepts were determined in this unit, the rubric for this project was created before the development of lessons in order to use the method of backward planning. After all, backward planning “reminds us to begin with the question, What would we accept as evidence that students have attained the desired understandings and proficiencies- before proceeding to plan teachings and learning experiences?” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001, p. 8). Creating this rubric allowed us to determine what students needed to do to be able to demonstrate their learning in this unit.

For the project, students will be creating artifacts for their artifact box assignment in groups of 3 throughout this unit. The “Artifact Box Rubric” will be used to assign each group a grade based on their artifacts, presentation, writing, and creativity upon the completion of presentations. Grades will also be assigned for group work and individual work on this project. The final project incorporates artifacts that are created on different days, starting at the beginning of the unit. By assessing them at the end the teacher is able to truly assess student progress and offer help/intervention as necessary. So rather than grading each artifact separately, students are able to build off of each topic and complete a comprehensive final project. This project represents project based learning because, “Within its framework students collaborate, working together to make sense of what is going on...project-based instruction differs from traditional inquiry by its emphasis on students’ own artifact construction to represent what is being learned” (Houghton Mifflin). This organization of the project is authentic “because understanding develops as a result of ongoing inquiry and rethinking, the assessment of understanding should be thought of in terms of a collection of evidence over time instead of an event- a single moment-in-time test at the end of instruction” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001, p. 13). In the case of this project, students are engaged in the authentic inquiry of investigating interests and creating artifacts throughout the unit to demonstrate their knowledge.

Finally, because students are working with others, we felt it was important to also assess group work (through the “Group Work Rubric”) and individual student contributions to group work (through the “Self-assessment Brag Sheet”). We decided to also assess these areas because we want to encourage all students to be involved in the creation of artifacts, accompanying writing and research, and project decisions so that all students are learning. A student is unlikely to learn if he or she is not actively involved in the project for this authentic, project-based curriculum. By working together on this project, “our unit or course will be anchored by performance tasks or projects- these provide evidence that students are able to use their knowledge in a context, a more appropriate means of evoking and assessing enduring understanding” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001, p. 13).

***Resource(s):***  
Heacox, D. (2010). *Making differentiation a habit: How to ensure success in*

*academically diverse classrooms*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Houghton Mifflin. (n.d.). Background knowledge & theory. Project-based learning space.

Retrieved from

<http://college.cengage.com/education/pbl/background.html#The%20Basics>.

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2001). *Understanding by design*. Upper Saddle River,

NJ: Merrill/Prentice.

**Explanation of Development of Rubrics**  
***This section discusses the development of the Artifact Box Rubric, the primary assessment tool for the project-based learning in this unit. Since other rubrics are included within this unit though, brief explanations of the creation of other rubrics will also be included.***   
  
**Venn Diagram Rubric**

The purpose of this rubric is to allow the teacher to formally assess aspects of student learning within the specific lesson of day four. This rubric was created to ensure students understand how exemplary, acceptable, unacceptable, and incomplete criteria measure against one another. Exemplary criteria includes that students give multiple examples of characteristics of place (geography theme) and favorable geography characteristics (OACS content) in the Venn diagram and that students thoroughly explain movement (geography theme) in the thinking question. This shows that the objectives and content of the lesson are measured in the rubric. Additionally, since students are comparing and contrasting Mesopotamia to their own community, the teacher will be able to determine if students are able to apply this knowledge to their own lives, an important concept of enduring knowledge.

**Class Participation Rubric**  
Active participation in class assignments and discussions is an important part of learning. After all, “[t]he most powerful learning comes when children develop true understanding of concepts through higher-order thinking” (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005, p. 11). Criteria for quantity and quality of participation was included. After all, if a student participates often, they are likely paying attention and engaged in the content. However, in order for learning to occur, students must also demonstrate quality comments in discussion because this will show the student is using higher-order thinking skills.

**Group Work Rubric**  
Because a core component of learning (and this project-based unit) is cooperative, a rubric to assess group work has been included. By including a rubric, students are encouraged to each participate to ensure the success of the group. After all, “[l]earning is always socially constructed and often interactive...[and] cooperative learning activities tap the social power of learning better than competitive and individualistic approaches” (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005, p. 11). Because a cooperative learning approach includes all students interacting, criteria was especially included to measure that each group member contributed to decisions, discussions, and the overall project and success of the group. By including this criteria, each student is encouraged to participate in each element of the project creation (and active involvement helps facilitate learning). Additionally, criteria for on-task behavior was also included since students are able to accomplish more when they stay focused on the project.   
  
**Self-Assessment Brag Sheet**  
While the brag sheet is not set up as a traditional rubric, it is an important part of assessment. After all, when students note “their progress, a greater sense of success results. They also become more motivated to strive for improvement because they can see their learning progress over the course of the term” (Heacox, 2010, p. 42-43). This document is not set up like a typical rubric because according to Heacox (2010), language in the checklist must be “kid-friendly, using the same words and language you used with students in instruction...avoid ‘edu-babble’ that we educators use but that does not convey clear meaning to students” (p. 42) The brag sheet was created with students in mind, wanting to give students as many opportunities as possible to share the individual work they contributed.   
  
**Artifact Box Rubric**

The rubric for students’ Artifact Box project is used as a means to formally assess students on their final project. The four stages of inquiry according to Houghton Mifflin’s information on project-based learning in “Background Knowledge & Theory” include searching, solving, creating, and sharing. With this in mind, a specific section of the rubric is dedicated to each group’s presentation of their artifacts to their peers. This will assess students’ ability to communicate their findings to the class based on their research and information they have gathered. Students’ creation of their artifacts also has a separate section in the rubric. This is to ensure that students are being assessed on their ability to choose an appropriate artifact to represent a specific aspect of Mesopotamia that coincides with the concepts mentioned in the OACS as well as the geography themes studied in class. Students must be able to synthesize the information they collect through their research and apply it to their artifact creation in an appropriate and relevant manner. The written explanation of each artifact as well as the creativity incorporated is also indicative of students’ ability to take the information they absorbed from their research and instruction, process it, and apply it to their own self-selected artifact for Mesopotamia.

***Resource(s):***  
Heacox, D. (2010). *Making differentiation a habit: How to ensure success in*

*academically diverse classrooms*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

Houghton Mifflin. (n.d.) Background knowledge & theory. *Project-based learning space.*

Retrieved from <http://college.cengage.com/education/pbl/background.html#Summary.>

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. (2005). *Best practices: Today’s standards for*

*teaching & learning in America’s schools* (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.