**Ancient Mesopotamia**

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**Video Links**

**Youtube:** <https://youtu.be/wYznIzOsJAA>

**Googledrive:** <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7zgS2kfTW_xdEJkNkNIdmFlVTg/view>

**Content Statements**

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** History

**Topic:** Historical Thinking and Skills

**Content Statement:** 1. Events can be arranged in order of occurrence using the conventions of B.C. and A.D. or B.C.E. and C.E

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** History

**Topic:** Early Civilizations

**Content Statement:** 2. Early civilizations (India, Egypt, China and Mesopotamia) with unique governments, economic systems, social structures, religions, technologies and agricultural practices and products flourished as a result of favorable geographic characteristics. The cultural practices and products of these early civilizations can be used to help understand the Eastern Hemisphere today.

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** Geography

**Topic:** Spatial Thinking and Skills

**Content Statement:** 3. Globes and other geographic tools can be used to gather, process and report information about people, places and environments. Cartographers decide which information to include and how it is displayed.

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** Geography

**Topic:** Spatial Thinking and Skills

**Content Statement:** 4. Latitude and longitude can be used to identify absolute location.

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** Geography

**Topic:** Places and Regions

**Content Statement:** 5. Regions can be determined, classified and compared using various criteria (e.g., landform, climate, population, cultural, or economic).

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** Geography

**Topic:** Human Systems

**Content Statement:** 6. Variations among physical environments within the Eastern Hemisphere influence human activities. Human activities also alter the physical environment.

**Theme:** Regions and People of the Eastern Hemisphere

**Strand:** Geography

**Topic:** Human Systems

**Content Statement:** 7. Political, environmental, social and economic factors cause people, products and ideas to move from place to place in the Eastern Hemisphere in the past and today.

**Common Core**

3. Identify key steps in a text’s description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes a law, how interest rates are raised or lowered)

7. Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts).

10. By the end of grade eight, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

**Introduction**

Mesopotamia means “the land between rivers” referring to an ancient region in the Middle East (modern day Iraq and part of Turkey and Syria) between and around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Also known as the “Cradle of Civilization,” this is where some of the very first civilizations were formed. The northern region consisted of mostly plains, good for growing wheat and raising cattle and the southern region was mostly marshy with barren plains. The first people to form farms and villages began in 5000 B.C.E. and were called the Sumer. They learned how to irrigate the land and grow crops, resulting in larger farms and even larger towns. As towns became cities, a need for government and writing developed and so the first civilizations were formed. There were many different civilizations that ruled over Mesopotamia throughout its almost 5000 year existence. These included, the already mentioned, Sumerians, as well as the Akkadians, then the Babylonians, Assyrians, and finally the Persians who were eventually overthrown by the Greeks resulting in the end of the Mesopotamian era.

City-states were first formed by the Sumerians and were protected by large walls with canals to bring in water which attracted many traders. Timber, hardstones and metals were imported and resulted in the creation of many trade routes. They also created the first writing system which consisted of pictographs, pictures drawn on clay to record produce. This system was later advanced into a writing system called Cuneiform which consisted of wedge-like shapes and was used to record events. Mesopotamians worshipped many gods and each city had its own temple dedicated to a patron god or goddess.

Priests were the first rulers of these city-states, later replaced by kings, who then began to build empires. One of the most famous emperors was Hammurabi because he created the first set of laws, known as the Code of Hammurabi. The Mesopotamian class system consisted of an upper class (kings, nobles, priests, scribes, military leaders and rich landowners), middle class (skilled workers, merchants, and farmers), and lower class (slaves who could be freed by paying their debts). The Mesopotamians were known for experimenting with mathematics and measurements for time. This civilization created a basis for which many other civilizations were formed and created.

**Artifact 1-Landform Between Two Rivers-My box itself**

**Theme:** LOCATION

**Summary:**

Ancient Mesopotamia is located in a part of the world that was once called “the fertile crescent” because it was easy to grow food in that area. Mesopotamia, specifically, is known as the land between rivers because it comes from the Greek word meaning “between the rivers.” This ancient civilization was literally located right between the two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. These rivers flow through modern day Iraq. The southern part of Iraq is where Mesopotamia was in fact located. This civilization was made up of different regions with very different geography. Northern Mesopotamia was made up of hills and fertile plains due to the rain and rivers coming down from the mountains. Southern Mesopotamia was marshy with wide, flat, barren plains causing early settlers to create irrigation systems along the banks to help their crops grow.

**Teaching Activity:**

Give students the approximate coordinates (latitude and longitude) of Mesopotamia and ask them to locate it on their individual maps. Have a discussion about where it was located and what part of the modern day world that would be. Ask students to describe what they know about that location in today’s world as well as identify any landmarks such as rivers or mountains that are surrounding it. Describe what Ancient Mesopotamia was like and its different regions. Ask students to use that knowledge along with other knowledge they have gained about Mesopotamia to create a travel brochure encouraging people to come visit Mesopotamia, including details about the benefits of the land and location.

**Artifact 2-Water**

**Theme:** REGION/H.E.I.

**Summary:**

Mesopotamia, known as the land between rivers, was literally located between two rivers, the Tigris to the north and the Euphrates to the south. In order for the people of Mesopotamia to be able to farm they relied heavily on a system of irrigation from these two rivers because of the dramatic seasonal weather changes. The land was flooded with rain in the winter and spring months but water was scarce during the summer and fall months. City walls and temples were first built by the Sumerians in the south and then canals and ditches were dug in order to redirect the water to the farming fields. Each farmer was only allowed certain amounts of water so regulators were utilized to raise and lower the water levels and direct the water from the canal to the irrigation ditch that ran next to a particular farmer’s field. The Assyrians also had their own unique irrigation system in which they used tunnels to bring in water from under the hills.

**Teaching Activity:**

In a desired location, set up a sandbox at an elevated height so that it is at a slight angle. Have a discussion with the students about the climate and landscape of the region of Mesopotamia as well as the challenges of living somewhere where there are periods of drought and flooding. Compare the landscape of Mesopotamia to the sandbox model then assign each student or small group a plot to “irrigate” and protect. As a class, define the words reservoir, levee, dam, and canal. Tell each student that they should come up with and create their own irrigation system to move water from the main river to their plot of land as well as allow water to flow to communities downstream, using one or more of the previously defined terms. Each student should be equipped with a trowel and a wooden block to use if needed. Once students have created their irrigation systems, simulate a flood by allowing water to flow from a hose (or other source) into the sandbox. Have the students evaluate their irrigation systems, think about and apply any changes they might want to make, and then simulate the flood one more time. Have a discussion about the improvements the students made and why, as well as what they thought it might have been like to live in ancient Mesopotamia and create large-scale irrigation systems during that time period.

**Artifact 3-Cloud**

**Theme:** PLACE

**Summary:**

At the center of Mesopotamian beliefs were the gods, goddess, demons, and monsters that controlled their world. They believed that everything in the world was controlled by a certain god or goddess so it only makes sense that their were hundreds of them. The responsibilities included everything from controlling the rivers and mountains, to making bread or pottery. Every city had its own temple dedicated to a patron god or goddess who protected that particular place. Priests were in charge of looking after the gods with their special rituals but ordinary people could visit smaller temples throughout the city in order to make offerings. Demons were created by the gods and could either be evil or good. Anu, many times referred to as the highest god, was a member of the triad of deities and was a sky god. He was the father of all of the gods as well as the evil spirits and demons. He was also the god of kings and the yearly calendar, typically represented wearing a headdress with horns, which was a sign of strength to the Mesopotamians.

**Teaching Activity:**

Assign each student to a Mesopotamian god, goddess, demon, or monster. Each student should research their assigned character and take notes about their responsibilities, characteristics, abilities, etc. Students should then come up with a short “elevator” speech about their character in first person point of view. Students will then be encouraged to dress up like their god, goddess, demon, or monster on a pre-assigned day of the week and the class will hold a Wax Museum presentation. Half of the class will perform on one day of the week, the other half on another day. Encourage students to invite parents/relatives or you could just invite another class to come in each day. Students/visitors will walk around the “museum” and as they approach each wax figure, the god, goddess, demon, or monster will come to life and present the elevator speech about themselves.

**Artifact 4-Pyramid**

**Theme:** PLACE/REGION

**Summary:**

The Mesopotamian class system can be described as a hierarchical pyramid consisting of three levels in which the top section consists of the most powerful and the bottom consists of the least powerful. The most powerful class was considered the upper class and included the King and his family, the nobles and their families, the priests, the scribes, the military leaders, and other rich landowners. The middle class consisted of shop-owners, merchants, farmers, craftspeople, iron workers, fishermen, and other skilled workers. The lower class was made up of the slaves. The King held almost all of the power, creating laws, leading the army, and seen as a god on earth. The priests held a significant amount of power because religion was of such high importance during that time. They were believed to have relationships with the God and were even considered doctors. Scribes were well educated and usually ran their own public writing businesses, but had to go through special training to be considered an official scribe. Merchants and artisans were responsible for the wealth that was needed to grow the civilization. They invented Mesopotamian writing system as well as calendars. The commoners consisted of mostly farmers and were not educated. They had their own homes and lived a comfortable life. The slaves usually worked for the upper class in the agricultural fields but could actually be freed by paying their debts.

**Teaching Activity:**

Divide the class into 3 small groups and give each group either the top, middle, or bottom section of a large poster sized 2D pyramid. The group with the top section will be assigned to the upper class and so on. Ask each group to cut their section of the pyramid into four equal parts. Divide each small group into four mini-groups or pairs and assign each min-group/pair within each small group to one of the following characteristics: Jobs, Attire, Rights, Hobbies/Other Interesting Facts. Each mini-group/pair will then be responsible for collecting information about their class and the specific characteristic they were assigned to. For example, the mini-group/pair within the upper class section who is assigned to the characteristic of “Jobs” would be responsible for researching the types of jobs that people in the upper class had. After each mini-group/pair has completed their research they should creatively display the information on their section of poster board and then come back to their small group and attach their “class” back together. Each small group will then present their “class” to the whole group, creating a full-sized Mesopotamian Class Pyramid.

**Artifact 5-Wheel**

**Theme:** MOVEMENT

**Summary:**

Mesopotamians are known for their many inventions throughout their existence. One of the most well-known being the wheel which is thought to have been first made by the Sumerians around 3500 BC. At first the wheel was not used for transportation but as a potter’s wheel. The wheel was then modified by the early men who placed them underneath heavy objects to help them move more easily. This became an important tool for the trading industry. As improvements and changes were made, innovative uses for the wheel came about such as the first cart and eventually chariots. Wheels then started to be used as gears which eventually led to the invention of mechanical devices like clocks, water wheels and astrolabes for navigation while sailing. There is no doubt that we would be living in a very different world today without the invention of the wheel.

**Teaching Activity:**

Since Mesopotamia is well-known for their many inventions, it would be beneficial for students to explore these items together. After introducing the wheel and its importance to the Mesopotamian people, assign each student to a small group and a specific invention. Each group will then be asked to research their invention and come up with a presentation of that item. They should identify why and how the invention was created, how it was used, ways in which it improved throughout the years. If it still exists today then they should explain how it is used/what the world might be like if it was never created. If it does not still exist today they they should explain why they think people stopped using it or what it was replaced with and why.

References

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