

Civilization and Mesopotamia

Reading and Discussion

A civilization is typically defined as an organized society where people live in cities, specialize in different tasks, use written language, and have a religion and some form of government. Although people have lived on Earth for hundreds of thousands of years, the concept of civilization has only existed for about the last six thousand years.

The main reason for this is that people primarily lived nomadic lives throughout history. Having a nomadic life means that people frequently roamed from place to place without having a fixed pattern of movement. People did not have permanent homes. They would hunt animals, fish in rivers, and gather wild plants for food. People who live this way are known as hunter-gatherers.

Humans began growing their own food around 9,000 BCE. This was the beginning of agriculture. People then began raising animals, like sheep, cattle, and goats. Since animals could be a source of milk, meat and wool, people no longer had to move around to satisfy their needs. They were able to stay in one place, and villages grew. Some villages became quite large and turned into towns and cities.

Since people were able to grow their own food and raise their own animals, a surplus of food was created. Due to this surplus, not everyone had to farm anymore. Some people could do other things. As a result, some people began to craft things like jewelry and pottery. Other people became traders, builders, writers, and artists.

More people began doing different things, and this led to specialization and trade. Specialization means that each person works in a specific field. Someone who was a builder, for example, would specialize in building things. A builder would not be a farmer, and a farmer would not be a builder. This specialization led to trade. For example, if a farmer needed something built, he could trade food or animals to a builder, who could then build him an area to store his feed.

The concept of trading led to a system of writing. Since people needed to keep track of their items and what they traded, they began to use a system of writing. Additionally, trade led to a more social structure, since people needed to contact other people to make trades. As people began to interact more, this led to a need for order and peace. This need was filled by religion and government.

The first civilizations in the world began in a fertile valley located in present-day Iraq. This valley was between two rivers. The two rivers were the Tigris and the Euphrates. Sometimes, this area is called the Fertile Crescent. It is also known as the Cradle of Civilization. This area is also known as Mesopotamia. In Greek, Mesopotamia means "land between the rivers." The Tigris and the Euphrates provided the necessary fertile soil for farming. The rivers also provided transportation routes for trade. Using the rivers for trade routes was faster than traveling by land.

Name _____

Date _____

Activities

Activity A: Multiple Choice:

1. People who roam from place to place frequently without having a fixed pattern of movement are:
 - a. Nomads;
 - b. Farmers;
 - c. Aliens;
 - d. Scientists.

2. The first civilizations in the world began in:
 - a. a fertile valley;
 - b. an ice-covered mountain range;
 - c. what is now known as California;
 - d. Atlantis.

3. Humans began growing their own food around:
 - a. 90,000 BCE;
 - b. 9,000 BCE;
 - c. 900 BCE;
 - d. 2,000 BCE.

4. A civilization is typically defined as:
 - a. an organized society;
 - b. a fertile crescent;
 - c. a group of nomads;
 - d. farming by rivers.

Activity B: True or False:

- ___ 1. The Fertile Crescent was located in present-day Iraq.
- ___ 2. Mesopotamia means land of fruits and vegetables.
- ___ 3. The concept of farming led to a system of writing.
- ___ 4. The Tigris and Euphrates are lakes.
- ___ 5. Specialization means that each person works in a specific field.

Name _____

Date _____

Answer Key

Activity A

1. People who roam from place to place frequently without having a fixed pattern of movement are:

- a. **nomads**
- b. farmers
- c. aliens
- d. scientists

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- a. **a fertile valley**
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- a. 90,000 BCE
- b. **9,000 BCE**
- b. 900 BCE
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Activity B

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 F 6. Mesopotamia means land of fruits and vegetables.

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 F 8. The Tigris and Euphrates are lakes.

 T 9. Specialization means that each person works in a specific field.