

Sumer

Reading and Discussion

Around 3500 BCE, a civilization known as **Sumer** developed in Mesopotamia. Most of what is known about Sumer is due to the findings of archaeologists. In 1927, archaeologists unearthed the ancient Sumerian city of **Ur**. Based on their findings, we know that the Sumerians had powerful city-states. A city-state is a city that is a state unto itself. This means that it has its own government, and it is not controlled by any larger state or governing body.

Some Sumerians lived outside of the actual city. They farmed and raised pigs, sheep, and oxen. The crops received water from the rivers by using a complex network of canals. While the farmers lived outside of the city, merchants, artisans, and trades people lived in the city.

Sumerian society was made up of different classes. The upper class was made up of priests, government officials, rich landowners, nobles, and kings. The middle class included farmers, merchants, trades people, artisans, and soldiers. The lowest class was made up of slaves.

The Sumerian civilization is credited with inventing the wheel. The Sumerian civilization also had the earliest known written language. Their language used a form of wedge-shaped characters called **cuneiform**. Using the sharp end of reeds, Sumerians scratched the cuneiform symbols into tablets made out of clay. Sumerians used these clay tablets to write religious works, legal documents, and literary works. This is known because archaeologists have managed to dig up thousands cuneiform tablets.

Sumerians were also builders. They built **ziggurats**, which are pyramid-shaped temples. The Sumerians believed that the many gods of their religion lived atop the ziggurats.

It is thought that Sumerians were most likely also the first people to brew beer, make glass, and use a pottery wheel to make pottery. Additionally, our system of basing time on a sixty-minute hour is based on the Sumerian system of mathematics. The method of dividing a circle into 360 degrees also comes from Sumerian mathematics.

The Sumerian civilization also had weapons and an army. Sumerians traded with other peoples as well. Since the Sumerians were not united under a central government, the different city-states frequently fought with one another. It is believed that the frequent fighting between city-states made it easy for the Sumerians to be conquered by the **Akkads**. The Akkads were from a place located to the north of Sumer. The king of the Akkads was **Sargon**. Sargon actually united all of Mesopotamia and built the world's first empire. It is believed that this took place from 2,330 BCE to about 2,275 BCE. Sargon was considered a strong leader, but he was most likely a cruel leader as well. After roughly 50 years, the city-states rose up against the empire.

Name _____

Date _____

Activities

Activity A: Multiple Choice:

1. A civilization known as Sumer developed in:
 - a. Mesopotamia
 - b. Mongolia
 - c. Babylonia
 - d. Moscow

2. In 1927, archaeologists unearthed the ancient Sumerian city of:
 - a. Canton
 - b. Columbia
 - c. Sargon
 - d. Ur

3. The Sumerian civilization is credited with inventing the:
 - a. wheel
 - b. disco
 - c. catapult
 - d. printing press

4. Ziggurats are:
 - a. aqueducts
 - b. pyramid-shaped temples
 - c. tablets for writing
 - d. a species of rodent

Activity B: True or False:

- ___ 1. Sumerian society was made up of different classes.

- ___ 2. The Sumerian civilization had the earliest known written language.

- ___ 3. Sumerians were conquered by the Akkads.

- ___ 4. The king of the Sumerians was Sargon.

- ___ 5. Sumerians used bricks to write religious works, legal documents, and literary works.

Name _____

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Answer Key

Activity A

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Activity B

 T 5. Sumerian society was made up of different classes.

 T 6. The Sumerian civilization had the earliest known written language.

 T 7. Sumerians were conquered by the Akkads.

 F 8. The king of the Sumerians was Sargon.

 F 9. Sumerians used bricks to write religious works, legal documents, and literary works.