

The Fertile Crescent, Mesopotamia, and the Persian Empire

Lesson 1



MAIN IDEAS

1. The rivers of Southwest Asia supported the growth of civilization.
2. New farming techniques led to the growth of cities.

Key Terms and People

Fertile Crescent a large arc of rich farmland extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea

silt a mix of rich soil and small rocks

civilization an organized group of people (society) that live in an area and work to improve their way of life

irrigation a way of supplying water to an area of land

canals human-made waterways

surplus more of something than is needed

division of labor an arrangement in which people specialize in specific tasks

Lesson Summary

RIVERS SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF CIVILIZATION

Early peoples settled where crops would grow. Crops usually grew well near rivers, where water was available and regular floods made the soil rich.

Mesopotamia, part of the region known as the **Fertile Crescent** in Southwest Asia, lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Every year, floods on the rivers brought **silt**. The fertile silt made the land ideal for farming.

Hunter-gatherer groups first settled in Mesopotamia more than 12,000 years ago. Over time, these people learned how to work together to control floods. They planted crops and grew their own food.

Farm settlements formed in Mesopotamia as early as 7000 BC. Farmers grew wheat, barley, and other grains. Livestock, birds, and fish were also sources of food. Plentiful food led to

Mesopotamia means "between the rivers" in Greek. To which two rivers does the name of the region refer?

List two grains grown by Mesopotamian farmers.

Lesson 1, continued

population growth and villages formed. Eventually, these early villages developed into the world's first **civilization**.

FARMING AND CITIES

Early farmers faced the challenge of learning how to control the flow of river water to their fields in both rainy and dry seasons. Flooding destroyed crops, killed livestock, and washed away homes. When water levels were too low, crops dried up.

To solve their problems, Mesopotamians used **irrigation**. They dug out large storage basins to hold water supplies. Then they dug **canals** that connected these basins to a network of ditches. These ditches brought water to the fields and watered grazing areas for cattle and sheep.

Because irrigation made farmers more productive, they produced a **surplus**. Some people became free to do other jobs. For the first time, people became crafts persons, religious leaders, and government workers. A **division of labor** developed.

Mesopotamian settlements grew in size and complexity. Most people continued to work in farming jobs. However, cities became important places. People traded goods in cities. Cities became the political, religious, cultural, and economic centers of Mesopotamian civilization.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Develop Write a proposal for an irrigation system that will divert floodwaters and benefit riverbank farmers.

Underline the sentence that lists some of the problems caused by flooding.

From where did the water collected in the storage basins come?

Which places in Mesopotamia became the centers of civilization?

Lesson 1, *continued*

canals	civilization	division of labor
Fertile Crescent	irrigation	silt
	surplus	

DIRECTIONS Use the vocabulary terms in the word bank to write how Mesopotamia came to have cities.

DIRECTIONS Look at each set of three vocabulary terms following each number. On the line provided, write the letter of the term that does not relate to the others.

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|----------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| _____ 1. | a. irrigation | b. silt | c. canal |
| _____ 2. | a. surplus | b. division of labor | c. Fertile Crescent |
| _____ 3. | a. Fertile Crescent | b. civilization | c. division of labor |