

Babylonian numbers

In this activity we explore the number system of the ancient Babylonians.

The ancient Babylonians used cuneiform characters to write their numbers.

Exercise 1 What are the 2 basic ancient Babylonian numerical symbols and what do they mean?

Exploration 2 Discuss the limitations of the Babylonian system. Then debate whether these so-called limitations were actually limitations at all.

Exploration 3 Is the Babylonian system more of a place-value system or a concatenation system?

Problem 4 Fill out the following table, simplifying any calculations.

<i>Hindu – Arabic</i>	<i>Cuneiform</i>	<i>Hindu – Arabic</i>	<i>Cuneiform</i>	<i>Hindu – Arabic</i>	<i>Cuneiform</i>
5×1		5×2		5×3	
5×4		5×5		5×6	
5×7		5×8		5×9	
5×10		5×20		5×30	
5×40		5×50		$\frac{1}{5}$	
$\frac{1}{4}$		$\frac{1}{9}$		$\frac{1}{10}$	
$\frac{5}{6}$		$\frac{1}{20}$		$\frac{1}{100}$	

Problem 5 Use your table to make the following calculations. You should work in base sixty, though you may use Hindu-Arabic numerals.

- (a) 34×5
- (b) $1,47 \div 5$
- (c) $150 \div 4$
- (d) $8,6,15 \div 6,40$

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