

Ancient Mesopotamia

Before You Read: Previewing Key Concepts

The Big Idea below is a general historical idea. Rewrite this idea as three questions that can be answered as you read this chapter. One example is:

How did the geography of ancient Mesopotamia help agriculture develop?

Look for the answers to your questions as you read.

Big Ideas About Ancient Mesopotamia

Geography Civilizations arise in geographic locations that help the development of agriculture or trade or both.

Mesopotamia is a region that has two great rivers. They provided ancient people with water for drinking and for crops. When the rivers flooded, they deposited fresh soil on the land, making it good for farming. In addition, it was easy to move trade goods by boat down the rivers.



Integrated Technology

eEdition

- Interactive Maps
- Interactive Visuals
- Starting with a Story



Ancient Mesopotamia



INTERNET RESOURCES

Go to **ClassZone.com** for

- WebQuest
- Homework Helper
- Research Links
- Internet Activities
- Quizzes
- Maps
- Test Practice
- Current Events



AFRICA

20°E

30°E

MESOPOTAMIA

WORLD

5000 B.C.

5000 B.C.

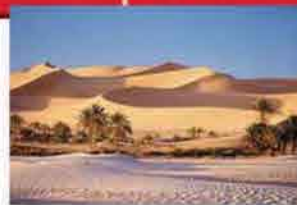
People by the Euphrates River begin to irrigate crops. (jug, about 3000 B.C.) ▶

4600 B.C.

4200 B.C.

4000 B.C.

A dry period begins in Africa, causing the Sahara to spread. ◀ (the Sahara today)



Mesopotamia, 2400 B.C.

INTERACTIVE



ARABIAN PENINSULA

0 75 150 miles
0 75 150 kilometers

- Fertile soil deposited by rivers
- Sumerian cultural area
- Modern coastline



3500 B.C.

Farming villages grow into cities.



3000 B.C.

The first system of writing is in use.

◀ (tablet, about 2100 B.C.)

2400 B.C.

King Urukagina of Lagash reforms government.

3400 B.C.

3000 B.C.

2600 B.C.

2200 B.C.

3100 B.C.

King Narmer unifies Egypt.



2600–2500 B.C.

People in the Indus Valley build cities.

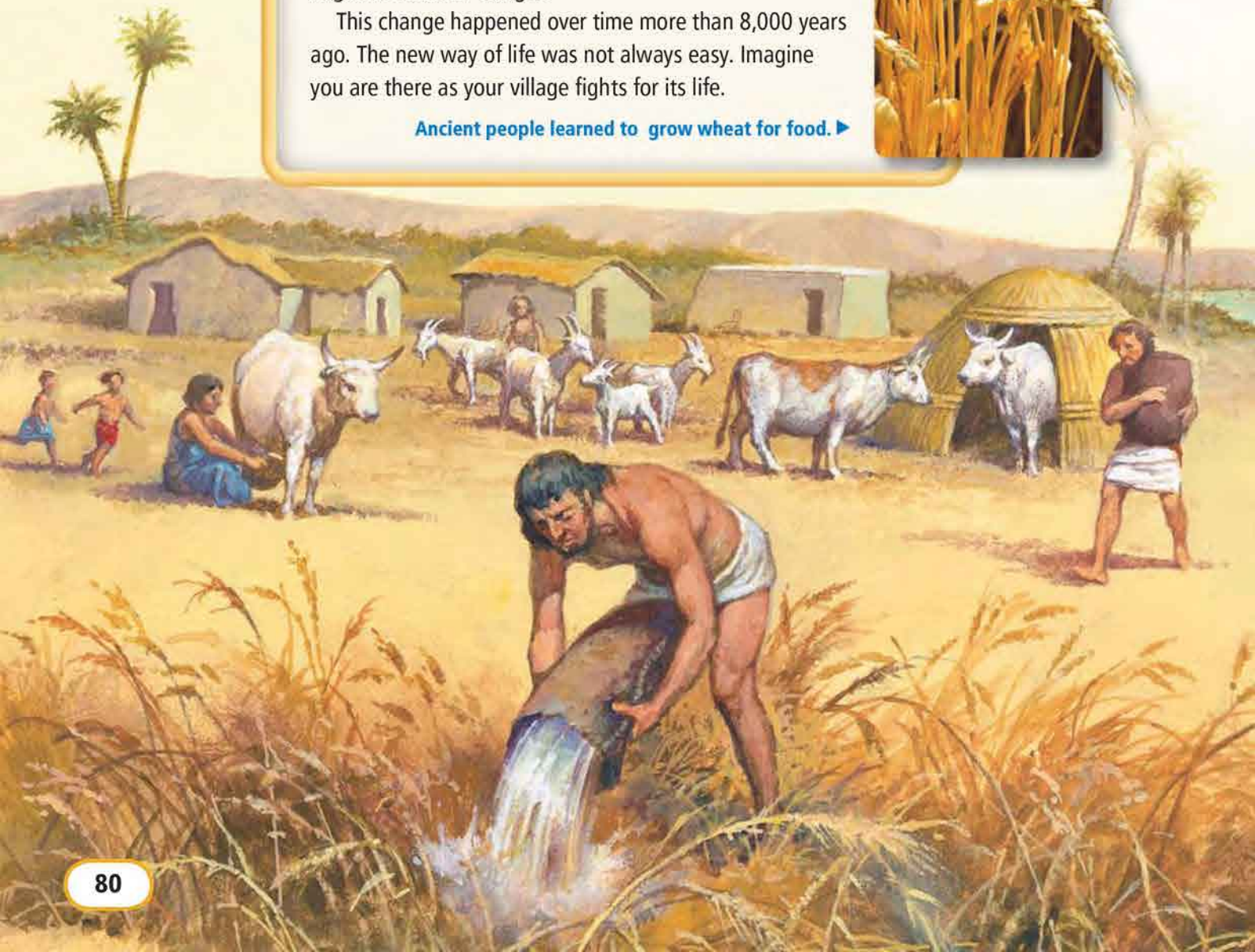
◀ (city ruins today)

THE Long Dry Spell

Background: The first people in Southwest Asia (sometimes referred to as the Middle East) were hunters and gatherers. In some places, they found animals and plants that people began to raise themselves. Some plants that people learned to grow were wild grains. So as people learned how to plant crops for themselves, they began to settle in villages.

This change happened over time more than 8,000 years ago. The new way of life was not always easy. Imagine you are there as your village fights for its life.

Ancient people learned to grow wheat for food. ▶



You are a farmer in Southwest Asia. The oldest members of your family decided several years ago to settle in a new village near a river. They knew the river had something special about it that would make this place suitable for farming.

Every year the river floods and puts a fresh layer of rich, dark mud on the fields. This mud provides moisture to the soil and somehow seems to help plants grow. You depend on the flood to be able to farm.

This year the flood never happened because there wasn't enough rain. With no moisture, the soil was hard when you were ready to plant. Your sharpened digging stick barely penetrated the soil enough for you to put the seeds in the ground.

Now the weather is hot and dry, and the tiny plants are struggling to survive. Every day the scorching sun beats down on them. Their leaves wilt. Large cracks are appearing in the ground, and crops are dying.

The brutal heat makes it difficult to work. Yet every day you must walk to the river with animal-skin bags to get water for the plants. You repeat the trip hour after hour, until your legs feel like they won't support you any longer. Your back aches from carrying water and from bending over your crops. The plants need every drop of moisture they can get. But the heat of the sun seems to evaporate the water as soon as it hits the ground.

At times like this, farming seems like fighting a losing battle. If your crops die, your family won't have enough food. Trudging back and forth to the river, you pray to the gods for help. Sick with worry, you wonder how to avoid this situation in the future.

What can you invent to make farming easier?

Reading & Writing

- 1. READING: Setting** Setting is the place and time of a story. How did setting influence the problem in this story?
- 2. WRITING: Explanation** Write a description of your invention. Explain how it works step by step. Conclude by summarizing how the invention will change farming.

Lesson

1

MAIN IDEAS

- 1 **Geography** The land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was a good region for agriculture.
- 2 **Geography** The environment of Mesopotamia presented several challenges to the people who lived there.
- 3 **Geography** Mesopotamians changed their environment to improve life.

TAKING NOTES

Reading Skill: Summarizing

To summarize is to restate a passage in fewer words. After you read Lesson 1, write a sentence or two summarizing each of the three main sections. Use a chart like this one to record your summaries.

Geography of Mesopotamia

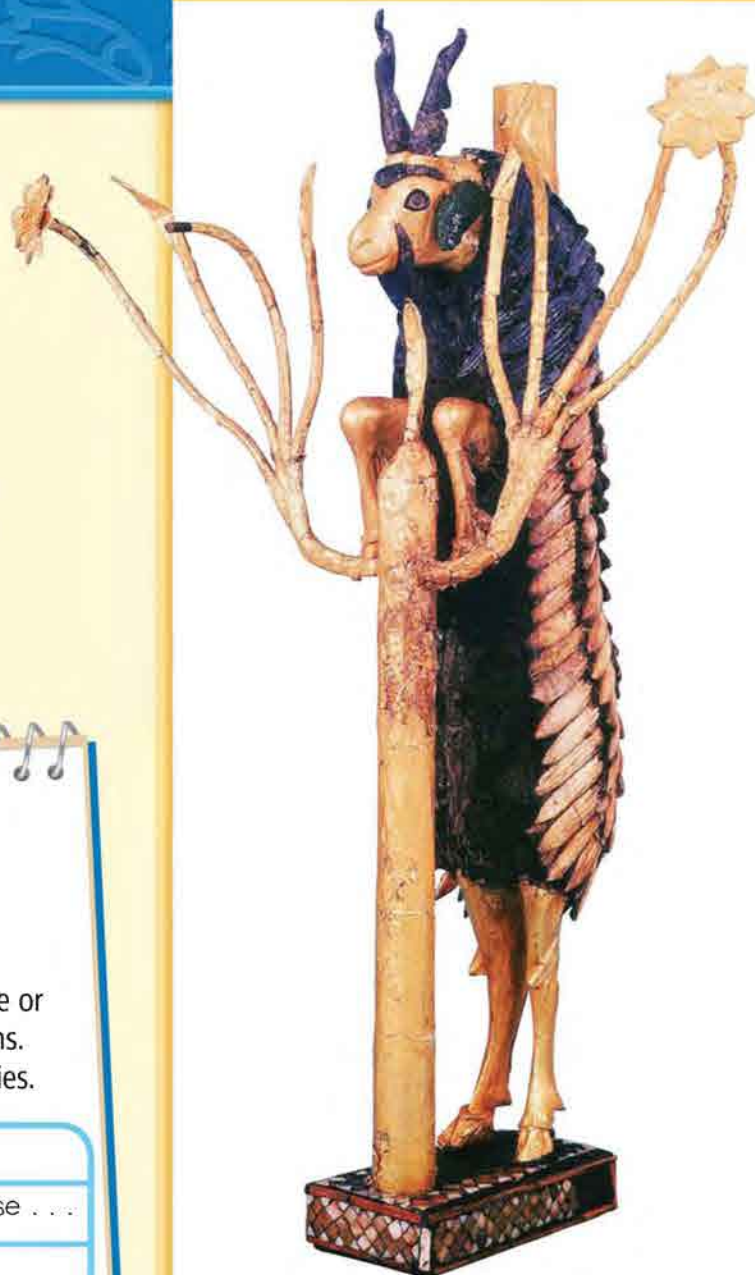
The rivers of Mesopotamia were important because . . .

Mesopotamians watered their crops by . . .

Because of a lack of resources, . . .



Skillbuilder Handbook, page R3



▲ **Ram** This figurine shows a ram caught in a thicket. It is made of gold, shell, and a blue stone called lapis.

Words to Know

Understanding the following words will help you read this lesson:

current a flowing part of a river or stream (page 83)

Experienced travelers knew how currents affected boats on the river.

swell to increase in size or volume (page 84)

The farmers knew that the river would swell, pour over its low banks, and flood their fields.

clog to block up (page 85)

The water slowed to a trickle because the canal through which it flowed was clogged with dirt.

steal to take without permission (page 85)

The thieves planned to sneak into the village at night to steal food and valuables.

Geography of Mesopotamia

TERMS & NAMES

Mesopotamia
floodplain
silt
semiarid
drought
surplus

Build on What You Know Think of a time when you have seen pictures of a flood on television or in newspapers. Floods cause destruction by washing away objects in their path. Do you think a flood can also have good consequences?

The Land Between Two Rivers

- 1 ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How did the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers support agriculture?

The Tigris (TY•grihs) and Euphrates (yoo•FRAY•teez) rivers are in Southwest Asia. They start in the mountains of what are now Turkey and Kurdistan. From there they flow through what is now Iraq southeast to the Persian Gulf. (See the map on pages 78–79.)

Mesopotamia The region where these two rivers flow is called **Mesopotamia** (MEHS•uh•puh•TAY•mee•uh). The name means “land between the rivers.” This land was mostly flat with small, scrubby plants.

The rivers provided water and means of travel. In ancient times, it was easier to travel by boat than over land. Boats can carry heavy loads. River currents helped move boats that were traveling down river. Also, few roads existed.

Connect to Today

Euphrates River
Even today, people of Mesopotamia farm the land next to the Euphrates River. The flat land by a river is a floodplain. ▼



Fertile Soil Almost every year, rain and melting snow in the mountains caused the rivers to swell. As the water flowed down the mountains, it picked up soil. When the rivers reached the plains, water overflowed onto the **floodplain**, the flat land bordering the banks. As the water spread over the floodplain, the soil it carried settled on the land. The fine soil deposited by rivers is called **silt**. The silt was fertile, which means it was good for growing crops.

A Semiarid Climate Usually, less than 10 inches of rain fell in southern Mesopotamia a year. Summers were hot. This type of climate is called **semiarid**. Although the region was dry, ancient people could still grow crops because of the rivers and the fertile soil. Farming villages were widespread across southern Mesopotamia by 4000 B.C.

Vocabulary Strategy

The prefix *semi-* means "half." The word *arid* means "dry." A *semiarid* region has some rain, but remains fairly dry.

REVIEW What made Mesopotamia a good region for farming?

Controlling Water by Irrigation

2 ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the climate affect farmers?

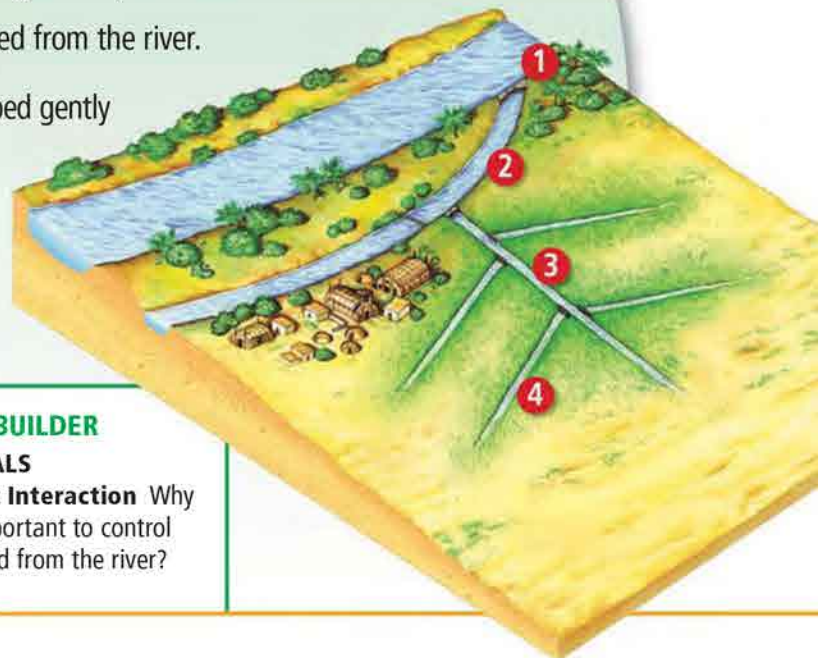
Being a farmer is difficult. Crops need the right amount of water to thrive. The floods and the semiarid climate in Mesopotamia meant that farmers often had either too much water or too little.

Geography

Ancient Irrigation

The model below shows how an ancient irrigation system worked.

- 1** Gates controlled how much water flowed from the river.
- 2** Main canals led from the river. They sloped gently downward to keep the water flowing.
- 3** Medium-sized branch canals led away from the main canals.
- 4** Small feeder canals led water directly to the fields.



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

INTERPRETING VISUALS

Human-Environment Interaction Why do you think it was important to control how much water flowed from the river?

Floods and Droughts The yearly flood was unpredictable. No one knew when the flood would occur. It might come in April or as late as June. Farmers could not predict when to plant. Also, the flood's size depended on how much snow melted in the mountains in spring and how much rain fell. If there was too much, the flood might be violent and wash everything away. If there was too little rain and melting snow, the flood would not come.

A **drought** is a period when not enough rain and snow fall. In a semiarid region, drought is a constant danger. During a drought, the river level would drop, making it hard to water crops. If crops failed, people starved.

Irrigation By about 6000 B.C., farmers built canals to carry water from the rivers to their fields. Such a system is called irrigation. Often, the silt in the water clogged the canals. Workers had to clean out the silt to keep the water flowing. They also built dams to hold back excess water during floods.

REVIEW How did Mesopotamians water their crops during droughts?

Finding Resources

3 ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did Mesopotamians cope with a lack of resources?

Since the beginning of time, humans have had to solve problems in the environment. For example, Mesopotamia had no forests to provide wood. The region also lacked stone and minerals, such as metals.

Mud Houses and Walls Because of that lack of resources, Mesopotamians had few building materials. Since they could not build with wood or stone, they used mud for bricks and plaster. However, mud buildings crumbled easily and had to be repaired often.

Also, Mesopotamia was easy to invade because it had few mountains or other natural barriers. As a result, people from other regions often came to steal from the Mesopotamians or conquer them. The ancient Mesopotamians wanted to protect themselves, but they had no trees or stone to build barriers. So people built mud walls around their villages.



Connect to Today

▲ **Building of Mud and Reeds** This style of building has been used in the region for at least 5,000 years and is still used today.

Finding Resources Mesopotamians obtained some stone, wood, and metal outside their own land. They were able to trade for these things because they grew a surplus of grain.

Surplus means more than they needed for themselves.

Jobs such as digging canals, building walls, and trading had to be done over and over. Community leaders began to organize groups of people to do the work at the right time. Lesson 2 explains more about the organization of society.

REVIEW Why was trade important in Mesopotamia?

Lesson Summary

- The Tigris and Euphrates rivers made the soil of Mesopotamia good for growing crops.
- The people of Mesopotamia developed an irrigation system to bring water to crops.
- Mesopotamia had few resources. People traded surplus crops to get what they needed.

Why It Matters Now . . .

The Mesopotamians had to overcome a lack of resources. Today people still work to solve shortages of water, food, and resources.

1 Lesson Review

Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of
- | | | |
|-------------|----------|---------|
| Mesopotamia | silt | drought |
| floodplain | semiarid | surplus |

Using Your Notes

Summarizing Use your completed chart to answer the following question:

2. How did the Mesopotamians change the environment to deal with geographic challenges?

Geography of Mesopotamia
The rivers of Mesopotamia were important because . . .
Mesopotamians watered their crops by . . .
Because of a lack of resources, . . .



Main Ideas

3. What did the Tigris and Euphrates rivers provide for ancient Mesopotamians?
4. How did the lack of natural resources affect Mesopotamians?
5. How did Mesopotamian farmers obtain the right amount of water for their crops?

Critical Thinking

6. **Understanding Causes** How was irrigation connected to trade?
7. **Drawing Conclusions** How did Mesopotamians create a successful society?

Activity

Writing Job Descriptions Create a job description for a worker in Mesopotamia. Some possible jobs include irrigation system planner, canal digger, wall builder, trader, and project scheduler. Form a small group, and share your job descriptions.