

Ancient Civilizations

Map of Fertile Crescent

Name: _____ Date: _____

In this unit, you will learn about some of the earliest civilizations. Look carefully at the map.



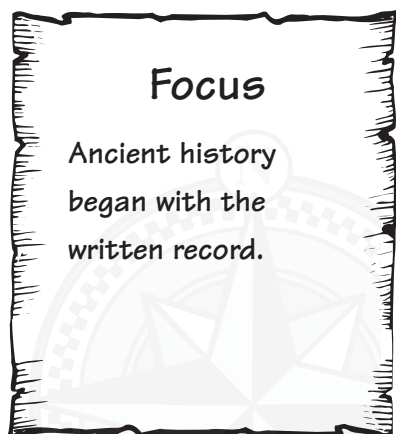
Ancient Civilizations

Vocabulary

1. **A.D.**—*Anno Domini*; the period of history which begins with the birth of Christ
2. **Akkad**—Mesopotamian city-state; world's first empire
3. **ancient history**—first civilizations that wrote and kept records; 3500 B.C. to 476 A.D.
4. **Assyrian Empire**—ancient Mesopotamian empire
5. **Babylon**—ancient Mesopotamian empire
6. **B.C.**—the period of ancient history before the birth of Christ
7. **Canaan**—area where the first Hebrews lived
8. **city-state**—ancient area with its own government and culture
9. **civilization**—complex society that has language, religion, a division of labor, and a social hierarchy
10. **cuneiform**—first form of writing
11. **empire**—large area of city-states controlled by one ruler
12. **Fertile Crescent**—area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where the first civilizations emerged
13. **Gilgamesh**—ancient Babylonian epic poem
14. **Hammurabi Code**—collection of ancient Babylonian laws
15. **Judaism**—the religion practiced by the Hebrews, who were the ancestors of Jewish people
16. **Kingdom of Israel**—second kingdom of Israelites established by king David
17. **Mesopotamia**—region in the Fertile Crescent where the first civilization began; means "the land between the two rivers"
18. **Monotheism**—belief in one god
19. **prehistory**—time before recorded history
20. **Sumer**—Mesopotamian city-state
21. **Torah**—sacred text of Judaism; first five books of the Bible
22. **ziggurat**—Mesopotamian pyramid-shaped structure used for religious ceremonies

Ancient History and Civilizations

Brief #1



Ancient History and PreHistory

In the next several units, you are going to learn about ancient history. **Ancient history is the study of the history of the first civilizations that wrote and kept records.**

Of course, people had been living in communities on Earth long before they began to write things down. That period of history is called prehistory. This is the main difference between prehistory and ancient history. There is a written record of the ancient period, but not of the prehistoric period.



Communities and Civilizations

Before you begin to study ancient civilizations you first have to know what a civilization is! There are differences between people living together in communities and groups, and people living together in civilizations.

Prehistoric people lived together in communities, but those groups are not considered civilizations. A civilization is a large group of people who live in a society that is complex. **A civilization has a written language, a social hierarchy, and a political system. There is a division of labor, an organized religion, and a food supply.** This is another important difference between the ancient world and the prehistoric world. Prehistoric people did not live in civilizations, but ancient people did.

Vocabulary

1. ancient history
2. prehistory
3. civilization
4. B.C.
5. A.D.



Population of the Ancient World

The ancient world was full of many different civilizations. You will hear about the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. You will learn about places like Persia, Babylon, and Judea. Some of these civilizations coexisted, or were around at the same time as one another. But there are other ancient civilizations that existed at different times. Scholars consider the ancient world to be anything between 3500 B.C. and 476 A.D.

While the ancient world was not as populated as the world is today, there were still millions and millions of people on the planet then. People lived on all of the continents with the exception of Antarctica. So when you read about the ancient Egyptians, or any other ancient civilization, it's important to remember that they were not the only civilization in existence at that time, or the only people alive on the planet.

Ancient History and Civilizations

Brief #1 (cont.)



Difference Between Civilizations

But what makes one civilization different from another? Sometimes you will learn that there were two or more civilizations that not only existed at the same time and in the same area, but that they also had similar cultures and religions.

If you look at a map of the Italian peninsula in ancient times, you will see that Romans, Etruscans, Greeks and other people populated the area. But these groups were considered to be members of different civilizations, even though their cultures had things in common. That's because they spoke different languages. This is one of the main features that distinguishes one civilization from another. In order for a civilization to arise in the first place, it would be important for the people to be able to communicate with one another.



Dates in the Ancient World

When you learn about ancient history, you will often see the abbreviations B.C. and A.D. For example, you may read that in 490 B.C. the Persian Empire attacked Greece, or that the Roman Empire fell in 476 A.D.

The abbreviation B.C. means before Christ, or before the birth of Jesus Christ. The abbreviation A.D. means *Anno Domini*, which is Latin for *in the year of our Lord*. The year 1 B.C. means one year before the birth of Jesus. The year 1 A.D. is the year in which scholars say Jesus was born. If the current year is 2009 A.D., it means that it has been two thousand and nine years since the birth of Jesus. So in order to figure out how long ago 490 B.C. or any other date in the B.C. time period really is, you must do the following: Add the current year to the number of years B.C.

For example: 2009 A.D. + 490 B.C. = 2,499 years ago.



B.C. and A.D.

The fact that we use a dating system that uses the birth of Jesus to divide history has been debated over the years. That's because the birth of Jesus is very important to some people, like Christians, and not as important to other people who practice different faiths.

This dating system was developed by a Christian monk who lived in the Middle Ages. It was adopted by Europe and has become the traditional way most western societies reckon time.

Mesopotamia

Brief #2

Focus

The Fertile Crescent is located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

The first civilizations developed in an area called the Fertile Crescent. **The Fertile Crescent is an area of rich land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the Middle East.** The present day countries of Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, and Kuwait are the countries that are there now. In 3500 B.C. this region was called Mesopotamia. **Mesopotamia means *the land between the two rivers*.**

Ancient civilizations, as well as more modern ones like the United States, often developed along the banks of rivers. Rivers provide food and water. Often, when rivers flood their banks, the surrounding soil becomes very fertile and good for growing crops.

Thousands of years ago, when civilizations first began, there were no countries or nations. But there were city-states. **A city-state is an area that has its own government and culture.** Some of the earliest city-states in the Fertile Crescent were Ur, Kish, and Nippur.



Sumer

Sumer was an early and influential Mesopotamian city-state. The Sumerians made houses out of mud bricks. They also built structures called ziggurats. **A ziggurat is a pyramid-shaped building that was used for religious ceremonies.** The ziggurat of Ur, located in present-day Iraq, still stands.

The Sumerians are credited with inventing the wheel and cuneiform. **Cuneiform is the first form of writing that people used.** The Sumerian civilization lasted until about 2000 B.C.



Akkad

Akkad was another powerful city-state in Mesopotamia. In about 2334 B.C., the Akkadians expanded their influence by conquering other city-states in the region. Eventually, the Akkadian Empire controlled a large area. An empire is different from a city-state. **An empire is a large area full of city-states that is controlled by one ruler. The Akkadian Empire is considered to be the first empire in the world.**

Vocabulary

1. Fertile Crescent
2. Mesopotamia
3. city-state
4. Sumer
5. ziggurat
6. cuneiform
7. Akkad
8. empire

Mesopotamia

Brief #2 (cont.)

Fast Fact

From the Hammurabi
Code:

*If a son strike his
father, his hands shall
be hewn off.*



Babylon

In about 1894 B.C., the city-state of Babylon began to emerge as a major force in the Fertile Crescent. It encompassed many city-states and spread over the whole of Mesopotamia. One of Babylon's most powerful kings was Hammurabi. **Hammurabi is famous for developing the Hammurabi Code, which consists of 282 laws.**

The Babylonians made many contributions to mathematics and astronomy. The Babylonian Empire lasted until 539 B.C.



Assyria

In around 1900 B.C. the Assyrian Empire, which was located in the northern part of Mesopotamia, gained power and influence. Even though Assyria and Babylon were separate civilizations, they influenced each others culture and progress.

Each civilization that emerges makes contributions that advance human knowledge. Even in the ancient world, people traveled, talked, and traded. As they did, different ideas, inventions, and religions were spread from person to person and eventually from culture to culture.

In the 19th century, archeologists found what has come to be called the Library of Ashurbanipal. This was the library of an Assyrian king of the same name. The library comprises thousands of clay tables that contain the writings of many civilizations that existed in Mesopotamia. **One of the writings that was found was of a Babylonian poem called Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is thought to have been an ancient Mesopotamian king.**

Vocabulary (cont.)

9. Babylon
10. Hammurabi Code
11. Assyrian Empire
12. Gilgamesh
13. Mesopotamia



Cradle of Civilization

Mesopotamia is often called the cradle of civilization because it is the area in which the first civilizations were established. The civilizations discussed here, along with many others, made important early contributions that helped to shape the development of all civilizations to follow.

Hebrews and Judaism

Brief #3

Focus

The Hebrews were a group of people who founded the Kingdom of Israel.

The Hebrews were a group of people who lived in an area called Canaan, which is the area of Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and northeastern Israel.

At the time of the Canaanites, the Egyptian Empire was a powerful force and major civilization in the region. Scholars think that many Canaanites migrated to Egypt due to a famine. The Egyptians then forced the Hebrews to live as slaves for many hundreds of years.

Scholars don't know exactly when, but at some point the enslaved Hebrews were granted their freedom and allowed to leave Egypt. The story of the enslavement and emancipation of the Hebrews is told in the book of Exodus, which is in the *Torah*. **The Torah is the first five books of the Bible**, and also the most important book in the religion of Judaism.

Judaism is the religion practiced by the Hebrews, who are the ancestors of Jewish people. Judaism is one of the first monotheistic religions in the world. **Monotheism is the belief in one god.**

In about 1000 B.C., the Kingdom of Israel was founded by King David. The Hebrews were then known as the Israelites.

After King David's death, his son Solomon became the king of Israel. He is famous for building a temple in which to keep the Torah. There are many very strict laws regarding how the Torah is treated. For example, every copy of the Torah is handwritten by scribes. The Torah itself is kept between two scrolls, and a special pointer is used to read from the sacred books.

After the death of King Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel split into two parts: Israel was located in the north and Judah was located in the south. In 722 B.C., Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire. Over a hundred years later, the Babylonians conquered Judah.

Judaism is one of the most important world religions. Not only is it practiced by millions of people the world over, it is also considered the origin of two other widely practiced religions: Christianity and Islam.

Vocabulary

1. Hebrews
2. Canaan
3. Torah
4. Judaism
5. monotheism
6. Kingdom of Israel