



## Civilizations: *Discussion Guide*

### Overview

What elevates a people and their culture to the rank of “civilization”? Explore the technological developments that defined and shaped early civilizations with this discussion guide and its related videos and activities.

Students will begin with a look at ancient Mesopotamia and the many notable inventions and innovations of the Sumerians. Then they’ll examine the crucial role the Nile played in the development of Egyptian civilization. A profile of the Inca and their ability to overcome the obstacles of their rugged environment follows. The guide ends with an introduction to the ancient city of Petra and the Nabataeans.

### Classroom Activities

1. Show the “Inventions and Innovations in Ancient Mesopotamia” segment from the *Mesopotamia: From Nomads to Farmers* program.
  - **Discussion:** What inventions and innovations by the Sumerians are shown in the video? (*Agriculture (planting and harvesting wheat, making a plow and using oxen to pull the plow; domestication (taming and raising wild goats and sheep); controlling the river (building levees to dam the water and gated ditches for irrigation); a calendar based on the moon and stars (zodiac); a system of writing (cuneiforms and clay tablets); and the invention of the wheel*)
  - **Cuneiform Tablets:** Have students learn more about how cuneiform tablets were used by browsing the following Web pages created by the Science Museum of Minnesota. Then have students create their own cuneiform tablets with oven-baked polymer clay, such as Sculpey or Fimo.
    - <http://www.smm.org/research/Anthropology/cuneiform/cuneiform.php>
    - <http://www.smm.org/research/Anthropology/cuneiform/sumer.php>
  - **Mesopotamia Today:** Show students the map of Mesopotamia and the Near East, pointing out the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Then, as a class, locate the region on a contemporary map. Ask students: Today, what countries and cities are located in this fertile crescent? Working in small groups, have students research and report on life in Iraq and the city of Mosul during the 20th century and at the start of the 21st. The groups’ presentations should address questions that include: Is farming still the way of life for most people? How has the economy of the region changed? What other changes have shaped the way of life for the civilizations that live in the region today?
2. Show the “The Nile: Where Egypt Began” segment from the *Toward Civilization* program. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

- **Discussion:** How often does the Nile overflow its banks? (*The river floods once a year.*) Why is this annual flooding important? (*It soaks the desert land of Egypt with water and deposits a layer of rich silt (fine soil). This makes the Nile Valley a good place to grow food and other agricultural goods.*) How did the Nile promote civilization? (*The growth of agriculture required people to cooperate, especially to build dikes and irrigation ditches. People also used the river like a highway between Northern and Southern Egypt, leading to the creation of the world's first unified state and to the establishment of an active trade route.*)
  - **Make a Shaduf:** The invention of this simple machine expanded the ability of ancient Egyptians to irrigate their lands. Working in small groups, have students use the directions at the following site to build their own shaduf:
    - <http://www.historyforkids.org/crafts/egypt/shaduf.htm>
  - **Who Built the Pyramids?:** In the video, students learn that scientists now think that off-season farmers, rather than slaves, built Egypt's pyramids. Have students learn more about this topic by reading "Who Built the Pyramids?", and article from the July-August 2003 issue of *Harvard Magazine*. A printable PDF version of the article can be found at the following Web site:
    - <http://128.103.142.209/lib/03ja/pdf/0703-42.pdf>
3. Show the "Peru's Past" segment from *Culture Clash: New World Meets Old* program. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
- **Discussion:** How did the Inca use their engineering skills to overcome the obstacles of their environment? (*They reshaped the landscape to meet their needs. They straightened rivers and dug canals to bring water to distant fields using irrigation systems. They carved the mountain side into steppes, creating terraces for farming.*) How did the Inca move enormous stone blocks? (*They used only inclined planes, ropes, and sheer human strength.*) What is the significance of Machu Picchu? (*This great city in the clouds survived the Spanish conquest untouched. In addition, its architecture mirrors the three levels of Inca society.*)
  - **Archaeology Investigation:** In the video, students hear that "Machu Picchu fell into disuse and was forgotten, even by the Incas." Have students research Hiram Bingham's rediscovery of the Inca city in 1911 and then write a newspaper account of the event. The following Web sites provide good starting points:
    - <http://www.infoperu.com/en/view.php?lang=en&p=81>
    - <http://www.machupicchu.org/>
    - [http://www.nationalgeographic.com/inca/machu\\_picchu.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/inca/machu_picchu.html)
  - **Hike to Machu Picchu:** Either individually or in small groups, have students visit the following Web site, which allows them to trek a virtual Inca Trail and see the sites of this "lost city of the Inca."
    - <http://www.raingod.com/angus/Gallery/Photos/SouthAmerica/Peru/IncaTrail/index.html>
4. Show the "Segment Two: Petra: Secrets of the Red City" segment from the *The Ancient World* program. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

- **Discussion:** How was Petra’s location important to its success? (*The narrow, mile-long mountain gorge that served as the entrance to Petra helped protect the city for invaders. The gorge also served as a channel for ceramic pipes in the city’s sophisticated plumbing system. Petra’s location allowed it to control the spice trade in the region and helped turn the city into a thriving international crossroads for commerce, architecture, and religion.* )
- **Tour Petra:** Have students take “A Walk Through the Ruins” at the American Museum of Natural History’s *OLogy* feature for kids. Here, they can take an archaeological tour of Petra, stopping at 11 sites and examining photographs of the ruins and the artifacts found there.
  - <http://ology.amnh.org/archaeology/petra/walkthru.html>

Students can also examine interactive panorama’s of three Petra sites—the Treasury, Monastery (Al Deir), and Urn Tomb—as part of the museum’s Petra exhibit at:

  - <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/petra/interactives/>
- **Related Viewing:** Have students learn more about Jordan by watching “The Royal Tour of Jordan” segment of *The Middle East: Land of Contrasts*. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.) The 38-minute segment, led by the dynamic King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein, examines ancient sites and contemporary issues.

## Academic Standards

### National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
- People, Places, and Environments
- Science, Technology, and Society

### Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

#### World History

- The Beginnings of Human Society
- Early Civilizations and the Rise of Pastoral Peoples
- Global Expansion and Encounter

#### Geography

- Human Systems
- Environment and Society

#### Language Arts

- Writing: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions; Gathers and uses information for research purposes

- Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media