Mesopotamia

From Nomads to Farmers
Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 3-6  Curriculum Focus: Social Studies  Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description

Inventions and Innovations in Ancient Mesopotamia (5 min.) — Looks at significant inventions and innovations in agriculture, timekeeping, writing, and technology. Development of the Sumerian City-State (4 min.) — Explores the city-state of Nippur, explaining how villages grew into city-states, and describing the architecture and social hierarchy in Sumer. Religion and the Ruling Class of the Ancient Sumerians (4 min.) — Discusses the role of religious beliefs in ancient Sumerian society, and how the priests and kings of its city-states maintained order.

Discussion Questions

• What was it like to live long ago, in one of the world’s most ancient civilizations?
• Why did the development of farming allow people to live in one place all year long?
• How do inventions improve people’s lives?
• How did people trade with each other and pay taxes long ago?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

• Learn about the history and lifestyles of the ancient Sumerians.
• Understand how human innovations can dramatically change the way people live.
• Create a journal based on a day in the life of a resident of Nippur, a city-state in the Sumerian region of ancient Mesopotamia.

Materials

• Mesopotamia: From Nomads to Farmers video
• Computer with Internet access
• A map of the ancient world showing Sumer and the rest of Mesopotamia (optional)
• Print resources about Sumer and Mesopotamia
Procedures

1. Review information from the video with the class.
   - Why did the ancient Sumerians look for new ways to produce their food? (Hunting wild animals for meat and gathering fruits and greens did not always provide them with enough to eat.)
   - How did growing crops of wheat and domesticating animals like sheep and goats allow the Sumerians to build cities and live in one place all year long? (They didn't have to travel constantly to find new sources of food.)
   - What does the word “Mesopotamia” mean? (The land between the rivers)
   - Between which rivers did Mesopotamia lie? (The Tigris and the Euphrates)
   - Why did the soil of the Mesopotamian region of Sumer grow such good crops? (The yearly flooding of the two rivers washed rich soil down from the mountains and left it in the fields of Sumer.)
   - What problem at first made farming difficult there and how did the Sumerians solve it? (At first, they never knew when the rivers would flood. They solved the problem by building earthen dams called levees to hold back the floods.)
   - In what other way did the Sumerians control the rivers? (They created gated ditches to send water into their crops for irrigation.)
   - What important farming tool did the Sumerians invent? (The plow)
   - What else did the Mesopotamians invent? (The wheel; a calendar based on the moon and stars; writing.)
   - What tools did the Mesopotamians use for writing? (They used a sharpened piece of reed called a stylus which they pressed into wet clay tablets.)
   - What do we call their style of writing? (Cuneiform)
   - What did the Sumerians put into writing before any other society? (Their laws)
   - What was the name of the temple where Sumerians believed their gods lived? (ziggurat)
   - Of what material were the houses in a Sumerian city made? (Mud bricks)

2. Ask students to name some of the people they saw or heard mentioned in the program, by their jobs or their station in life. Record their responses and read any below not offered by a student. Examples include:
   - Student
   - Farmer
   - King
   - Priest
3. Have each student choose one of the people in the list above and challenge them to learn more about what that person’s life in Sumer would have been like. Have them consider these questions: What was a typical day in that person’s life like? What did they do in the morning, afternoon, evening? Where did they sleep? What kind of clothes did they wear? If you lived in Sumer, what would your life have been like? What would your parents do for a living and what would you do when you grew up? How would your life have been different than the modern life you live now? How would it be harder? How might it be easier?

4. Have students research the lives of people in the Sumerian region of ancient Mesopotamia using print and Web resources. The following Web sites are a good starting point:

- Ancient Civilizations for Kids: Mesopotamia
  http://www.kathimitchell.com/ancivil.html#Mesopotamia:
- Suffolk Web Kids: Mesopotamia
  http://www.suffolk.lib.ny.us/youth/jcancient.html#MESOPOTAMIA
- Everyday Things in Ancient Mesopotamia
  http://www.costumegallery.com/Mesopotamia/ancient.htm
- Yahooligans: Mesopotamia
  http://search.yahooligans.yahoo.com/search/ligans?p=mesopotamia
- Sumerian Civilization
  http://www2.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/sumer.htm
- Ancient Sumer
- Women’s Lives in Mesopotamia
  http://www.womeninworldhistory.com/lesson2.html
5. When students have completed their research, ask them to summarize their findings in a one-page Day in the Life Journal. They will describe the activities and events in a typical day in the life of the Sumerian they chose to research. Ask them to include at least three specific details, for example, instead of just writing that they ate breakfast, they would describe exactly what they ate. Instead of just writing that they dressed to go out, they would describe their clothing. Instead of just writing that they went to bed, they would describe where they slept. Or they might choose different specific details to describe. Alternative project for younger students: Have them create an illustrated journal, drawing pictures to explain a day in their Sumerian’s life and writing short captions about each picture.

6. Have students choose a partner. Ask them to share their journal with their partner and answer any questions. Then have each student summarize their partner’s report for the class, including at least three interesting facts.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; produced a complete Day in the Life Journal, including all of the requested information; accurately summarized their partner’s Journal and cited three interesting, relevant points.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; produced an adequate Day in the Life Journal, including most of the requested information; satisfactorily summarized their partner’s Journal and cited two relevant points.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions; created an incomplete Day in the Life Journal with little or none of the requested information; were not able to summarize their partner’s Journal or recall any interesting, relevant points.

Vocabulary

ancestors
Definition: People in one’s family, from whom one is descended
Context: Your ancestors include your grandparents, great grandparents, and great-great grandparents.

cuneiform
Definition: The system of writing used by the ancient Sumerians
Context: Cuneiform writing consists of characters with wedge-shaped parts.

domestication
Definition: The taming of wild animals to use for farming or to be kept as pets
Context: The domestication of sheep and goats helped the Mesopotamians become farmers.
**Euphrates River**
*Definition:* One of the rivers that borders what was the land of Mesopotamia.
*Context:* The Euphrates River bordered Mesopotamia to the west.

**journal**
*Definition:* A record of personal experiences and thoughts kept on a regular basis
*Context:* Writing a journal can help you understand yourself.

**levee**
*Definition:* Earthen dams constructed to hold back floodwaters
*Context:* A levee system helped the Mesopotamians farm their most fertile land.

**Mesopotamia**
*Definition:* An ancient land located where we find the modern country of Iraq
*Context:* Mesopotamia means, “land between the rivers” and got its name because it was located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

**Nippur**
*Definition:* A major city-state in the ancient Sumerian region of Mesopotamia
*Context:* Nippur was a busy trading center in Sumer and its most important religious city.

**scribe**
*Definition:* A person paid to write, especially in ancient times
*Context:* The job of a scribe was considered important in Sumer.

**stylus**
*Definition:* A hard, pointed writing tool cut from a reed
*Context:* Sumerians pressed the point of a stylus into wet clay in order to write.

**Sumerians**
*Definition:* Residents of Sumer, a region of the ancient land of Mesopotamia
*Context:* Sumerians developed a culture whose members farmed and traded instead of hunting and gathering to make a living.

**Tigris River**
*Definition:* One of the rivers that borders what was the land of Mesopotamia
*Context:* The Tigris River bordered Mesopotamia to the east.
**zodiac**

**Definition:** A system of star constellations used to measure time and dates

**Context:** The Mesopotamians used the zodiac to help them keep track of the seasons.

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**Academic Standards**

**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/](http://www.mcrel.org/).

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- **World History—Era 1—The Beginnings of Human Society:** Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities; Understands the processes that contributed to the emergence of agricultural societies around the world
- **World History—Era 2—Early Civilizations and the Rise of Pastoral Peoples, 4000-1000 BCE:** Understands the major characteristics of civilization and the development of civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley
- **Geography—The World in Spatial Terms:** Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment; Understands the characteristics and uses of spatial organization of Earth's surface
- **Geography—Places and Regions:** Understands the physical and human characteristics of place; Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions
- **Geography—Physical Systems:** Knows the physical processes that shape patterns on Earth's surface
- **Geography—Human Systems:** Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface; Understands the patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface; Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes; Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface
- **Geography—Environment and Society:** Understands how human actions modify the physical environment; Understands how physical systems affect human systems; Understands the changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources
- **Geography—Uses of Geography:** Understands how geography is used to interpret the past
- **Language Arts—Writing:** Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing; Gathers and uses information for research purposes
• Language Arts—Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts
• Language Arts—Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
• Language Arts—Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
• Arts—Visual Arts: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures; Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

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
• Time, Continuity, and Change
• People, Places, and Environment
• Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
• Power, Authority, and Governance
• Production, Distribution, and Consumption
• Science, Technology, and Society

Support Materials
Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the DiscoverySchool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit
• http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html

DVD Content
This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.
How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video — This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index — Here the video is divided into three parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, use the navigation key to highlight the icon and press Enter or Play on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units — These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher’s Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, use the navigation key to highlight the icon and press Enter or Play on the TV remote, or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link — Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources — This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Inventions and Innovations in Ancient Mesopotamia (5 min.)
Discover how the Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia settled into the fertile valley between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers, while making important advances in agriculture, language, and timekeeping.

II. Development of the Sumerian City-State (4 min.)
The city-state of Nippur was considered the holiest city in all of Sumer. Learn about the social hierarchy and varied roles that people played within this ancient city-state.

III. Religion and the Ruling Class of the Ancient Sumerians (4 min.)
The ancient Sumerians believed that their laws were handed down from seven great gods. Find out how the priests and kings maintained order within Nippur and redistributed wealth through a system of taxation.
Curriculum Units

1. Hunter-Gatherer, Agrarian, and Pastoral Communities

Pre-viewing question
Q: What are the benefits of switching from a hunter-gatherer society, to an agrarian (farming) community?
A: Answers may include the ability to rely on a steady source of food, to have a place to store the harvest, and more permanent shelters for people to live.

Post-viewing question
Q: What were the first wild animals that the ancient Sumerians domesticated?
A: The Sumerians tamed wild goats and sheep so they could raise them for food.

2. Mesopotamian Geography and Sumerian Society

Pre-viewing question
Q: What are the benefits of living in a river valley?
A: Answers may include the fact that river valleys have a reliable source of freshwater and usually have fertile soil for farming.

Post-viewing question
Q: What crops did the ancient Sumerians grow and eat?
A: The ancient Sumerians grew barley, wheat, beans, vegetables, melons, dates, apples, figs, and grapes. They also raised livestock to produce their own milk, cheese, and meat, and they ate fish that they caught in the rivers.

3. Agricultural Technology

Pre-viewing question
Q: How did farmers get water to their crops before the advent of mechanical sprinkler systems?
A: Answers may include relying on rainfall or transporting water from lakes or rivers.
Post-viewing question
Q: How did the irrigation system developed by the Sumerians provide water for their crops?
A: The Sumerians built earthen levees along the river to prevent flooding, and they built a series of ditches with gates that the farmers could open if they needed more water from the rivers.

4. Innovations in Timekeeping

Pre-viewing question
Q: How did ancient civilizations keep track of time?
A: Answers may include primitive sundials, and observing seasonal climate changes.

Post-viewing question
Q: How is the ancient Sumerian calendar similar to our own calendar?
A: The Sumerian calendar has twelve months in a year, and thirty days every month (which is the average number of days per month in the Gregorian calendar used in the United States today).

5. Development of a Written Language

Pre-viewing question
Q: How did people keep track of important information before the invention of a written language?
A: Answers may include sketches on cave walls, and passing down stories orally from one generation to the next.

Post-viewing question
Q: What was the name of the system of writing used by the ancient Sumerians, and what material did they use to write on?
A: The Sumerian system of writing is called cuneiform, and scribes documented information by etching letters into wet clay tablets. Once the clay hardened, the tablets became a permanent record.

6. Advances in Technology

Pre-viewing question
Q: If the wheel had never been invented, how could people move heavy objects from place to place?
A: Answers may include using a large number of people to lift objects, or putting objects on a boat and sending it downstream.
Post-viewing question
Q: What were some of the early uses of the wheel?
A: Answers may include using carts to transport building materials, bringing harvested crops in from the field, and transporting people in chariots across long distances.

7. The Rise of the Sumerian City-State

Pre-viewing question
Q: Does your town have a central location where people like to gather?
A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question
Q: What was the importance of the ziggurat in Nippur?
A: The ziggurat was literally at the center of the city-state. Not only was the building a temple, it was the tallest building in Nippur. Residents of Nippur could tell how important a family was by their home’s proximity to the ziggurat.

8. Social Hierarchy Within Nippur

Pre-viewing question
Q: What occupations did people have in ancient societies?
A: Answers may include fisherman, farmer, weaver, or servant.

Post-viewing question
Q: How did some people become slaves in Nippur and how long did they remain in slavery?
A: Some of Nippur’s slaves were prisoners of war; others were debtors. In Sumerian society, these slaves would be released from working in the fields after three years.

8. Religious Beliefs of the Ancient Sumerians

Pre-viewing question
Q: Name some early cultures that believed in more than one god.
A: Student responses may include the ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and the Aztecs.

Post-viewing question
Q: How did the people of Nippur worship their greatest god, Enlil?
A: In addition to building a temple in his honor, the residents of Nippur made statues of themselves praying to Enlil, which they left at the temple. The priests held ceremonies twice each day honoring Enlil and offering him food.

9. Power, Authority, and Governance in the Sumerian City-State

Pre-viewing question
Q: How did early rulers maintain order in their kingdoms?
A: Answers may include taxation, imposition of laws, and total control over the armed forces.

Post-viewing question
Q: What possessions and activities did the Sumerian kings tax?
A: Sumerian kings usually taxed everything from crops and livestock to funerals. The male head of the household also donated time to the government in a form of taxation called a “burden.”

Credit

Renne Leatto, education and curriculum writer
Robyn Kurth, freelance writer
The Development of Written Language
Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 3-6  Curriculum Focus: Social Studies  Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description

Development of Writing in Mesopotamia (2 min.) – Explains why the Sumerians developed a written record of their civilization, and how they documented information on clay tablets. The Role of Scribes in Ancient Sumerian Society (2 min.) – Describes how scribes were trained in Sumer, and their importance to the ruling class. Myths and Archetypes of Mesopotamia (6 min.) – Recounts a story of the great flood that is similar to the story of Noah’s Ark in the Bible’s Old Testament, and provides a detailed retelling of a portion of the Epic of Gilgamesh, one of the world’s oldest written stories.

Discussion Questions

• What type of things did the ancient Sumerians want to document?
• How did the Sumerians document their laws, myths, and other records?
• What was the importance of scribes in Mesopotamia?
• What is the moral of the story of Gilgamesh?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

• Understand how written language transformed Western civilization.
• Learn why scribes were valued and respected in ancient Sumerian society.
• Create a clay tablet “time capsule” that documents three important aspects of everyday life.

Materials

• Mesopotamia: The Development of Written Language video
• Computer with Internet access
• A map of the ancient world showing Sumer and the rest of Mesopotamia (optional)
• Print and Web resources about Sumer, Mesopotamia, and cuneiform writing
• Hardening clay (either oven-bake or air-dry type)
Procedures

1. Review with the students why the ancient Sumerians felt the need for a written language to retain permanent records. How did people pass along information before the development of the written word? (Cave paintings, oral traditions, and pictographs are all suitable answers.) What is the benefit of developing a written language? Discuss examples from the video. (It is difficult for people to remember exactly what happened from year to year; it is faster to use symbols than to draw pictures every time you need to describe something; writing information makes it a permanent record that outlasts the people who wrote it.)

2. Ask students to name some of the things mentioned in the video that the ancient Sumerians documented in their clay tablets. Record their responses. Examples include:
   - How much grain each farmer had grown
   - How much different people got as their share of the harvest
   - How many sheep and cattle a farmer had
   - How many animals were born and how many died
   - Offerings given to the gods
   - How much tax everyone paid
   - When the traders left and what they took with them
   - Sumerian laws

3. Ask the students what are some other things that societies want to have on record? Record their responses. Examples include:
   - Births
   - Deaths
   - Marriages
   - Property ownership
   - Citizenship
   - Academic degrees/vocational training

4. Review with the students the origins of cuneiform. How did the ancient Sumerians write down their laws, myths, and other records? Discuss examples from the video; Sumerian scribes used to draw pictures that resembled words, and then developed symbols that could be combined to make words and names—just like the letters of the alphabet. What does cuneiform mean? (Cuneiform means “wedge-shaped” because all of the symbols are made up of little wedge marks.) What did the Sumerian scribes use to record this information? (The scribes used a stylus made out of a reed, and carved symbols into a tablet of wet clay. When the clay hardened, it became a permanent record.)
5. Ask the students about the role that scribes played in Mesopotamia. What was the importance of scribes in Mesopotamia? Why did they have greater access to the priests and kings than other people in the city-state? How long did it take to train a scribe? (Twelve years) What is the name of the training school where scribes learn how to write? (An edubba) Remind the class that the ability to read and write was a valuable skill not only in Mesopotamia but in all civilizations that followed. Some people, such as women, slaves, and minorities, were discouraged from reading and writing. Even in the United States, there was a relatively high rate of illiteracy until the twentieth century.

6. Discuss the stories of the ancient Sumerians with the class. Does the story of Ziusudra and the great flood sound like another story in the Old Testament of the Bible? Discuss the similarities between the story of Ziusudra and Noah’s Ark. Is there a moral to the portion of the Epic of Gilgamesh recounted in the video? What is it? (Yes, there is a moral. The moral is it is better to use the time you have trying to do good than to spend time trying to become immortal.) Do you think the story of Gilgamesh would have survived all these centuries if it had not been documented on the clay tablets?

7. Have students research the clay tablets of ancient Mesopotamia using print and Web resources. The following Web sites are a good starting point:

   - Ancient Civilizations for Kids: Mesopotamia
     http://www.kathimitchell.com/ancivil.html#Mesopotamia:
   - Suffolk Web Kids: Mesopotamia
     http://www.suffolk.lib.ny.us/youth/jcancient.html#MESOPOTAMIA
   - Yahooligans: Mesopotamia
     http://search.yahooligans.yahoo.com/search/ligans?p=mesopotamia
     Writing
     http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/writing/home_set.html
   - Gilgamesh Summary
     http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MESO/GILG.HTM
   - The Epic of Gilgamesh
     http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/
   - Gilgamesh
     http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/eng251/gilgameshstudy.htm
   - Cuneiform Writing
     http://www.logoi.com/links/cuneiform_writing.html
   - Write Like a Babylonian
     http://www.upennmuseum.com/cuneiform.cgi

8. When students have completed their research, ask them to create a clay tablet documenting three aspects of their everyday lives. Tell the students to consider this project to be a “time
capsule” of their lives at this point in time. Using hardening clay, have the students flatten a piece of clay with a rolling pin or similar instrument. Students can write on their clay tablets using a stylus made out of a toothpick, the end of a paintbrush, or a popsicle stick. Each tablet should include the following information: the student’s name, age, today’s date, and three sentences describing what’s going on in the world around them. The students can accompany this information with their own illustrations if they choose. Ask the students to consider what they would want other people to know about their lives if their tablets were discovered 3,000 years from now. Ask the students the following questions: Who are the members of your family? Where do you live? Do you live in a big city, suburb, or rural area? How do you travel from place to place? What type of activities do you like to participate in? Older students might include more details on local and national events, current world leaders, and concerns facing young people at this time in our nation’s history.

9. Have students choose a partner. Ask them to share their finished clay tablet with their partner and answer any questions. Then have each student summarize their partner’s project for the class as if they had just discovered the clay tablet during an archeological excavation. Have the student include at least three interesting facts in their description.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; produced a complete project, including all of the requested information; accurately summarized their partner’s project and cited three interesting, relevant points.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; produced an adequate project, including most of the requested information; satisfactorily summarized their partner’s project and cited two relevant points.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions; created an incomplete project with little or none of the requested information; were not able to summarize their partner’s project or recall any interesting, relevant points.

Vocabulary

city-state
Definition: A self-governing state consisting of a city and surrounding territory
Context: Nippur was the most important city-state in the land of Sumer.

cuneiform
Definition: The system of writing developed by the ancient Sumerians
Context: Cuneiform writing looks more like symbols than pictures.
demon
Definition: An evil spirit
Context: According to Sumerian legend, Gilgamesh killed the demon Huwawa with the help of the sun god.

epic
Definition: A long poem telling the deeds of a hero and often centering on the ideals of a nation or culture
Context: The Epic of Gilgamesh teaches us to enjoy the time we have on Earth.

immortality
Definition: The quality or state of having an endless life
Context: Gilgamesh was unable to achieve immortality, but he was able to leave behind a legacy through the work he had done during his lifetime.

Mesopotamia
Definition: An ancient land located where we find the modern country of Iraq
Context: Mesopotamia means, “land between the rivers” and got its name because it was located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Nippur
Definition: A major city-state in the ancient Sumerian region of Mesopotamia
Context: Nippur was a busy trading center in Sumer and its most important religious city.

scribe
Definition: A person paid to write, especially in ancient times
Context: Mesopotamian scribes worked closely with the priests and kings.

stylus
Definition: A hard, pointed writing tool cut from a reed
Context: Sumerian scribe wrote with styluses they made from reeds.

Sumerians
Definition: Residents of Sumer, a region of the ancient land of Mesopotamia
Context: The Sumerians developed many inventions, such as the wheel and the plow.

tablet
Definition: A flat slab – often of clay or stone – suitable for an inscription
Context: The Sumerians etched symbols into wet clay tablets to create a permanent document of their activities.
**Academic Standards**

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

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This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

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- **Geography—The World in Spatial Terms**: Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment; Understands the characteristics and uses of spatial organization of Earth's surface
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- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Science, Technology, and Society

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the DiscoverySchool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

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**Play Video**—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

**Video Index**—Here the video is divided into three parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, use the navigation key to highlight the icon and press Enter or Play on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

**Curriculum Units**—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher’s Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, use the navigation key to
highlight the icon and press Enter or Play on the TV remote, or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Development of Writing in Mesopotamia (2 min.)
The ancient Sumerians realized a need to document their activities, laws, and myths. Discover how primitive pictographs evolved into a style of writing known as cuneiform.

II. The Role of Scribes in Ancient Sumerian Society (2 min.)
It took twelve years to train scribes in the ancient land of Sumer. Learn more about what the scribes documented for the Sumerians as well as their importance to the ruling class.

III. Myths and Archetypes of Mesopotamia (6 min.)
The story of Ziusudra and the Great Flood and the Epic of Gilgamesh were preserved by the Sumerian scribes, saving these culturally significant stories for future generations.

Curriculum Units

1. Identifying the Need for a Written Language

Pre-viewing question
Q: How did people keep track of important information before the invention of a written language?
A: Answers may include making sketches on cave walls and drawing pictographs.

Post-viewing question
Q: What types of information did the ancient Sumerians document?
A: The Sumerians kept records of what happened from year to year, such as the amount of grain a farmer grew, the amount of the harvest distributed to various individuals, the number of livestock raised, and how much of everything was given to the gods.
2. The Development of Written Language in Ancient Sumer

Pre-viewing question
Q: Why is it better to record information using symbols or an alphabet instead of simply drawing a picture?
A: Answers might include the amount of time it takes to draw a picture, the amount of space taken up by an illustration, and the fact that there would be no uniform way to draw certain objects or concepts.

Post-viewing question
Q: What was the name of the system of writing used by the ancient Sumerians, and what materials did they use for their writing?
A: The Sumerian system of writing is called cuneiform. Scribes cut a writing tool called a stylus from a piece of reed, then etched symbols into wet clay tablets to document their activities. Once the clay hardened, the tablets became a permanent record.

3. Education of Scribes

Pre-viewing question
Q: In ancient Mesopotamia, very few people were literate. What are the most obvious disadvantages of being unable to read and write?
A: Answers may include being unable to hold important jobs, not being exposed to new ideas, being unaware of what is going on in their community and in other parts of the world.

Post-viewing question
Q: The Sumerians were the first civilization to write down their laws. What are the advantages of documenting a society’s laws?
A: If the laws are written down, they will stay the same for a much longer period of time. There is less chance that a king or leader can change them on a whim, and the written law can be the final word in a legal dispute.

4. Relationship Between Scribes and the Ruling Class

Pre-viewing question
Q: Ancient Sumerian priests observed the phases of the moon and the position of the stars and had the scribes write down everything they observed. What is the modern term for the science of studying the moon, stars, and planets?
A: Astronomy. (If necessary, clarify that astrology is the study of the supposed influences of the stars on human affairs by their positions in relation to each other, whereas astronomy is the study of planets and other objects outside Earth's atmosphere including their orbits and physical composition.)

Post-viewing question
Q: What did the priests of Sumer try to predict with the help of the scribes?
A: By keeping track of certain patterns in the past, the priests predicted when a flood might occur, so the farmers could strengthen the levees on the riverbanks.

5. The Sumerian Story of the Great Flood

Pre-viewing question
Q: How did people share their stories before the invention of a written language?
A: Answers may include drawing sketches on cave walls, and passing down stories orally from one generation to the next.

Post-viewing question
Q: Who is the Noah “character” in the Sumerian story of the Great Flood, and how is this story similar to the story of the Great Flood from the Old Testament of the Bible?
A: Ziusudra is the protagonist in the Sumerian story of the Great Flood, and like Noah, he put his family and many animals in a large boat to ride out the storm.

6. The Epic of Gilgamesh

Pre-viewing question
Q: What are the names of some stories that you have read that have been handed down for several generations?
A: Answers may include various Mother Goose rhymes, Grimm’s fairy tales, and other children’s stories from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Post-viewing question
Q: What is meant by the “moral” of a story, and what is the moral of this portion of the Epic of Gilgamesh?
A: A story’s moral is the idea or lesson that the storyteller wants the reader to remember. Usually the moral instructs the reader in the correct way to behave in a particular situation. The moral to this portion of the Epic of Gilgamesh is that it is better to do good works or deeds during our lives rather than to attempt to become immortal.
Credit
Robyn Kurth, freelance writer
Mesopotamia

Trade Routes and Transportation
Teacher’s Guide

Grade Level: 3-6  Curriculum Focus: Social Studies  Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

Development of Trade in Mesopotamia (2 min.) — Explores how the ancient Sumerians developed agricultural practices that sustained them and allowed them to trade with other cultures in the region. Methods of Trade and Transportation (4 min.) — Accompanies ancient Sumerian traders overland and through various waterways to foreign trading centers. Trade Between Cultures in the Ancient World (3 min.) — Share the acculturation process as Sumerian traders are exposed to other cultures while exchanging goods with their counterparts from foreign lands.

Discussion Questions

- What type of goods did the Sumerians have to trade?
- What did the Sumerians purchase from other countries in the ancient world?
- Why are bodies of water so important to cities that are major trading centers?
- How did the Mesopotamian traders transport their goods overland?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand how trade with other countries enables a civilization to grow and prosper.
- Understand why major trading centers needed a body of water to transport goods.
- Map out a trade route without the use of modern technology.

Materials

- Mesopotamia: Trade Routes and Transportation video
- Computer with Internet access
- A map of the ancient world showing Sumer and the rest of Mesopotamia (optional)
- Print and Web resources about Sumer, Mesopotamia, and ancient trade routes
Procedures

1. Review with the students reasons why the Sumerians began trading with other cultures. Discuss answers from the video, such as obtaining goods from other lands in order to build their own civilization. What type of goods did the ancient Sumerians have to trade? (Grain, oils, and textiles.) Would the Sumerians have been able to trade these goods if they had still been a culture of hunter-gatherers? Explain how a nation’s economy can benefit from selling raw materials as well as finished goods. Would the city-state of Nippur have been as prosperous if it was in the middle of a desert with no agriculture or access to water?

2. Ask students to name materials that the Sumerians needed from other parts of the world. What did the Sumerians purchase from other countries? How did products like wood, stone, and precious metals enable the Sumerians to build their own cities? Possible answers include building materials for homes and temples, or precious metals that could be fashioned into artwork or religious offerings.

3. Discuss how major trading centers were built around bodies of water, especially before the advent of modern transportation. Why are bodies of water so important to cities that are major trading centers? In one column, write a list of American cities that utilize a large body of water to transport people and products. Ask the students to guess which body of water is used by that city (in some cases there might be more than one) and write down the correct responses. Add some foreign cities to the list for older students. Examples include:

- Chicago, IL        Lake Michigan, Chicago River
- Boston, MA         Atlantic Ocean, Charles River
- New Orleans, LA    Mississippi River, Gulf of Mexico
- St. Louis, MO      Mississippi River
- New York, NY       Atlantic Ocean, Hudson River
- Miami, FL          Atlantic Ocean
- Frankfurt, Germany Rhine River
- London, England    Thames River
- Tokyo, Japan       Pacific Ocean
- Cairo, Egypt       Nile River

4. Review with students the methods of transportation that were available in ancient Mesopotamia. What was the name of the lightweight boat that Sumerian traders used to transport goods on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers? (the guffā) What was the main disadvantage of the guffā? (It could travel only downstream.) What were some of the hazards involved in traveling across the Persian Gulf? Discuss examples from the video, such as fierce storms, shortages of drinking water, and pirate raids.
5. How did the Mesopotamian traders transport their goods overland? What were some of the dangers involved in traveling long distances overland? Discuss examples from the video, such as thieves, desert heat, and a shortage of drinking water. How did the invention of the wheel impact trade routes and the civilizations that depended on them? Would it have been possible to establish trade routes in Mesopotamia before the Sumerians invented the wheel?

6. Have the students research maps and trade routes of ancient Mesopotamia using print and Web resources. The following Web sites are a good starting point:

- Ancient Civilizations for Kids: Mesopotamia
  http://www.kathimitchell.com/ancivil.html#Mesopotamia:
- Suffolk Web Kids: Mesopotamia
  http://www.suffolk.lib.ny.us/youth/jcancient.html#MESOPOTAMIA
- Yahooligans: Mesopotamia
  http://search.yahooligans.yahoo.com/search/ligans?p=mesopotamia
- Nippur, Sacred City of Enlil, Supreme God of Sumer and Akkad (University of Chicago)
  http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/PROJ/NIP/PUB93/NSC/NSCFIG1.html
- Bible History Online (Maps and Geography Resources)
- Map: Mesopotamia to 2500 BCE
  www.fsmitha.com/h1/map01mes.htm
- Ancient Mesopotamia by History Link 101
  www.historylink101.com/ancient_mesopotamia.htm

7. When students have completed their research, ask them to map out a trade route from one city to another using only the modes of transportation available to the ancient Sumerians. If necessary, assign the students a starting point and destination based on the maps in www.bible-history.com or a publication with maps of ancient Mesopotamia. Ask the students to take into account the location of rivers, mountains, and desert regions. What would they be transporting? Would they need a boat? Would it be easier to cross the desert or safer to take a longer route along a waterway? Have the students draw a simple map and write a brief summary of their planned journey with at least three important details about their route.

8. Have students choose a partner. Ask them to share their finished travel itinerary with their partner and answer any questions. Then have each student summarize their partner’s project for the class and include at least three interesting facts in their description.
Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; produced a complete project, including all of the requested information; accurately summarized their partner’s project and cited three interesting, relevant points.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; produced an adequate project, including most of the requested information; satisfactorily summarized their partner’s project and cited two relevant points.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions; created an incomplete project with little or none of the requested information; were not able to summarize their partner’s project or recall any interesting, relevant points.

Vocabulary

amulet
**Definition:** A small object worn as a charm against evil
**Context:** Nisaba’s uncle brought back a gold amulet from Egypt.

city-state
**Definition:** A self-governing state consisting of a city and surrounding territory
**Context:** Nippur was the most important city-state in the land of Sumer.

idol
**Definition:** An image worshipped as a god
**Context:** The people of ancient Mesopotamia usually crafted idols out of stone.

irrigation
**Definition:** The process of supplying with water by artificial means
**Context:** The Sumerians used an irrigation system to prevent their wheat fields from drying out during the hot summer months.

Mesopotamia
**Definition:** An ancient land located where we find the modern country of Iraq
**Context:** Mesopotamia means, “land between the rivers” and got its name because it was located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Nippur
**Definition:** A major city-state in the ancient Sumerian region of Mesopotamia
**Context:** Nippur was a busy trading center in Sumer and its most important religious city.
seafaring
*Definition:* Oceangoing; capable of traveling on the ocean
*Context:* The traders navigated their *guffas* down the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, but they needed seafaring boats to travel in the gulf waters.

**Sumerians**
*Definition:* Residents of Sumer, a region of the ancient land of Mesopotamia
*Context:* After the Sumerians invented the wheel, transporting goods overland became much easier.

tax
*Definition:* A charge usually of money set by an authority on persons or property for public purposes
*Context:* When the king of Dilmun imposed a tax on the sale of any goods from Nippur, the local traders were able to purchase fewer of the materials they needed.

textile
*Definition:* A woven or knit cloth
*Context:* The women of the village wove textiles out of wool.

**trader**
*Definition:* A person who exchanges one type of goods for another
*Context:* The Sumerian traders transported large amounts of grain, oil, and textiles and exchanged them for wood, stone, and precious metals from other parts of the world.

voyage
*Definition:* A journey especially by water from one place or country to another
*Context:* The Sumerian traders were willing to make the dangerous voyage for the promise of riches and adventure.

**Academic Standards**

**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/](http://www.mcrel.org/).

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History — Era 1 — The Beginnings of Human Society: Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities; Understands the processes that contributed to the emergence of agricultural societies around the world
• World History — Era 2 — Early Civilizations and the Rise of Pastoral Peoples, 4000–1,000 BCE: Understands the major characteristics of civilization and the development of civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley

• Geography – The World in Spatial Terms: Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment; Understands the characteristics and uses of spatial organization of Earth's surface

• Geography – Places and Regions: Understands the physical and human characteristics of place; Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

• Geography – Physical Systems: Knows the physical processes that shape patterns on Earth's surface

• Geography – Human Systems: Understands the nature, distribution and migration of human populations on Earth's surface; Understands the patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface; Understands the patterns of human settlement and their causes; Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface

• Geography – Environment and Society: Understands how human actions modify the physical environment; Understands how physical systems affect human systems; Understands the changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources

• Geography – Uses of Geography: Understands how geography is used to interpret the past

• Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing; Gathers and uses information for research purposes

• Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

• Language Arts – Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

• Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

• Arts – Visual Arts: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures; Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others

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
• Time, Continuity, and Change
• People, Places, and Environment
• Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
• Power, Authority, and Governance
• Production, Distribution, and Consumption
• Science, Technology, and Society

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Video Index

I. Development of Trade in Mesopotamia (2 min.)
Once the ancient Sumerians were able to sustain themselves through their agricultural products, they were in a position to trade with other cultures in the region.

II. Methods of Trade and Transportation (4 min.)
Traders in ancient Mesopotamia carried their goods overland on foot or with the help of donkey-drawn carts, while others traveled downriver or across the gulf waters in specially designed boats.

III. Trade Between Cultures in the Ancient World (3 min.)
Sumerian traders became exposed to other cultures as they exchanged agricultural products, raw materials, and other items of value with traders from foreign lands.

Curriculum Units

1. The Function of Trading
   Pre-viewing question
   Q: How did people feed themselves before they learned to grow their own crops and raise their own livestock?
   A: Answers may include hunting animals and gathering fruits and nuts that grew in the wild.

   Post-viewing question
   Q: What did the ancient Sumerians have to trade that other nations needed?
   A: The Sumerians grew large amounts of grain and other crops and were able to trade their agricultural surplus with nations where such goods were in short supply.
2. Nippur as a Trading Center

Pre-viewing question
Q: Why were major trading centers usually built around large bodies of water?
A: Answers may include the relative ease of transporting goods by boat through navigable waterways, particularly before the advent of mechanized transportation and modern roadways.

Post-viewing question
Q: How did Nippur’s location influence its development as an important trading center?
A: Nippur was centrally located on the banks of the Euphrates River; this meant traders had easy access to the city-state.

3. Trade Routes Over Water

Pre-viewing question
Q: Why was traveling by boat a better way than traveling overland for Sumerian traders?
A: Answers may include the fact that traveling by boat was faster and allowed traders to transport more items than with a cart and donkey.

Post-viewing question
Q: What were the hazards of traveling on the high seas in ancient times?
A: The hazards of traveling on the high seas included fierce storms, pirate raids, and a shortage of drinking water.

4. Trade and the Ruling Class

Pre-viewing question
Q: What is a tax?
A: A tax is a fee that individuals or groups are required to pay to their government. These funds are to be used for public purposes.

Post-viewing question
Q: What type of items did the traders from Nippur exchange with people from other nations?
A: Traders from Nippur primarily brought grain and oil to trade. Other answers might include jewelry or textiles.
5. The Overland Route

*Pre-viewing question*
Q: How did people transport goods overland before the invention of the wheel?
A: Answers may include carrying items on their backs or loading them on animals.

*Post-viewing question*
Q: What were some of the hazards traders faced when traveling overland?
A: Traders traveling overland faced a shortage of drinking water and the possibility of being robbed. Answers might also include the dangers of the extreme desert heat.

6. Trade Between Different Cultures

*Pre-viewing question*
Q: The civilizations of ancient Egypt thrived along the banks of what river?
A: The Nile

*Post-viewing question*
Q: What was the significance of scarab amulets to the ancient Egyptians?
A: The ancient Egyptians believed that wearing a scarab amulet (charm) protected the wearer in this world and in the afterlife.

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**Credit**

Robyn Kurth, freelance writer