













Civilization of Sumer

FOOD SUPPLY:

The people of Sumer created the first civilization, advancing their way of life over time. The first step towards creating a civilization was when the Sumerians established a **CONSTANT** supply of **FOOD**.

Foods of Mesopotamia/Sumer: YOUR TURN! Draw a picture in each box.

barley (for bread/beer)		onions		apples	
sheep (mutton)		cucumbers		figs	
deer/gazelles		carrots		dates	
geese/ducks (eggs)		lettuce		pears	

(also...milk/cheese/butter from cows, sheep and goats; meat from birds/fish; radishes, beets, turnips, beans, chickpeas, garlic; pomegranates, plums, and melons)

Once the people of Sumer invented the **PLOW** as a means for breaking up soil and getting the fields ready for planting, growing these crops became much easier. They Sumerian system of **IRRIGATION** was also an advance in farming technology because it made it possible to access and provide **WATER** whenever needed.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE:

Jobs became more specialized as time went by, helping to establish a **SOCIAL STRUCTURE** in Sumer. There were different levels of people who worked at different jobs. The higher up you were, the more **STATUS**, or importance, you had than others.

Sumerian positions on the social structure:

- (high) *king, priest, tax collector, vizier, scribe, cup bearer, accountant, merchant
*architect, astrologer, chariot driver (soldier), herald, prophet, toll collector
- (middle)*weaver, stone carver, musician, goldsmith, carpenter, brickmaker,
perfume-maker, leather dealer, potter, brewer
- (low) *farmer, fisherman, shepherd, tanner, barber, butcher
*slaves

YOUR TURN! After reading about Jobs of Mesopotamia, write about the job you would have wanted to do for a living . ***If I had lived in ancient times, I would want to be a*** _____

GOVERNMENT:

KINGS were the head of the **GOVERNMENT** in ancient Sumer. The people of Sumer believed that there were many **GODS** who ruled heaven and chose the kings who ruled the Earth. Kings made sure **LAWS** were followed and that **TAXES** were paid. They were in charge of their city-state's **ARMY**. Government workers checked on things like **DAMAGE** to irrigation canals. The kings also hired men

who knew how to read and write called **SCRIBES** whose job it was to keep written records of laws and to keep track of **TRADE** dealings.

A king named **HAMMURABI** who ruled Sumer (when it was called Babylon) was known for his written code of 282 laws. These laws were carved into a large stone slab called a **STELE** and were the first set of written laws known to man.

YOUR TURN!

pict. & sent.
describing 1 of
Hammurabi's
laws.

RELIGION:

Mesopotamia was taken over by different groups of people over time; names for the various gods and goddesses changed depending on who was ruling Mesopotamia at that time. According to Sumerian mythology, humans were created to please the gods by doing all the hard labor in Sumer and acting as servants to the gods. These humans were made out of **CLAY** gathered from the **EUPHRATES RIVER**. The Sumerians believed that everything in **NATURE** was controlled by the gods.

Because nature could cause disasters, the people believed they needed to **HONOR** the gods in order to survive. They built huge temples called **ZIGGURATS** in the center of each city-state and held religious ceremonies in a small room located at the top of these structures. Each city-state was believed to be “watched over” by a specific god. Only the **KING** and **PRIESTS** were allowed inside the ziggurats where offerings of **FOOD** and even animal **SACRIFICES** were left. The Ziggurats had **STAIRCASES** built on either side so that the gods could climb down to Earth.

YOUR TURN! Draw an icon/symbol to represent each of the following Mesopotamian gods (using their Babylonian names):

SHAMASH (sun god)

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ISHTAR (love goddess)

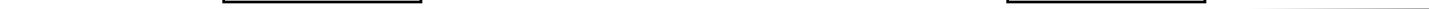
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EA (water god)

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MARDUK (god of storms)

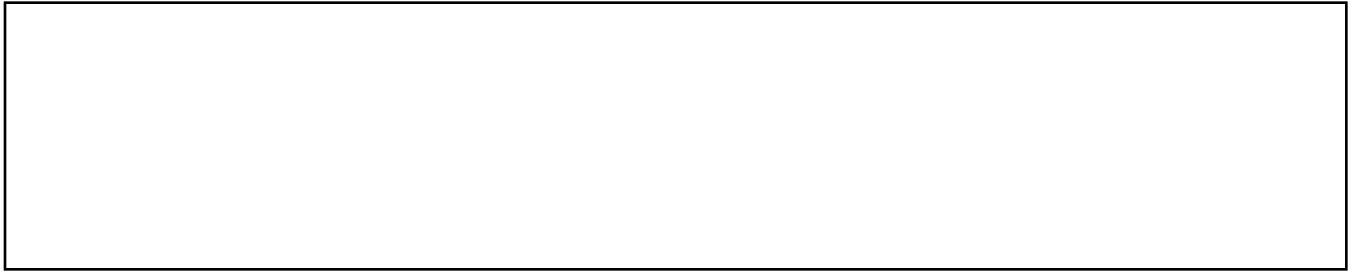
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THE ARTS:

There were many skilled craftspeople who created things like mirrors, jewelry, weapons, carved cylinder seals, and even ziggurats. Most early pieces of art from Sumer (or Mesopotamia) were carved from **CLAY** since stone was not readily available. This is why most early Sumerian art had **ROUNDED** edges since it's hard to create sharp edges when carving clay. **GOLD** and a blue stone called **LAPIS LAZULI** were used in jewelry for rich people in ancient Sumer.

YOUR TURN! Cylinder seals made from stone or clay had carvings that were unique to the designer and were used as a way of putting a signature on a document or letter. The seal was rolled across wet clay until the imprint from the seal appeared. Create a picture in the box below of what your cylinder seal design would look like if you had lived in ancient Sumer.



TECHNOLOGY:

All civilizations created everyday **TOOLS** that made life easier. The most important invention of the Sumerians is the **WHEEL** which started out as a tool for making **POTTERY** and eventually made it possible for them to have a simple means of transportation called a **CHARIOT**. They also invented the **PLOW** which made it possible to get the soil ready for planting as well as their amazing water control system called **IRRIGATION**. The people of Mesopotamia are also credited with inventing **GLASS**, the **SAILBOAT** which greatly helped fisherman and the trade industry, and the earliest form of the popular board game **CHECKERS** was found at an old Sumerian city called Ur.

YOUR TURN! Other than a bike, skateboard, or vehicle think of and list 5 things that are based on the Sumerians' most important invention.



WRITING:

The Sumerian written system was made up of symbols carved into **CLAY** tablets. The writing system was known as **CUNEIFORM** which means “wedge-shaped.” It was used to write stories, keep tax information and keep records of **TRADE**.

Schools in ancient Sumer were very strict and only for **BOYS** who were from **WEALTHY FAMILIES**. Each school was known as an “edduba” which means **TABLET HOUSE** since the students created their own type of “paper” by shaping and flattening clay. Finishing 12 years of school would enable a Sumerian boy to get a job as a **SCRIBE** which was a respected position in society that earned him a good living.

YOUR TURN! The story of Gilgamesh is the oldest piece of literature written down by the people of ancient Mesopotamia. It's about a king of Uruk (a city-state in Sumer) who might be real as he appears on an ancient list of Sumerian kings. In the story, Gilgamesh was part god and part human. After hearing a portion of the Gilgamesh story, free write your own ending below.
