6th Grade - Chapter 4
Mesopotamia

Sumerians & Mesopotamian Empires
Lesson 1: The Sumerians

The Sumerians made important advances in areas such as farming and writing that laid the foundation for future civilizations.
The First Civilizations in Mesopotamia

Why did people settle in Mesopotamia?

- Civilizations developed around 3000 B.C in the river valleys of Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China
- The need to have water for drinking and growing crops influenced where people settled all through history.
The First Civilizations in Mesopotamia

- As the civilizations developed, people formed social classes which largely depending upon their occupation.
- The set up government and passed laws, defended their lands and carried out large building projects.
- The people developed a system of values and beliefs that gave meaning to their lives.
The Two Rivers

- Mesopotamia, which was the earliest known civilization, developed in what is now southern Iraq
- Mesopotamia means “land between the rivers” in Greek
- The civilization began between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers
The two Rivers

- This two rivers run parallel to each other and flow more than 1,000 miles
- Mesopotamia was located in the eastern part of the larger Fertile Crescent - which as curving strip of good farmland from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf
- The Fertile Crescent includes parts of the modern countries of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan
Early Valley Dwellers

- For thousands of years, clues to Mesopotamia’s history lay buried among its ruins and piles of rubble
- Archaeologist began to dig up many buildings and artifacts in the 1800s
- Historians believe that the early people who settled in Mesopotamia were hunters and herders and later build farming villages along the two rivers
TAMING THE RIVERS

- Early Mesopotamian farmers used water from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to water their fields.
- However, they could not always rely on the river during the summer when the river was often low and they did not have enough water to plant crops in the fall.
- Sometimes during the spring the rivers would overflow their banks causing it to flood the land.
Taming the Rivers

- However, the farmers know the floods were also helpful because they left silt on the bank and the plains which was very good soil for farming.
- Over time, people in Mesopotamia learned to build dams to control the seasonal floods and dug canals that let water flow from a water source to their fields. This method of watering crops is called **IRRIGATION**.
TAMING THE RIVERS

- Irrigation is a system that supplies dry land with water through ditches, pipes or streams.
- Irrigation let these early farmers grow SURPLUSES or extra amount of food. Farmers then could store the surpluses for later use.
Sumar’s Civilization

• By 3000 B.C., several cities developed in Sumer, a region in southern Mesopotamia
• Sumer’s people were known as Sumerians
• They build the first cities in Southwest Asia, including Ur, Uruk and Eridu.
• These cities became centers of civilization that controlled the lower part of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys
City-States Arise

- Sumer’s cities were surrounded by mudflats and patches of scorching desert.
- The landscape made it hard to travel by land and communicate with other groups which meant each city was cut off from its neighbors.
- As a result, Sumerian cities became independent – people raised their own crops and made their own goods.
City-States Arise

- As the cities grew, they gained political and economic control over the lands around them.
- They formed **CITY-STATES** - each city-state had its own government and was not part of any larger governing state.
- The population of city-states ranged from about 5,000 to 20,000 people.
City-States Arise

- Historians think each Sumerian city-state was protected by a large city-wall.
- Sumerians used mud from the rivers as their main building material - they mixed mud with crushed reed and formed bricks by drying them in the sun.
- City-states often went to war with one another over resources and political borders - they fought to win glory or to gain more territory.
- During times of peace they traded with each other and agreed to help each other protect common interests.
Gods, Priests and Kings

- The Sumerian people worshipped many gods which is a type of belief known as POLYTHEISM.
- The multiple gods played different roles in Sumerian life such as nature like rain or wind.
- Each city-state claimed one god as its own by building a large temple called a ZIGGURAT which means to “rise high” in the ancient Akkadian language.
- The very top of the ziggurat was a holy place and the god’s home and only special priests were allowed to go there.
Gods, Priests and Kings

- Later, Sumerian city-states became monarchies – ruled by a single leader (king).
- Sumerian kings claimed they received their power to rule from the city’s god and the first kings were most likely war heroes.
- Over time, the rule became hereditary meaning the king was passed down to their son.
Social Groups

- People were divided into social classes and they usually stayed in the social class in which they were born.
- Upper class – kings, priests, warriors and government officials.
- Middle class – merchants, farmers, fishers and artisans (largest social group).
- Lowest Class – enslaved people (captured in war and criminals or people who could not pay their debts).
Social Groups

- Women and men have different roles in Sumerian society
- Men were the head of the home
- Boys went to school and were trained for a specific job
- Women ran the home and taught their daughters to do the same and cared for the children
- Women had few civil rights
- Law required parents to care for their children and for adult children to care for their parents if their parents needed help
Farmers and Traders

- Farmers had a plot of land located in an area around the city-state.
- Wheat, barley and dates were the major crops.
- Farmers also raised sheep, goats and pigs.
- Trade was a key part of the economy.
- Trade routes linked Sumer to places as far away as India and Egypt.
Sumerian Contributions

- Sumerians created the first civilization that had a great influence on history
- Mesopotamia is called the “Cradle of Civilization” because it was the beginning of organized human society
Writing

- Writing is perhaps the most important contribution made to world
- The writing system they developed was the earliest known system in the world
- Writing was a way for Sumerians to keep records of their lives and their history and to share information
- They could pass information to later generations
Writing

- Sumerians created a way of writing called **Cuneiform** which was made up of about 1,200 different characters
- Cuneiform was written by cutting wedge-shaped marks into damp clay with a sharp reed
- The name Cuneiform comes from a Latin word meaning “wedge”
- They wrote on clay because they didn’t have paper
Archeologists have found cuneiform tablets that have provided important information about Mesopotamian history. Only a few people such as boys from wealthy families learned how to read and write cuneiform. Some students became scribes or official record keepers after years of training. Scribes wrote documents about everyday life, court records, contracts, etc.
The oldest known story is from Sumer written more than 4,000 years ago and is still studied today.

The story is called the Epic of Gilgamesh – an **EPIC** is a long poem that tells the story of a hero.
Technology and Mathematics

- People of Mesopotamia made many useful inventions such as the wheel and carts pulled by donkeys as well as the chariot which was the first vehicle to be created for military use.
- The Sumerians developed the sailboat for river travel.
- They invented a wooden plow and a potter’s wheel.
- They were the first to make bronze out of copper and tin.
Technology and Mathematics

- The Sumerians studied mathematics and astronomy
- They used geometry to measure the size of fields and to plan buildings
- The 60 minute hour and 60-second minute and 360 degree circle all came from the Sumerians
- The position of the stars told them the best time to plant crops and to hold religious ceremonies
- They also made the 12-month calendar based on the cycles of the moon
Lesson 2: Mesopotamian Empires

- By 2400 B.C., Sumer’s city-states were weak from conflict.
- As the strength of Sumer faded, other powerful kingdoms arose in northern Mesopotamia.
- These kingdoms built empires.
- **EMPIRE** - a group of many different lands under one ruler.
- Through conquest and trade, these empires spread their cultures over a wide region.
Who was Sargon?

- Sargon was an ambitious leader who ruled in the kingdom of Akkad.
- Sargon moved his well-trained armies south and he conquered the remaining Sumerian city-states one by one.
- He became known as the king of Sumer and Akkad and eventually he expanded to include all people of Mesopotamia.
- His empire lasted more than 200 years before invaders conquered it.
Who was Hammurabi?

- The Amorites lived in the west region of Mesopotamia and Babylon was the grandest of all their cities.
- It was located on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River in what is now Iraq.
- The Babylonian king, Hammurabi began conquering cities and created the Babylonian Empire.
Hammurabi was thought to be a just ruler
He is best known for creating a set of laws for his empire
He posted this law code for all to read
The code dealt with crimes, farming, business, marriage and the family and the code listed a punishment for each crime
Hammurabi' Code

- The Code was stricter than the old Sumerian laws
- The code demanded “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” this means that the punishment for the crime should match the seriousness of the crime - it was meant to limit punishment and do away with blood feuds
- The code also protected the less powerful such as wives from abuse by their husbands
- The code influenced later law codes such as those from Greece and Rome
The Assyrian Empire

- The Assyrian Empire arose about 1,000 years after the empire of Hammurabi.
- Assyria was a larger empire extending into four present-day countries – Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.
- The Assyrians built a large and powerful military to defend their hills and fertile valleys – their army began taking over the rest of Mesopotamia.
Assyrian Army

- Assyrian army had about 50,000 soldiers and they were well trained and disciplined, they fought with slingshots, bows and arrows and swords and spears.
- They robbed people, set crops on fire and destroyed towns and dams.
- They took **TRIBUTE** or forced payments from conquered people and drove people from their homes.
- Assyrian army was brutal and people were afraid and would surrender to them without a fight.
Kings and Government

- Assyria’s capital was located at Nineveh along the Tigris River
- The kings divided their empire into PROVINCES known as political districts
- The government built roads that connected the provinces and the kings chose officials to govern, collect taxes and carry out the laws in each province
Life in Assyria

- They had law codes but their punishments were harsher.
- They based their writing on Babylonian writing and worshipped many of the same gods.
- They built large temples and palaces filled with all carving and statues.
- They wrote and collected stories.
- King Ashurbanipal built one of the world’s first libraries in Ninevah with 25,000 tables of stories and songs to the gods.
- Farming and trade were important to the Assyrians.
The Chaldean Empire

- Assyria ruled the area from Persian Gulf to Egypt
- People often rebelled because they were harsh rulers
- In 650 B.C. fighting broke out over the next ruler allowing a group called the Chaldeans to take over power
A New Empire

- King Nabopolassar was the king of the Chaldeans.
- He and his son, Nebuchadnezzar created a new empire.
- The city of Babylon served as their capital and because of this, the Chaldean Empire is sometimes called the New Babylonian Empire.
The Greatness of Babylon

- King Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Babylon making it the largest and richest city in the world.
- Huge brick walls surrounded the city that were guarded by soldiers
- Grand palaces and temples were located in the center of Babylon
- A huge ziggurat stood more than 300 feet tall and when the sun shone, its gold roof could be seen for miles
The Greatness of Babylon

- The king’s palace had a giant staircase of greenery known as the Hanging Gardens
- Babylon’s Hanging Gardens were considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
- A complex irrigation system brought water from the Euphrates River to water to the gardens
- It is believed that Nebuchadnezzar built the gardens to please his wife
The Greatness of Babylon

- Each spring, thousands of people crowded into Babylon to watch a gold statue of the god Marduk as it was wheeled along the street – Chaldeans believed that the ceremony would bring peace and bigger crops to their empire
- They built many new canals making the land even more fertile
- Nebuchadnezzar collected very high taxes and tributes to pay for these projects
The Greatness of Babylon

- Merchants came to the city in traveling groups called CARAVANS. They bought Babylonian good, pottery, cloth, baskets, and jewelry.
- They made many scientific advancements
- They believed the gods showed their plans in the sky
- Chaldean ASTRONOMERS – the people who study the heavenly bodies, mapped the stars and planets and phases of the moon
- They also invented the sundials to measure time and the first to follow a seven-day week
The Fall of the Empire

- After Nebuchadnezzar died, a series of weak kings ruled the Chaldean empire
- Poor harvests and slow trade further weakened the empire
- The Persian recognized the Chaldeans had lost their strength and leadership and took advantage and captured Babylon and made Mesopotamia part of their empire
- However, they allowed the captured land to keep its distinct culture - they did not want to destroy all that the Chaldeans had accomplished