

# Taking the Mystery Out of Mesopotamia

**Grade Level:** First Grade

**Presented by:** Coleen Hewes and Diana Bullock, Lubbock Christian Schools, Lubbock, Texas

**Length of Unit:** 10 days

## I. ABSTRACT

This unit focuses on the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia. The students will learn how civilization as we know it began. They will also learn about the important contributions made by the Mesopotamian civilization.

## II. OVERVIEW

### A. Concept Objectives:

1. The student will develop an awareness of time and chronology. (TEKS 1.3)
2. The student will understand the importance of the relative location of places. (TEKS 1.4)
3. The student will appreciate the purpose of rules and laws. (TEKS 1.10)

### B. Content from the Core Knowledge Sequence:

1. Mesopotamia: The “Cradle of Civilization” (p. 27)
2. Importance of Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (p. 27)
3. Development of writing, why writing is important to the development of civilization. (p. 27)
4. Code of Hammurabi (early code of laws), why rules and laws are important to the development of civilization. (p. 27)

### C. Skill Objectives:

1. The student will be able to comprehend the reasons that people settle and build civilizations.
2. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
3. The student will be able to locate items on maps and label maps.
4. The student will identify contributions created in the past.
5. The student will use technology to communicate in written form.
6. The student will analyze and describe situations and solutions experienced in the past.

## III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

### A. For Teachers:

1. Martell, H. M. *The Kingfisher Book of the Ancient World*. New York: Kingfisher, 1995. 1-85697-565-7.
2. Shiotsu, V. *Mesopotamia Ancient Civilizations Series*. Torrence, CA: Frank Schaffer Publications, Inc., 1997. 0-7647-0147-9.
3. Pofahl, J. *Ancient Civilizations – Mesopotamia*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: T. S. Denison, 1993. 513-02188-4.

### B. For Students:

1. The students will have map skills and a basic knowledge of the seven continents.

## IV. RESOURCES

- A. Moss, Carol. *Science in Ancient Mesopotamia*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1998. 0-531-20364-6.
- B. *Mesopotamia, Kids Discover*. New York: Kids Discover, Nov. 1999. 1054-2868.

- C. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. "Write Like A Babylonian," Ancient Mesopotamia: The Royal Tombs of Ur [On-line]. Available URL: <http://www.upennmuseum.com/cuneiform.cgi>, 2001.
- D. Indo.com. "Distance Calculator, How Far is it?" Bali & Indonesia on the Net [On-line]. Available URL: <http://www.indo.com/distance>, 2000.
- E. Martin, Phillip. You be the Judge on Hammurabi's Code [On-line]. Available URL: [http://members.nbci.com/\\_XMCM/pmartin/hammurabi/homepage.htm](http://members.nbci.com/_XMCM/pmartin/hammurabi/homepage.htm), 1998.

## V. LESSONS

### Lesson One: What is a Civilization?

- A. *Daily Objectives*
  - 1. Concept Objectives
    - a. The student will develop an awareness of time and chronology. (TEKS 1.3)
  - 2. Lesson Content
    - a. Mesopotamia: The "Cradle of Civilization" (p. 27)
  - 3. Skill Objectives
    - a. The student will be able to comprehend the reasons that people settle and build civilizations.
    - b. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
- B. *Materials*
  - 1. laminated map of the world to use as a word wall
  - 2. chart paper
  - 3. markers
  - 4. prepare classroom for chaos and civilization demonstration
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
  - 1. civilization – It is the stage of cultural development at which writing and keeping of written records is attained.
  - 2. order – It is the rule of law or proper authority.
  - 3. chaos – It is a state of utter confusion.
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
  - 1. The teacher will demonstrate the difference between chaos and civilization by designating half of the classroom as neat and organized (civilized) and half of the classroom as chaotic. The organized side of the classroom has rules that are in place. The teacher will behave with manners and in an orderly fashion. The other half of the classroom will be in chaos. On the chaotic side of the room the teacher can do whatever comes to mind that is not following the rules. For example, the teacher could tear up paper, eat out of the trashcan, break pencils, sleep under a desk, etc.
  - 2. Introduce the word wall, the laminated world map, and how it will be used. As a vocabulary word is introduced and defined, it will be placed on the word wall as a reference. Introduce the vocabulary and definitions and place words on the word wall.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
  - 1. The students will dictate likes and dislikes of the chaos and civilization demonstration. The teacher will document on chart paper. The students will list reasons why there is a need for civilization.

### Lesson Two: Geography of Mesopotamia

- A. *Daily Objectives*
  - 1. Concept Objective
    - a. The student will understand the importance of the relative location of places. (TEKS 1.4)
  - 2. Lesson Content

- a. Importance of Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (p. 27)
3. Skill Objective
  - a. The student will be able to locate items on maps and label maps.
  - b. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
- B. *Materials*
  1. word wall, laminated map
  2. globe
  3. world map
  4. overhead projector, transparency of map of Mesopotamia (Appendix A), transparency markers
  5. handout of map of Mesopotamia copied on card stock or tag board
  6. empty squeeze bottles recipe of salt paint (Appendix B) (colors: blue, green, and brown)
  8. map colors (optional)
  9. <http://www.indo.com/distance>
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
  1. Tigris and Euphrates Rivers – Rivers begin in eastern Turkey, flow in a southeast direction, converge in southeast Iraq and empty into the Persian Gulf.
  2. Mesopotamia – It means land between two rivers. Mesopotamia is the site of the world’s first civilization, Sumer.
  3. fertile – It means productive.
  4. Fertile Crescent – It is an area of land that is fertile because of the irrigation developed by ancient farmers using the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and crescent because the land area is shaped like an upside down horseshoe
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
  1. Introduce vocabulary and definitions and place words on word wall.
  2. Using handout and transparency of map of Mesopotamia, have students locate and label the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Identify Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent. Using the recipe of salt paint put into squeeze bottles and the copy of the map of Mesopotamia on cardstock, have the students paint the rivers blue, the Fertile Crescent green and the rest of Mesopotamia brown or tan. Place maps in a safe place to dry and for later use.
  3. Using the computer web site, the teacher will demonstrate to the students the distance from their city to Baghdad. The location of the city the students are in is pointed out on the globe. This is shown in relation to the location of Ancient Mesopotamia and present day Iraq and Baghdad on the and the world map.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
  1. The teacher will observe student individually pointing to the location of the rivers on their own maps and painting the areas correctly.

### **Lesson Three: The Reason for Settling in Mesopotamia – Resources**

- A. *Daily Objectives*
  1. Concept Objective
    - a. The student will understand the importance of the relative location of places. (TEKS 1.4)
  2. Lesson Content
    - a. Importance of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (p. 27)
  3. Skill Objectives
    - a. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
    - b. The student will be able to locate items on maps and label maps.
- B. *Materials*
  1. map of Mesopotamia (Appendix C)
  2. map colors

3. transparency of Mesopotamia Map
  4. 2 paper or plastic cups for each student
  5. fertile soil (enough for each student to have some)
  6. sand (enough for each student to have some)
  7. seeds
  8. plants (optional)
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
1. resource – It is a source of supply or support: an available means.
  2. irrigation – It is a way of watering crops by using a system of canals. By devising such an irrigation system, the Ancient Sumerians were able to establish a permanent civilization.
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
1. Introduce and define vocabulary words and place on word wall.
  2. Give students a copy of map. Using overhead transparency, help students locate and label Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent, and the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers on their map. Discuss what resources are and their importance to a civilization. The list of resources that the Mesopotamians would use, for example: wool, spices, grain, fish, mud, copper, wood, farming, etc. are on the map key. Have students place a symbol for the resources on the map.
  3. Show examples of fertile soil and sand. Give each student 2 cups. In one cup put fertile soil and in the other cup put sand. Plant seeds in each type of soil and allow the seeds to grow. Observe the growth in the different types of soil. Vary the amounts of water given to the plants to demonstrate the art of irrigation that the Mesopotamians developed.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
1. Teacher observation

#### **Lesson Four: Mesopotamia: The “Cradle of Civilization”**

- A. *Daily Objectives*
1. Concept Objective:
    - a. The student will develop an awareness of time and chronology. (TEKS 1.3)
  2. Lesson Content:
    - a. Mesopotamia: The “Cradle of Civilization” (p. 27)
  3. Skill Objectives:
    - a. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
    - b. The student will identify contributions created in the past.
- B. *Materials*
1. chart paper
  2. markers
  3. mystery bags that have been prepared ahead of time
  4. small items to fit in mystery bags to demonstrate each contribution, invention or “first,” for example, a small wheel, chisel, saw, clock, calendar, map, brick, story (Gilgamesh), star chart, etc.
  5. child’s cradle or doll cradle
  6. 4 ½” x 6” white paper
  7. crayons or markers
  8. “Cradle of Mesopotamia” worksheets (Appendix D and Appendix D-Part 2)
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
1. cradle – It can be a place of origin, infancy.
  2. invention – It is a discovery, finding, or a product of the imagination.

D. *Procedures/Activities*

1. Introduce vocabulary and place words on word wall.
2. To introduce the concept of Mesopotamia as the “Cradle of Civilization” the teacher will need a doll/child’s cradle in the classroom. Discuss the cradle and how it is important to a baby. The cradle is the first place a baby stays, etc. Relate that concept with how Mesopotamia is the “Cradle of Civilization.” It is the first civilization and is in the state of infancy. It is the very beginning of civilization.
3. Ahead of time prepare mystery bags. Collect enough small items that represent the “firsts” of Mesopotamia to provide enough bags for students to use. Place a “mystery” object inside a bag and secure each bag. Have the students discover what is inside the bag without opening it just as the civilization of Mesopotamia had to do when they discovered something new. As something is discovered, place that item in the cradle to signify that it was a “first” or new contribution to civilization. Place a “mystery” object inside a bag and secure each bag. The teacher can do this activity in small groups or as a whole group.
4. Discuss and chart the accomplishments of the people of Mesopotamia that were discovered in the “mystery” bags using Appendix D-Part 2. The teacher could make a record of the “first” contributions made by Mesopotamians by assigning or having each student select a contribution. Each student will draw, color, and label a picture of the contribution that was assigned/selected on the 4 ½” x 6” paper. These pictures can be compiled into a class book or made into a bulletin board for display.

E. *Assessment/Evaluation*

1. Teacher observation.
2. The student will be able to successfully complete the “Cradle of Mesopotamia” worksheet (Appendix D).

**Lesson Five: Cuneiform – The First Writing**

A. *Daily Objectives*

1. Concept Objective:
  - a. The student will develop an awareness of time and chronology. (TEKS 1.3)
2. Lesson Content:
  - a. Development of writing, why writing is important to the development of civilization (p. 27)
3. Skill Objectives:
  - a. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
  - b. The student will identify contributions created in the past.
  - c. The student will use technology to communicate in written form.

B. *Materials*

1. pictures of cuneiform tablets gathered from available resources
2. clay (Appendix E)
3. golf tees
4. Model Magic®
5. cylinder shaped Styrofoam®
6. chart paper
7. markers
8. web site – <http://www.upennmuseum.com/cuneiform.cgi>
9. watercolors or black tempera paint and brushes

C. *Key Vocabulary*

1. cuneiform – It was the world’s first writing system. It means wedge shaped.
2. stylus – It is a wedge shaped instrument made out of reeds or wood.
3. reed – It is any of various tall grasses with slender pointed stems.

4. symbol – It is an arbitrary or conventional sign used in writing or printing.
5. scribe – It is a person that writes. After graduating from a Sumerian school, a young man became a scribe or a writer.
6. cylinder seal – It is cylinder shaped stones that have a continuous design cut into them. It was often used as a signature.
7. seal – It is a symbol or form acting as a signature on business transactions.

D. *Procedures/Activities*

1. Introduce and define vocabulary words and place on word wall.
2. To emphasize the importance of writing to the students, play a game of gossip. Have students sit in a circle. The teacher must whisper a message into the first student's ear. Each student must then whisper the message to the next student until the message has completed the circle. When the message has completed the circle have the last student repeat the message received. Compare the final message to the beginning message. Help students realize that if the message had been written down, it would have reached the final destination with more accuracy. List reasons why writing is important to the development of civilization on a chart.
3. Introduce cuneiform using pictures and discuss the development of cuneiform. Discuss how cuneiform began as pictures and developed into symbols to represent sounds or meanings. It was used as a method of record keeping. Discuss the materials that the Mesopotamians had available (refer back to resources) and why clay and reeds were used.
4. Go to web site <http://www.upennmuseum.com/cuneiform.cgi> and allow students to "Write like a Babylonian." Allow them to see their monograms in cuneiform. Print out a copy of each child's initials to make a hard copy for the child to use later.
5. Using the hard copy of each child's initials, have child make a cuneiform tablet. Using Model Magic®, have the student make small tablets. Each student needs a golf tee to use as a stylus. Discuss shape and form of cuneiform stylus and similarities it has to a golf tee. Have students inscribe cuneiform symbols or their own initials with the alphabet using the golf tee into the tablet. When the tablet is dry, paint with a gray watercolor wash using black watercolors or black tempera paint.
6. Make a cylinder seal. Using a golf tee, have the students carve or etch images on a piece of Styrofoam® shaped like a cylinder. The images can represent a celebration, the student, or an aspect of the student's life. Roll the styrofoam onto a piece of clay or on the bottom of their cuneiform tablet to represent the student's signature.. (Another way is to have students roll out clay and shape into a cylinder. Have students use a golf tee to carve pictures into the seal for themselves. Keep the clay in a cylinder shape and let it dry. When the seal is dry, roll the seal into a tablet of clay to represent a signature or picture.)

E. *Assessment/Evaluation*

1. Teacher observation.

### **Lesson Six: Code of Hammurabi: Rules and Laws**

A. *Daily Objectives*

1. Concept Objective:
  - a. The student will appreciate the purpose of rules and laws. (TEKS 1.10)
2. Lesson Content:
  - a. Code of Hammurabi (early code of laws), why rules and laws are important to the development of civilization. (p. 27)
3. Skill Objectives
  - a. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.

- b. The student will analyze and describe situations and solutions experienced in the past.
- B. *Materials*
  1. chart paper or poster board
  2. markers
  3. web site – <http://members.nbc.com/XMCM/pmartin/hammurabi/homepage.htm>
  4. handout of crossword puzzle (Appendix F)
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
  1. Hammurabi – He was a warrior and strong king of Mesopotamia. He established many new reforms including the Code of Laws.
  2. code – It is a systematic statement of a body of law.
  3. rights – It is the power or privilege to which one is justly entitled.
  4. reform – It is to improve by change.
  5. Babylon – It was a cultural and political center for Mesopotamia.
  6. justice – It is the administration of law.
  7. law – It is a rule of conduct or action.
  8. scribe – It is a person that writes. After graduating from a Sumerian school, a young man became a scribe or writer.
  9. Mesopotamia – It means land between two rivers.
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
  1. Introduce vocabulary and definitions and place on word wall.
  2. The teacher will introduce the Code of Hammurabi. Tell who Hammurabi was and his contribution to civilization. Discuss the need for laws and rules and why they were recorded (written down).
  3. Go to web site <http://members.nbc.com/XMCM/pmartin/hammurabi/homepage.htm> and allow students to see Hammurabi’s Code. Explore the site. Discuss and analyze some of the laws and describe situations that Hammurabi faced. Discuss solutions to the situations. Discuss how these laws might affect students today.
  4. The students will create a classroom code of laws. Tell the students that they are going to have the opportunity to develop their own code of laws. The students should name their code of laws. The students should create at least ten laws that all the students can agree upon and that would protect basic rights of everyone in the classroom. Record the laws on chart paper or poster board.
  5. Complete the crossword puzzle (Appendix F) on Hammurabi and his code of laws using the vocabulary words.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
  1. The teacher will observe students while making the classroom code of laws. The student will successfully complete the vocabulary crossword puzzle.

**Lesson Seven: Architecture – Ziggurats, The Hanging Gardens, Gate of Ishtar  
(3 days)**

- A. *Daily Objectives*
  1. Concept Objective:
    - a. The student will develop an awareness of time and chronology. (TEKS 1.3)
  2. Lesson Content:
    - a. Mesopotamia: The “Cradle of Civilization” (p. 27)
  3. Skill Objectives:
    - a. The student will be able to comprehend word meanings.
    - b. The student will identify contributions created in the past.
- B. *Materials*
  1. at least 3 boxes per group

2. masking tape
  3. colored butcher paper – green and brown
  4. construction paper – various colors
  5. geometric shapes cut out of construction paper (for example pattern block shapes)
  6. sugar cubes
  7. glue
  8. Bible – story of the “Tower of Babel”
  9. ziggurat maze worksheet (Appendix G)
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
1. ziggurat – It means “mountain of god.” It was a temple located in the center of each city-state.
  2. Gate of Ishtar – This was built by King Nebuchadnezzar in the city-state of Babylon. The Mesopotamians were the first to use the arch. The arch allowed doorways and roofs to hold more weight.
  3. Hanging Gardens – This was a series of terraced gardens kept lush and green by an elaborate irrigation system. The gardens did not really hang but were actually overhanging. The Hanging Gardens are still considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
1. Introduce the vocabulary and definitions and play on the word wall.
  2. Read the story from the Bible, “The Tower of Babel” to introduce the concept of ziggurats. Discuss ziggurats and the meaning of the word. Place word on word wall. Discuss the importance of buildings and their importance in civilizations. Have the students use boxes and masking tape to build a terraced ziggurat. Save the ziggurat to use with the Hanging Gardens project. As students finish, have them do the ziggurat maze worksheet (Appendix G).
  3. Teacher will have discussion with students about the concept of being homesick. Ask questions like “Have you ever been homesick?” “What things helped you when you were homesick?” etc. Introduce the Hanging Gardens. Explain that the gardens were built by King Nebuchadnezzar for his homesick wife. Tie this in with ziggurats and allow the students to decorate their ziggurat with vegetation. Have students create the vegetation from construction paper and butcher paper. Remember the gardens were overhanging.
  4. The teacher will introduce the Gate of Ishtar using pictures available. The concept of the arch needs to be discussed. Explain that the Gate of Ishtar is like a mosaic. It has a design made from small pieces of colored tile, glass, or other material (brick) set in mortar. Explain that bulls and dragons were the animals used to adorn the Gate of Ishtar and that lions decorate the Sacred Way leading up to the Ishtar Gate. Have the students make a mosaic of an animal using the various construction paper geometric shapes (pattern blocks) and glue to a piece of construction paper. The paper will resemble the bricks used in the Ishtar Gate. The teacher will use the “bricks” to make an arch over the door entering the classroom to make a classroom Gate of Ishtar.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
1. Teacher observation.

## VI. CULMINATING ACTIVITY

- A. Have the students write papers in their own handwriting stating the students’ favorite concepts learned in the unit. The papers must contain the students’ names, the date written, and a short summary of what the students’ favorite concepts were in this unit. They could also contain pictures drawn by the students pertaining to what the students wrote.

- B. The students will each make a “bulla” which was a football-shaped clay container used as a record-keeping source or message-carrying method in Ancient Mesopotamia. The bulla was sealed when the clay was still wet. This way no one could see, change, or remove the tokens or items that were placed inside. The bulla can be made from clay, Model Magic®, or any medium that will lend itself to simple construction. Inside the bulla, the student will place the article that he or she wrote, or an appropriate item representing what he or she learned about Mesopotamia. At the end of the year or later in the year, the bulla could be opened and reviewed.

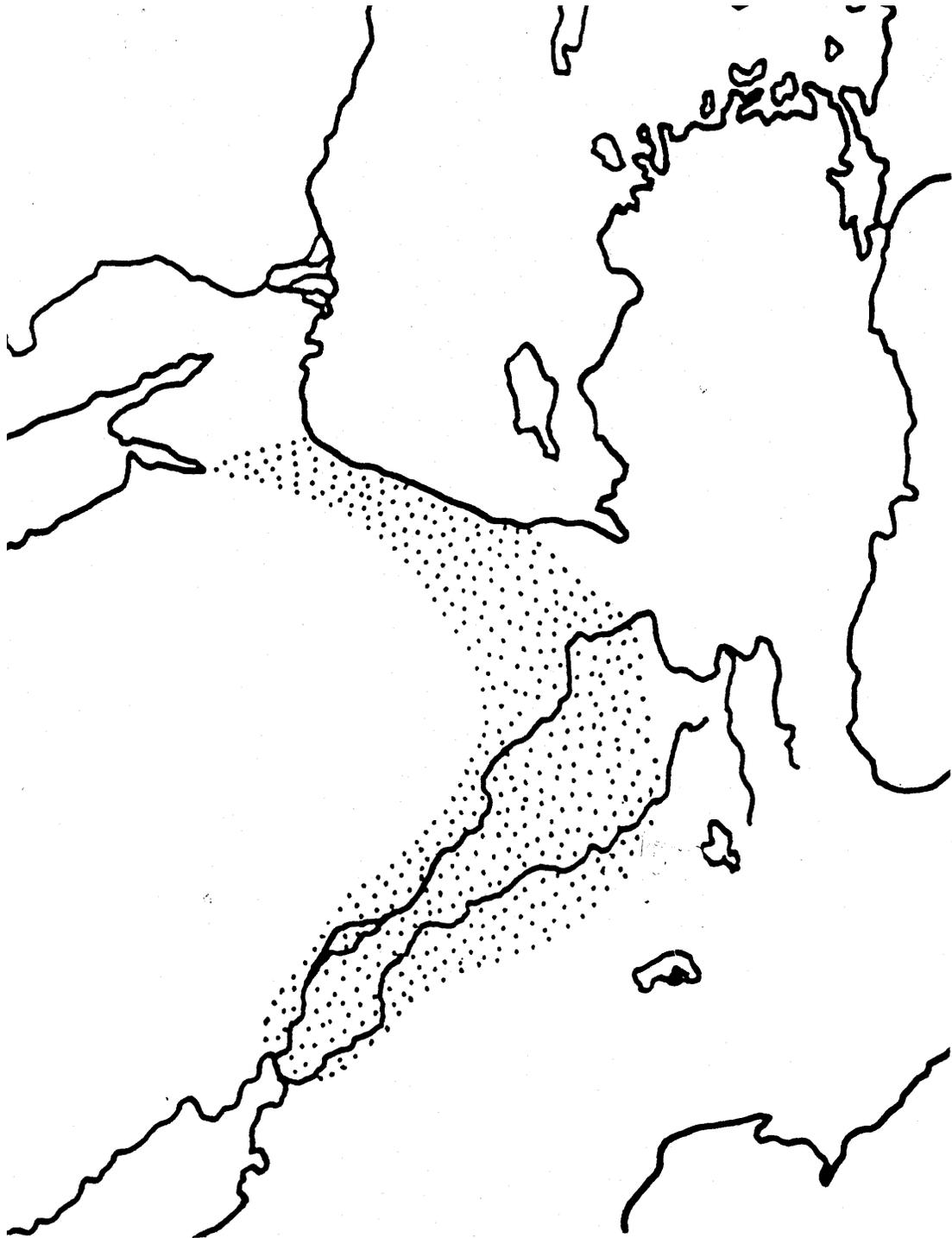
## VII. HANDOUTS/STUDENT WORKSHEETS

- A. Appendix A – map of Mesopotamia
- B. Appendix B – Salt Paint Recipe
- C. Appendix C – map of Mesopotamia
- D. Appendix D - “Cradle of Mesopotamia” worksheets
- E. Appendix E – Salt Dough Recipe
- F. Appendix F - Hammurabi’s Code of Laws
- G. Appendix G - Ziggurats

## VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. Bible
- B. Core Knowledge Sequence. Charlottesville, VA: Core Knowledge Foundation, 1999. 1-890517-20-8
- C. Ganeri, A., Martell, M., & Williams, B. World History Encyclopedia. Bath, BAI IHE, UK: Parragon, 2000. 1-84084-761-1
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Appendix A



**MESOPOTAMIA**

## **Appendix B**

### Salt Paint Recipe

#### Ingredients:

- Salt
- Flour
- Water
- Food Coloring

#### Directions:

Mix equal parts of salt, flour, and water. Add food coloring to color. Place in small squeeze bottles. The mixture must be used quickly. This recipe must be mixed and used in approximately one hour or it will lose its consistency.

## Appendix C

### Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia was a land of many resources.

1. Trace the Tigris River with a red crayon.
2. Trace the Euphrates River with an orange crayon.
3. Locate Mesopotamia in the area between the two rivers.
4. Put the symbols of their resources on the map.

wool 

mud 

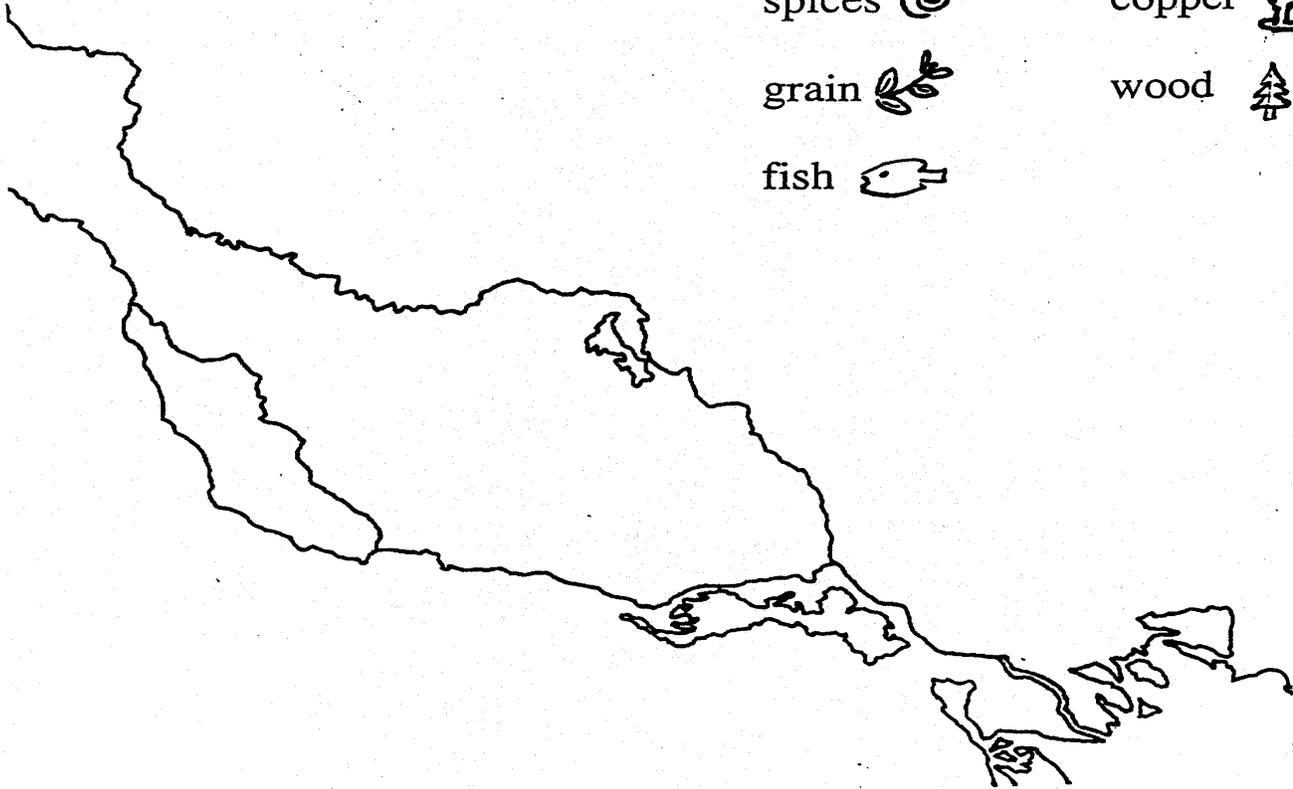
spices 

copper 

grain 

wood 

fish 



Appendix D

Mesopotamia  
The "Cradle of Civilization"

Look at the pictures and names of inventions. Cut out and glue the inventions of the Mesopotamians in the cradle.



Appendix D – Part II



Mesopotamia,  
“Cradle of Civilization”

Mesopotamia had the hardest job of all civilizations. They had no one to teach them, so they did everything for themselves. List the “firsts” that were invented by the people of Mesopotamia.

## Appendix E

### Salt Dough Recipe

This recipe makes an all-time favorite modeling clay that is nice and soft and can be combined with food coloring. It keeps in the refrigerator or freezer in a covered container.

- 1 cup flour
- 1 tablespoon salad oil
- 1 cup water
- ½ cup salt
- 2 teaspoon cream of tartar
- food coloring (optional)

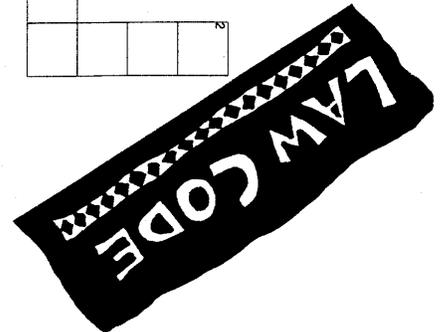
#### Directions:

Combine all ingredients in large saucepan. Stir over medium heat consistently to prevent sticking. The mixture will be soupy for several minutes and then suddenly it will stick together and can be stirred into a ball. When it thickens, remove from heat and continue stirring. Knead on a floured surface as it cools.

Appendix F

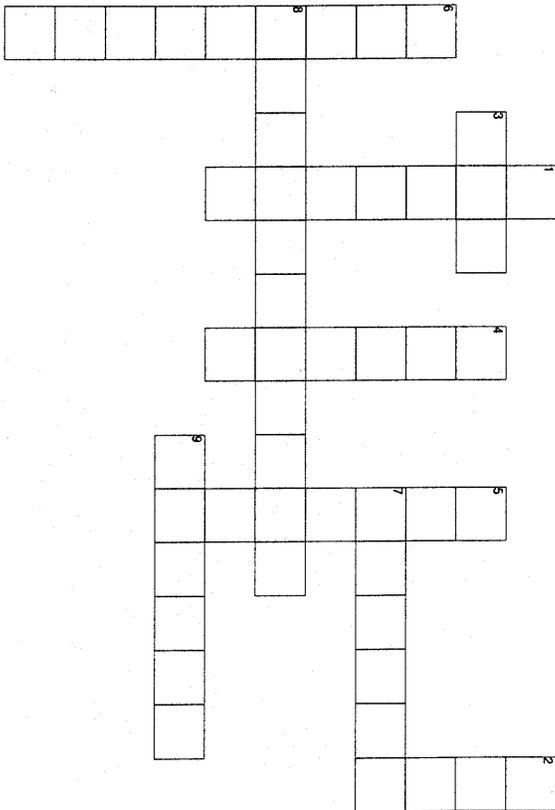


Hammurabi's Code of Laws



Words to choose from:

- rights
- Mesopotamia
- reform
- code
- Babylon
- justice
- Hammurabi
- law
- scribe



ACROSS

DOWN

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>3. a rule of conduct or action</p> <p>7. a young man who is a writer</p> <p>8. the land between two rivers</p> <p>9. to improve by change</p> | <p>1. center of Mesopotamia</p> <p>2. a body of law</p> <p>4. privileges to which one is entitled</p> <p>5. the administration of law</p> <p>6. the king of Mesopotamia</p> |
|--|---|

Appendix G

Ziggurats  
are  
A"maze"ing

Directions: Find your way to the top of the ziggurat.

