Rivers to Cities

Trace how geography and innovation shaped Mesopotamia.

SS24.7.6 "Explain how technological innovations and the geographic features of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers contributed to the development of civilization in the Fertile Crescent. 6a Describe how agriculture, domestication of animals, inventions..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three features of the land or human innovations, then circle a result of each one. Give each cause and its matching result the same number to show how they are connected.

How Mesopotamian Cities Grew

1 In southern Mesopotamia, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers crossed a dry plain before reaching the Persian Gulf. Melting mountain snow swelled the rivers, bringing water and fertile silt, but floods could arrive at dangerous times. Farmers built canals and ditches to guide river water to fields when rain was scarce. They also raised embankments to help protect crops from floods. With more reliable harvests of grain, families could remain in villages instead of moving to find food, and their settlements grew.

2 In Sumer, farmers used oxen to pull plows, helping them work more land. Grain surpluses supported people who were not farmers, including builders and traders. Since southern Mesopotamia had little stone, timber, or metal ore, traders carried surplus grain and woven cloth by riverboat to exchange for these materials. Miners elsewhere dug up copper ore, and metalsmiths shaped copper into tools. Wheeled carts moved goods over land. As trade and specialized work expanded, cities such as Ur governed themselves and nearby farmland as independent city-states.

3 Keeping track of stored grain and trade deals became harder as cities grew. Sumerian scribes developed cuneiform writing, which began as a way to record goods and later carried stories. The Epic of Gilgamesh tells of a king of Uruk who faces loss and searches for lasting life; the story offers clues to Mesopotamian beliefs. Centuries after early Sumerian cities arose, the Babylonian king Hammurabi issued a written law collection called Hammurabi's Code. Its rules set penalties for offenses and showed the king's role in judging disputes, although punishments differed by social rank.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the rivers both help and threaten farmers, and what did farmers build in response?

2. Explain how using oxen and plows could lead to jobs outside farming.

3. Why did Sumerians trade for materials, and how did they move goods to trade?

4. How did writing serve one cultural purpose and one political purpose in Mesopotamia?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that canals near a Sumerian city stop carrying water for a dry season. Write one paragraph tracing likely effects on farming, trade, and the city-state, including an effect on someone with a specialized job.

Rivers to Cities

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three features of the land or human innovations, then circle a result of each one. Give each cause and its matching result the same number to show how they are connected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the rivers both help and threaten farmers, and what did farmers build in response?	**The rivers brought water and fertile silt but could flood at dangerous times. Farmers built canals and ditches to guide water and embankments to help protect crops.**
2	Explain how using oxen and plows could lead to jobs outside farming.	**Oxen and plows helped farmers work more land. Surplus grain then supported people with other jobs, such as builders and traders.**
3	Why did Sumerians trade for materials, and how did they move goods to trade?	**Southern Mesopotamia had little stone, timber, or metal ore. Traders moved goods by riverboat, while wheeled carts carried goods over land.**
4	How did writing serve one cultural purpose and one political purpose in Mesopotamia?	**Writing carried stories such as The Epic of Gilgamesh, which offers clues to beliefs. Hammurabi's written law collection set penalties and showed the king's role in judging disputes.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If the canals stopped carrying water, fields would not get enough water during a dry season. Grain harvests would shrink, leaving less food for people with jobs outside farming. A metalsmith might have to find another way to get food or stop making tools. Traders would have less grain to exchange for metal ore and timber. With fewer goods and workers, the city-state could struggle to support its population.

Accept reasonable cause-and-effect explanations grounded in the passage. For the open task, look for a connected chain that addresses farming, trade, the city-state, and a specialized worker.