Water Builds Cities

Trace how farming changes shaped Sumerian life.

SS24.7.6b "Analyze how advancements in agriculture in Sumer led to economic growth, expansion of trade and transportation, and the emergence of independent city-states."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline farming advances, circle their effects on trade or transportation, and draw a box around details about how cities governed themselves.

From Fields to City-States

1. Near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Sumerian farmers faced a problem: rain was scarce, and river floods did not arrive on a useful schedule. Communities dug canals to guide river water to fields and built banks of earth to help control it. They also used plows pulled by animals to prepare more land for planting. With dependable water and larger fields, farmers could grow more grain than their families needed. This extra food, called a surplus, could support people who did not farm.

2. A potter in a Sumerian city could trade bowls for grain instead of growing every meal. As more people made goods or worked at other jobs, cities gained busy markets. Traders exchanged surplus grain and crafted goods for materials Sumer lacked, including timber, stone, and metals. Boats carried loads along rivers and canals, while pack animals moved goods over land. Waterways thus did two jobs: they fed fields and provided routes for moving heavy cargo. More goods and wider exchanges increased economic activity.

3. Managing irrigation required people to clear canals, divide water, and settle disputes. Cities and nearby farmland organized these tasks under their own leaders. Uruk, Ur, and other Sumerian cities became city-states: each governed itself and the surrounding countryside rather than obeying one ruler for all Sumer. Leaders could collect grain and labor to maintain canals and defend their city. A strong harvest helped a city feed workers and traders, but it could also make control of water and farmland worth fighting over. Farming advances helped these centers grow into independent powers.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did canals and plows help make it possible for some Sumerians to work at jobs other than farming?

2. How did a grain surplus lead to more trade beyond Sumer?

3. Why did canals help both farming and the movement of goods?

4. How did the needs of irrigation help Sumerian cities become independent city-states?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A Sumerian city plans to extend a canal to a new field, but the canal will cross land claimed by a neighboring city. In four sentences, predict a benefit for jobs or trade, a possible effect on transportation, and a political problem, explaining how the farming change could cause each one.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 7 · SS24.7.6b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline farming advances, circle their effects on trade or transportation, and draw a box around details about how cities governed themselves. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did canals and plows help make it possible for some Sumerians to work at jobs other than farming?	**Canals brought water to fields, and plows helped farmers prepare more land. Larger harvests created a surplus that could feed people with other jobs.**
2	How did a grain surplus lead to more trade beyond Sumer?	**Traders could exchange surplus grain and crafted goods for timber, stone, and metals that Sumer lacked.**
3	Why did canals help both farming and the movement of goods?	**Canals carried water to fields and provided routes for boats carrying heavy loads.**
4	How did the needs of irrigation help Sumerian cities become independent city-states?	**Cities organized work such as clearing canals and dividing water under their own leaders. Each city governed itself and its nearby farmland.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Extending the canal could water new fields and increase the grain harvest. The surplus could support more potters, who could exchange their bowls for needed materials. If the canal is deep enough, boats could carry grain along it toward other markets. Because the canal crosses disputed land, the two independent city-states might argue over who controls its water and repairs.

Accept other supported cause-and-effect chains. For Part 3, look for a plausible link from the new canal to economic activity, transportation, and a dispute between independently governed cities.