Stories and Laws

Read how Mesopotamians recorded ideas and governed cities.

SS24.7.6c "Summarize the cultural and political innovations of Mesopotamia, including The Epic of Gilgamesh and Hammurabi's Code."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a sentence that shows a cultural innovation, and circle a sentence that shows a political innovation so you can summarize what each contributed to Mesopotamian life.

What Mesopotamians Wrote Down

1. In ancient Mesopotamia, cities grew beside the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Farmers used canals to bring water to fields, and city leaders organized work and settled disputes. As cities became more complex, scribes pressed wedge-shaped marks into wet clay. This writing system, called cuneiform, helped people keep records of grain, trade, and government decisions. Scribes also used it to preserve stories. A clay tablet could hold a list of supplies or a tale about a king. These records let later generations study how Mesopotamians explained life and managed their cities.

2. One famous story is *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a collection of tales that took shape over many centuries. Gilgamesh, a king of Uruk in the story, becomes close friends with Enkidu. After Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh searches for a way to escape death. He does not gain endless life, but his journey raises questions about friendship, loss, and what people leave behind. Mesopotamian scribes recorded versions on clay tablets in cuneiform. The epic was a cultural innovation because a long written story carried shared ideas across generations, not just a ruler's orders.

3. Another record shows a different kind of innovation. Around 1750 BCE, Hammurabi, king of Babylon, had a large collection of laws carved on a stone monument. Known as Hammurabi's Code, it listed rules and penalties for matters such as property, trade, and family life. Making laws visible connected justice to the king's authority, even though many people could not read them. The penalties were not the same for everyone; a person's social rank could change the punishment. Unlike the epic, the code set out how a ruler claimed society should work.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize how cuneiform helped Mesopotamians develop both culture and government.

2. In two sentences, summarize Gilgamesh's main problem and explain why writing down the epic mattered.

3. Summarize what Hammurabi's Code shows about the king's authority and the fairness of its penalties.

4. How did the epic and the code serve different purposes? Summarize the difference using details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum can display replicas of only two Mesopotamian texts. Write a four-sentence label arguing why it should display both *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Hammurabi's Code. Explain what each reveals, connect their different purposes, and warn visitors about one mistaken assumption they might make.

ANSWER KEY

Stories and Laws

GRADE 7 · SS24.7.6c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a sentence that shows a cultural innovation, and circle a sentence that shows a political innovation so you can summarize what each contributed to Mesopotamian life. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize how cuneiform helped Mesopotamians develop both culture and government.	**Cuneiform preserved stories and shared ideas while also recording trade, supplies, and government decisions.**
2	In two sentences, summarize Gilgamesh's main problem and explain why writing down the epic mattered.	**After Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh searches for a way to escape death. Writing down the epic preserved its ideas about friendship and loss for later generations.**
3	Summarize what Hammurabi's Code shows about the king's authority and the fairness of its penalties.	**The code linked laws and justice to the king's authority, but penalties could differ according to a person's social rank.**
4	How did the epic and the code serve different purposes? Summarize the difference using details from the passage.	**The epic preserved a story that explored human experiences, while the code stated rules and penalties that showed how a ruler claimed society should work.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Display *The Epic of Gilgamesh* beside Hammurabi's Code to show that Mesopotamians recorded both ideas and rules. The epic explores friendship and the fear of death through a king's story. The code shows how a Babylonian king used written laws to claim authority over disputes. Visitors should not assume that its penalties treated people of every social rank equally.

Accept accurate paraphrases that distinguish cultural ideas preserved in the epic from political authority expressed through the code. For the museum label, an acceptable warning might note that the epic is a story, not a factual account of every event.