

Rivers, Crops, and Fire

Use geographic evidence to trace ancient environmental crises.

SS.6.G.5.3 "Use geographic tools and terms to analyze how famine, drought, and natural disasters plagued many ancient civilizations."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline words that name geographic features or tools. Number the three cause-and-effect chains, beginning with an environmental event and ending with its effect on people, to show how geography helps explain each crisis.

When Geography Shaped Survival

- ① Ancient civilizations often grew where rivers supplied water and rich soil. In Mesopotamia, farmers lived on the floodplain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They dug irrigation canals to carry river water to fields. A long drought, a period with far less rain than usual, could lower river levels. Canals then delivered too little water. Crops such as barley failed, grain stores shrank, and famine, a severe shortage of food, threatened cities. A map of rivers and dry lands helps explain this pattern.
- ② Egypt depended on the Nile River, which flowed north through a narrow river valley toward the Mediterranean Sea. Annual floods usually spread silt across the valley's farmland. However, several years of weak flooding meant less water and less new soil for crops. When harvests were small, people faced famine and officials collected less grain as taxes. Egyptians stored grain in good years, but supplies could not always last through repeated poor harvests. Comparing river levels with harvest records helps historians connect a climate pattern to food shortages.
- ③ In AD 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted near the Bay of Naples in Roman Italy. Pompeii and Herculaneum lay on the volcano's slopes, close to the coast. Ash, rock fragments, and hot gases buried neighborhoods and farmland. The eruption destroyed homes, killed many people, and disrupted local trade. A physical map can show the volcano, the steep slopes, and nearby sea. Those features help explain why nearby settlements faced danger, even though the area offered fertile volcanic soil and access to sea routes.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did drought in Mesopotamia lead to famine? Use the river and irrigation system in your answer.

2 Why could weak Nile floods cause food shortages in Egypt?

3 What three physical features could a map show to explain why Pompeii and Herculaneum were in danger?

4 How were the Mesopotamian drought and the Vesuvius eruption different in their effects on people?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose an ancient civilization not named in the passage. In 3 or 4 sentences, identify its location using at least two geographic terms, explain how drought, famine, or a natural disaster could affect it, and name one geographic tool a historian could use to study the risk.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline words that name geographic features or tools. Number the three cause-and-effect chains, beginning with an environmental event and ending with its effect on people, to show how geography helps explain each crisis. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did drought in Mesopotamia lead to famine? Use the river and irrigation system in your answer.	Drought lowered river levels, so irrigation canals carried too little water to fields. Barley crops failed, grain stores shrank, and famine threatened cities.
2	Why could weak Nile floods cause food shortages in Egypt?	Weak floods provided less water and spread less new silt on farmland. Small harvests then led to famine and less grain for taxes.
3	What three physical features could a map show to explain why Pompeii and Herculaneum were in danger?	A map could show Mount Vesuvius, its steep slopes, and the nearby sea or coast.
4	How were the Mesopotamian drought and the Vesuvius eruption different in their effects on people?	The drought lowered river water, caused crop failure, and led to famine. The eruption buried settlements and farmland, killed many people, and disrupted trade.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The ancient Maya lived across parts of the Yucatán Peninsula, a lowland region with seasonal rainfall and limestone ground. During a long drought, maize crops could fail because there were few permanent rivers. Food shortages could weaken cities and cause people to move. A map showing rainfall patterns and water sources would help historians study this risk.

Accept equivalent cause-and-effect explanations that use passage evidence and accurate geographic terms. For the open response, accept any accurate ancient civilization, location details, environmental risk, and appropriate geographic tool.