Rivers Shape Civilizations

Trace how geography influenced life in Sumer and Egypt

6-9.WH.1.4 "Analyze the characteristics of early civilizations throughout the world including government, religion/belief systems, arts/architecture, technology, physical geography, economics, and social order."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two geographic conditions in the passage and circle a human response to each one. Write the same number beside each matching condition and response.

Life Along Two Rivers

(1) In southern Mesopotamia, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers watered a dry plain. Their floods could arrive at damaging times, so Sumerian communities dug canals and built banks to guide water into fields. Farmers grew barley, and stored grain supported people who worked at other jobs, including potters and builders. Each city, such as Ur, ruled itself and the fields around it. Leaders organized canal repairs, while priests oversaw temples called ziggurats. Scribes pressed wedge-shaped marks into clay tablets to record grain deliveries and trade.

(2) Along the Nile in Egypt, yearly floods left fertile silt on nearby land. Farmers used channels to move water to fields and raised crops such as wheat. The Nile also carried boats between settlements, helping rulers govern a long river valley. Unlike Sumer's separate cities, Egypt was united under a pharaoh for much of its early history. Desert lands on either side of the valley made travel into Egypt difficult. Scribes recorded grain owed as taxes, and workers used stone to build pyramids as royal tombs.

(3) These societies did more than grow food near rivers. Both depended on farmers, yet leaders, skilled workers, and scribes had different duties and levels of power. In Sumer, temple offerings honored many gods, and records helped officials manage stored grain. In Egypt, people also worshiped many gods and believed life could continue after death. That belief helped shape the practice of placing goods in tombs and building pyramids for some rulers. In both places, food surpluses made it possible for some people to spend time on building and record keeping.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did river conditions influence farming technology in Sumer and Egypt? Explain one response in each place.

2. How did the two civilizations differ in government, and how did the Nile help Egypt's rulers?

3. What do each society's written records show about its economy? Use evidence from both places.

4. How did a belief in Egypt shape its architecture, and what does that building choice suggest about rulers?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a new river civilization where floods come only every few years, but the river is easy to travel. In four or five sentences, explain how these conditions might shape its farming technology, government, and economy, and compare one choice with Sumer or Egypt.

ANSWER KEY

Rivers Shape Civilizations

GRADES 6-9 · 6-9.WH.1.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two geographic conditions in the passage and circle a human response to each one. Write the same number beside each matching condition and response. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did river conditions influence farming technology in Sumer and Egypt? Explain one response in each place.	**Sumerians dug canals and built banks to guide water from floods that could arrive at damaging times. Egyptians used channels to move Nile water to fields after yearly floods.**
2	How did the two civilizations differ in government, and how did the Nile help Egypt's rulers?	**Sumer had separate city governments, while Egypt was united under a pharaoh for much of its early history. Boats on the Nile helped rulers govern settlements along the valley.**
3	What do each society's written records show about its economy? Use evidence from both places.	**Sumerian records of grain deliveries and trade show that people stored and exchanged goods. Egyptian records of grain taxes show that rulers collected part of the harvest.**
4	How did a belief in Egypt shape its architecture, and what does that building choice suggest about rulers?	**Belief in life after death helped shape the building of pyramids as royal tombs. These large tombs suggest that rulers held a special, powerful place in society.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

With floods only every few years, farmers might store floodwater in reservoirs and guide it to fields through canals. Rulers could organize the work needed to build and repair these systems. Because the river is easy to travel, one ruler might govern several settlements by boat. Boats could also carry food from places with extra harvests to places facing a shortage. Like Sumer's communities, this civilization would need shared water projects, but its leaders might control a wider area.

Accept other supported links between geography and each civilization's choices. For the open task, look for plausible effects on farming technology, government, and the economy, plus an accurate comparison to the passage.