Water Builds Cities

How people changed a river plain to support growing settlements

6-9.WH.1.5 "Explain how humans adapted the environment to maintain population growth and develop the first civilizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways people changed the land or water, and circle the problem each change addressed. Number the steps in the passage that connect larger harvests to the growth of cities.

Farming Between Two Rivers

1 In southern Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, summer heat dried the ground. Rain rarely supplied enough water for crops, while river floods could arrive at the wrong time or cover fields. Early farmers faced a problem: how could they feed more people when water was either scarce or dangerous? Over many generations, communities reshaped the river plain. They dug canals to move river water toward fields and built earth banks to steer floodwater away from homes and young crops.

2 Canals let farmers water crops during dry months instead of depending only on rain. Ditches led water onto fields, and gates made from wood and earth helped control where it went. When harvests grew, a village could support more children and newcomers. Extra grain could be stored for lean seasons. Not everyone had to grow food: some people became potters, builders, or traders. Larger settlements developed markets and places where people made decisions together, helping some villages grow into cities.

3 These changes required planning, not just digging. Workers had to clear mud from canals, fix broken banks, and agree on when each field received water. Leaders could organize this work and collect grain to feed workers. Irrigation also brought a danger: in a hot, dry climate, water left salt behind as it evaporated. If too much salt built up in soil, crops grew poorly. Farmers could limit the damage by allowing water to drain away and by resting some fields. Keeping water systems working helped cities survive as their populations increased.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did earth banks help early farmers protect their food supply?

2. Explain how canals could help a village's population increase.

3. Why did people in growing settlements need to organize canal work and water use?

4. How could irrigation threaten future harvests, and what could farmers do about it?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A growing river village faces a longer dry season and a canal clogged with mud. In four sentences, propose two specific changes to its water system, explain how each could help feed more people, and describe one way villagers could organize the work as the settlement grows.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADES 6-9 · 6-9.WH.1.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways people changed the land or water, and circle the problem each change addressed. Number the steps in the passage that connect larger harvests to the growth of cities. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did earth banks help early farmers protect their food supply?	**Earth banks steered floodwater away from young crops, reducing damage to fields.**
2	Explain how canals could help a village's population increase.	**Canals brought water to fields during dry months. Larger harvests could feed more children and newcomers.**
3	Why did people in growing settlements need to organize canal work and water use?	**Canals needed mud cleared and banks repaired, and farmers needed to agree on when each field received water.**
4	How could irrigation threaten future harvests, and what could farmers do about it?	**Evaporating water could leave salt in the soil and reduce crop growth. Farmers could let water drain away and rest some fields.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Villagers could dig a pond to hold river water for the longer dry season. Stored water would help crops grow when the river runs low. They could also clear mud from the canal so water reaches more fields and produces more food. A team chosen by each neighborhood could take turns maintaining the pond and canal as the village grows.

Accept other workable changes to water systems if the response explains how each supports the food supply. The organization plan should address the work needed to keep those changes useful.