Rivers Reshape Cities

Trace how farming and urban growth changed southern Mesopotamia.

GHW.1.3 "Identify and describe the factors that explain how the local and regional human and physical environments of selected culture hearths were modified over time in terms of such features as urban development and agricultural activities."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two physical conditions and circle three ways people changed the land. Number the circled changes from earliest to latest to trace how the floodplain changed.

Changing the Plain Between Two Rivers

1 Around 6000 BCE, people established farming villages on the low plain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in southern Mesopotamia. Rainfall was too scarce for dependable crops, but the rivers supplied water and left fertile silt after floods. Floods did not arrive on a farmer's schedule, so villagers dug channels to bring river water to fields. They also built banks to steer water away from homes and stored grain for dry seasons. These choices turned patches of floodplain into farmland and made year-round settlement more practical. They also created work that neighbors had to organize together.

2 By about 3500 BCE, Uruk had grown into a large city in southern Mesopotamia. Farmers outside its built-up center sent grain into the city, where craft workers and other residents depended on food they did not grow. To support this population, people extended and maintained irrigation canals across the surrounding plain. Canal work required groups to coordinate digging, repairs, and water sharing. Inside the city, residents built dense neighborhoods and monumental temples, replacing open ground with streets and buildings. The growing city changed nearby land use too: fields and canal routes were shaped by the need to feed an urban population.

3 Over centuries, irrigation brought a new problem to some fields. In the hot, dry climate, water evaporated from wet soil and left salts behind. When drainage was poor, rising groundwater could bring more salt near plant roots. Farmers in parts of southern Mesopotamia increasingly planted barley, which tolerates salt better than wheat, but heavily salted land produced less food. Communities also had to clear silt from canals to keep water moving. Thus, the same rivers and canals that helped villages and cities grow demanded continued labor and changes in farming. The effects varied across the plain rather than striking every field equally.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the plain's physical conditions lead villagers to change the land for farming?

2. How did Uruk's growing population change land use both inside the city and on the surrounding plain?

3. How did long-term irrigation change some fields, and how did farmers respond?

4. How did the work of managing river water change from early villages to Uruk, and what caused that change?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a new settlement on the southern Mesopotamian plain after Uruk's growth. In four or five sentences, propose changes to both its fields and its buildings, explain how one physical condition and one human need shape your plan, and predict a longer-term risk with a response.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two physical conditions and circle three ways people changed the land. Number the circled changes from earliest to latest to trace how the floodplain changed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the plain's physical conditions lead villagers to change the land for farming?	**Scarce rainfall made river water important for crops, while unpredictable floods made water difficult to manage. Villagers dug channels to bring water to fields and built banks to steer it away from homes.**
2	How did Uruk's growing population change land use both inside the city and on the surrounding plain?	**Inside Uruk, dense neighborhoods, streets, and temples replaced open ground. Outside it, people extended irrigation canals and used fields to supply grain to residents who did not farm.**
3	How did long-term irrigation change some fields, and how did farmers respond?	**Evaporation and poor drainage allowed salt to collect near plant roots in some fields. Farmers in parts of the region increasingly planted barley because it tolerates salt better than wheat.**
4	How did the work of managing river water change from early villages to Uruk, and what caused that change?	**Early villagers dug channels for their fields and built banks near homes. As Uruk grew and needed more grain, people extended canals across the surrounding plain and coordinated repairs and water sharing.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would build houses and a grain store on raised platforms to protect supplies when the rivers flood. I would give field channels drainage outlets so excess irrigation water can leave the soil. Families need a steady grain supply, so they could organize crews to inspect the outlets each season. If salts began to collect in the fields over time, the crews could improve drainage before planting again.

For the marking job, accept any three clearly identifiable human changes placed in a defensible time order. For Your Turn, accept other historically plausible plans that link changes to fields and buildings with a physical condition, a human need, and a longer-term risk.