Rivers and Choices

How four early civilizations adapted to river environments

WH.1.3 "Review the key elements of the development of early river valley civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus River Valley, and Shang China."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one river condition for each civilization and circle an action people took in response. Give each matching condition and action the same number, from 1 to 4, so you can compare the choices.

Living Beside a River

1. A river could feed a settlement and still threaten it. In Mesopotamia, the Tigris and Euphrates sometimes flooded unpredictably. To carry water to fields when rain was scarce, communities dug canals, and they built levees to limit flood damage. This work required people to coordinate labor, helping villages grow into competing city-states. Along Egypt's Nile, annual floods were more regular. The retreating water left fertile silt, so farmers planted crops in the damp soil. Egyptian rulers also organized irrigation work. Reliable harvests helped support towns, skilled workers, and a government led by a pharaoh.

2. In the Indus River Valley, seasonal floods could damage homes. Builders at cities such as Mohenjo-daro raised sections of the city on brick platforms to reduce flood risk. Urban planners also laid out streets and built drains that carried away wastewater. Farther east, the Yellow River's floods left fertile soil. Shang farmers grew millet on the river plain, using its fertile ground to support settlements. Shang kings ruled a network of towns and commanded soldiers and workers. People in these four regions used river land, but each community made choices shaped by its own conditions.

3. Food surpluses did more than fill storage jars. In Mesopotamian city-states, scribes used cuneiform on clay tablets to keep records of goods. In Egypt, scribes recorded grain and other supplies for the state. Indus cities show shared building practices, including standardized bricks, but scholars cannot yet read their script, so details of their rulers remain uncertain. In Shang China, kings sought guidance by heating marked oracle bones and interpreting the cracks; the marks are an early form of Chinese writing. These different records reveal some ways communities managed resources and power. Rivers helped make larger societies possible, but their institutions were not identical.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates differ from the flooding of the Nile? Give one response to each river's conditions.

2. Compare how people in the Indus River Valley and Shang China responded to a condition created by their rivers.

3. What do the passage's examples of record keeping show about the organization of Mesopotamian city-states and Egypt?

4. What does the passage tell you about Shang rulers that remains uncertain about Indus rulers? Explain why that difference exists.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write four or five sentences proposing a plan for a new settlement beside a river that floods at unpredictable times. Adapt two different strategies from the passage, name the civilizations that used them, and explain how the strategies work together.

ANSWER KEY

Rivers and Choices

HIGH SCHOOL · WH.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one river condition for each civilization and circle an action people took in response. Give each matching condition and action the same number, from 1 to 4, so you can compare the choices. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates differ from the flooding of the Nile? Give one response to each river's conditions.	**The Tigris and Euphrates flooded unpredictably, so Mesopotamians built levees to limit damage. Nile floods were more regular, and Egyptians planted crops in the damp soil after the water retreated.**
2	Compare how people in the Indus River Valley and Shang China responded to a condition created by their rivers.	**Indus builders raised parts of cities on brick platforms because seasonal floods could damage homes. Shang farmers grew millet on the fertile soil left by Yellow River floods.**
3	What do the passage's examples of record keeping show about the organization of Mesopotamian city-states and Egypt?	**Both used scribes to track resources: Mesopotamian scribes recorded goods on clay tablets, while Egyptian scribes recorded grain and other supplies for the state.**
4	What does the passage tell you about Shang rulers that remains uncertain about Indus rulers? Explain why that difference exists.	**Shang kings ruled towns and commanded soldiers and workers. Details about Indus rulers remain uncertain because scholars cannot yet read the Indus script.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our new settlement needs to protect its homes and fields from floods that arrive without warning. Like builders in the Indus River Valley, we will raise our homes on brick platforms to reduce flood damage. Like communities in Mesopotamia, we will build levees to limit flooding near our fields. The platforms protect buildings, while the levees help protect the land where we grow food.

Accept accurate comparisons in students' own words. For the open task, look for two strategies tied to the correct civilizations and an explanation of how both suit an unpredictable river.