Many Gods, Many Needs

Belief and worship in ancient Mesopotamia

AWH.C.2.2 "Describe the basic religious belief of polytheism, as practiced by Mesopotamian civilizations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that defines polytheism, circle each named god, and number two ways people could honor a god. Use your marks to trace how belief shaped daily life.

A Family in Ancient Ur

1. At dawn in the Mesopotamian city of Ur, a family might look toward a temple before opening its shop. People there practiced polytheism, the belief in more than one god. They understood the world as home to many divine powers, rather than the work of a single god. Different gods were connected with different parts of life and nature. A person might turn to one god about water and another about danger in war. This did not mean each person chose only one god forever. The same household could honor several gods as its needs changed.

2. Ur's patron god was Nanna, associated with the moon. A large temple complex in the city honored him, but Nanna was not the only god its residents recognized. In Mesopotamian traditions, Enki was associated with fresh water and wisdom, while Inanna was associated with love and war. Names and stories could vary across cities and eras, and worshippers did not all follow identical customs. Still, naming these different gods and their concerns helps explain polytheism: the gods had distinct roles, and people could seek help from more than one of them.

3. Imagine the family carrying a small offering to a temple. They might bring food, speak a prayer, or join a festival honoring a god. Such acts expressed respect and asked for divine favor; they did not guarantee a safe harvest or victory. Temples also mattered beyond prayer: priests cared for sacred spaces, and communities gathered for ceremonies. In Ur, honoring Nanna did not require people to deny the existence of Enki or Inanna. For this family, daily choices about where to pray could reflect a larger belief that several gods had power in the world.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does the passage describe the basic belief of polytheism?

2. How do Enki and Inanna show that Mesopotamian gods had different roles?

3. What does honoring Nanna in Ur show about the place of a patron god in a polytheistic belief system?

4. How could a household's actions at a temple show its belief in several gods?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a Mesopotamian family facing a dry growing season and a coming conflict. In four sentences, explain how its belief in several gods might shape two different requests and one action at a temple, without promising that either request will be granted.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that defines polytheism, circle each named god, and number two ways people could honor a god. Use your marks to trace how belief shaped daily life. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the passage describe the basic belief of polytheism?	**Polytheism is belief in more than one god. Mesopotamians believed several gods had power in the world.**
2	How do Enki and Inanna show that Mesopotamian gods had different roles?	**Enki was associated with fresh water and wisdom, while Inanna was associated with love and war.**
3	What does honoring Nanna in Ur show about the place of a patron god in a polytheistic belief system?	**Ur especially honored Nanna, but its residents could recognize and honor other gods too.**
4	How could a household's actions at a temple show its belief in several gods?	**A household could pray or bring offerings to different gods as its needs changed.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The family believes that several gods have power in the world. They might ask Enki for help with fresh water and Inanna for protection during the conflict. At a temple, they could bring food as an offering. They would not know whether either request would be granted.

Accept other passage-based examples of distinct divine roles and temple practices. Responses should describe belief in several gods without suggesting that offerings guaranteed results.