

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

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Canada

WHY THINGS ARE

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS
AND ASPECTS OF GOVERNMENT IN CANADA

GRADE 5

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HOW IT ALL STARTED

About 10,000 years ago, the climate warmed and the last ice caps melted. This was called the New Stone Age. People began to change the way they lived. Until then, they lived as hunters and gatherers. They moved around in search of plants or animals to eat. When they had eaten everything, they moved on. They lived in groups of about 30 people. They led a subsistence lifestyle, which means they spent most of their time looking for food and shelter.

About 8,000 BC, something changed people's lives. People in northern Iraq discovered how to farm. Farming meant they could build homes. They had food when they needed it.

Better food meant people weren't sick as much. More people lived together. Towns started to grow. Some had as many as 5,000 people. People didn't have to worry anymore about where to get food. They could start thinking about other things. Now they made weapons, jewellery, figurines, clay pots, cloth and baskets.

These communities were a magnet for thieves. To protect themselves and their belongings, the towns turned to two things: gods and leaders.

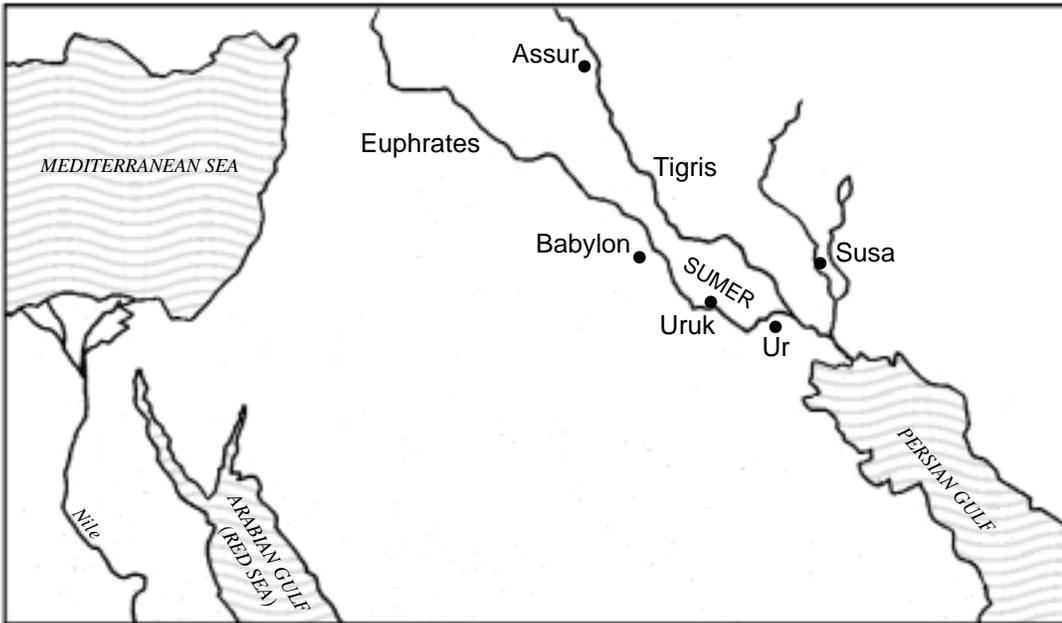
Storms, drought, and floods were thought to be sent by the gods. To protect the crops, animals, property and town, people believed they had to thank the gods. Successful individuals were believed to owe their success to the gods.

Some hunters had proved themselves as leaders. They were often respected in the larger communities. People thought the hunters were strong by the choice of the gods. They became religious and military leaders to make sure the town would do well. These leaders, the protectors, had great honour and power.

People were very eager to protect their towns. Walls were built to keep out animals and enemies. One town had a 3m-thick wall that was 3.6m high. No individual or family could have built it alone. It was a community effort.

CHAPTER ONE
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

SUMER



1. THE ENVIRONMENT: LAND AND WATER

In the country we now call Iraq there are two great rivers called the Euphrates and the Tigris. When the rains came both rivers would flood the plains. Sometimes there was too much water. Sometimes, there was not enough. The soil was rich, but just the right amount of water was needed to grow good crops. Farming was very difficult because of the unpredictable rainfall. The people of this area were called Sumerians.



The Ziggurat at Nippur. Today, it is desert, but long ago, Nippur was on the banks of the Euphrates River, surrounded by green pastures.

2. SUMERIAN DAILY LIFE

How Sumerians satisfied their basic needs.

The Sumerians' first job was to control the rivers. To do this, they built huge irrigation systems. This let them control floodwaters with dams, dikes and canals. They could also store the water in reservoirs for the dry seasons. Now they had just the right amount of water for their fields. Many people had to work and live together to build these huge irrigation systems. They built cities.

3. SUMERIAN SOCIAL LIFE

How Sumerians satisfied their social needs. Government and commerce.

So many people working and living together needed rules and laws. They developed rules for water use and for looking after the irrigation systems. Rulers created laws so that the system worked smoothly. The community was more important than the individual.

Better irrigation and farming meant that soon there was too much food. Not as many farmers were needed. Other types of workers were needed and many new jobs were created. People began to trade their things. Some became merchants. Civilization was born!

4. VALUES AND BELIEFS

How Sumerians satisfied their social needs: culture, religion, values and beliefs

The Sumerians had hundreds of gods. There was a god for rain and for vegetation. There was a god for the moon, the sky, and for wheat. The gods of the sky, air and rivers were the most important.

These gods were not all equal and they regularly fought among themselves.

The Sumerians believed that people were the servants of the gods. Sacrifices and rituals were held to honour the gods. Sumerians had to give some of their crops to the priests. This was to stop the gods sending diseases, droughts, floods or wars. They believed that if they treated the gods well, they would be protected from harm.

Myths and Legends

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a famous Sumerian legend. It tells about the brave deeds of the king of Uruk. Gilgamesh was half god and almost perfect. He treated his people badly, however. Gilgamesh becomes less evil when his best friend dies.

5. THE RIVALRIES

Sumerian people lived in cities. They did not have one government for the whole country. The cities ran themselves. Each one had its own king and a wall around the town. Fighting between cities happened quite often. The Sumerians lived in the valley. They had no natural barriers to protect them from attack. Once the enemy had crossed the river, getting to the cities was easy. The city walls were very important for protection. Often, one city attacked another in order to gain more land and power.

6. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Sumerians were very good farmers. They invented the plough and the harness. This made the work easier and quicker. Carts were used to deliver things to the market.

They also learned about metalworking. Gold and silver were used for jewellery. Bronze was used for weapons and tools.

The most amazing invention of the Sumerians was writing. Merchants could now keep track of the goods they bought and sold.

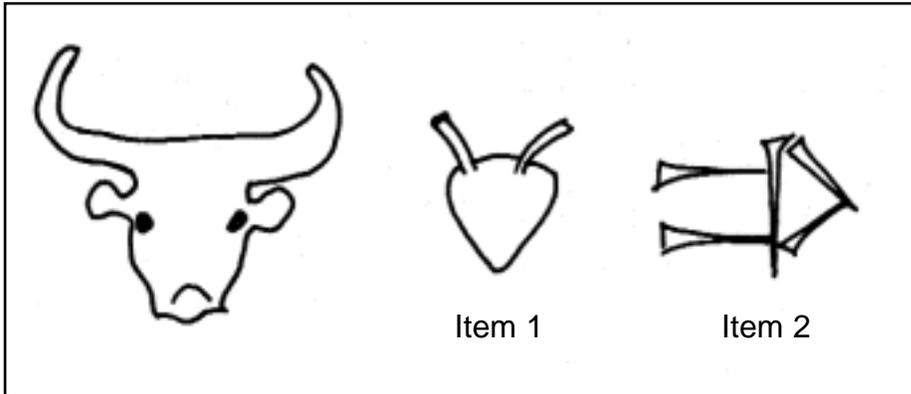
They wrote in symbols on clay tablets. Picture writing was used to keep track of trade. Some pictograms were of ideas and others of sounds. Other cultures started to use these pictograms in their own languages.

The Sumerians also invented some of the math that we use today. They invented addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and geometry. They knew about stars and also had a 12 month calendar.

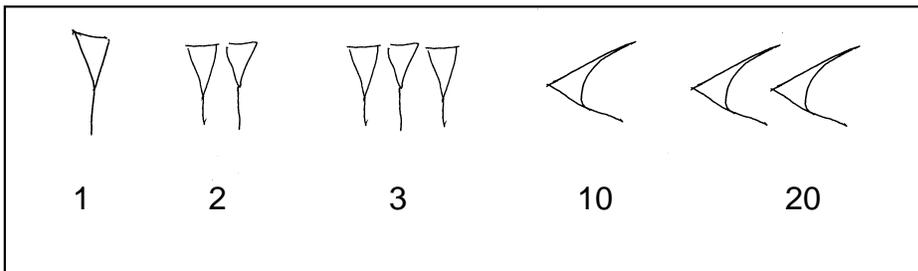
7. THE FIVE FORCES CIVILIZATION SNAPSHOT

1. THE ENVIRONMENT: Good farming. A valley between two rivers.
2. THE GOVERNMENT: Every city had its own king.
3. THE CULTURE: Fewer worries about food supply led to more time to develop culture. A system of writing was developed.
4. THE RIVALRIES: Fighting Between Cities: cities fought each other.
No natural barriers.
5. THE TECHNOLOGY: Mass irrigation systems and improved farming methods.

Sumer's greatest gift to the world was its invention of writing.



The bull is represented as Item 1. It looks like a bull. Later, Sumerians improved writing and made it more flexible by using abstract symbols (like our alphabet). Item 2 means a bull.



Some mathematical symbols and the modern numbers they represent.