Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent

Section 1

MAIN IDEAS
1. The rivers of Southwest Asia supported the growth of civilization.
2. New farming techniques led to the growth of cities.

Key Terms and People
Fertile Crescent a large arc of rich farmland extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea
silt a mix of rich soil and small rocks
irrigation a way of supplying water to an area of land
canals human-made waterways
surplus more of something than is needed
division of labor an arrangement in which people specialize in specific tasks

Section Summary
RIVERS SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF CIVILIZATION
Early people settled where crops would grow. Crops usually grew well near rivers, where water was available and regular floods made the soil rich.

Mesopotamia, part of the region known as the Fertile Crescent in Southwest Asia, lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Every year, floods on the rivers brought silt. The fertile silt made the land ideal for farming.

Hunter-gatherer groups first settled in Mesopotamia more than 12,000 years ago. Over time these people learned how to work together to control floods. They planted crops and grew their own food.

Farm settlements formed in Mesopotamia as early as 7000 BC. Farmers grew wheat, barley, and other grains. Livestock, birds, and fish were also sources of food. Plentiful food led to population growth and villages formed. Eventually, these early villages developed into the world’s first civilization.

“Mesopotamia” means “between the rivers” in Greek. To which two rivers does the name of the region refer?
_______________________
_______________________
_______________________

List two grains grown by Mesopotamian farmers.
_______________________
_______________________
FARMING AND CITIES

Early farmers faced the challenge of learning how to control the flow of river water to their fields in both rainy and dry seasons. Flooding destroyed crops, killed livestock, and washed away homes. When water levels were too low, crops dried up.

To solve their problems, Mesopotamians used irrigation. They dug out large storage basins to hold water supplies. Then they dug canals that connected these basins to a network of ditches. These ditches brought water to the fields and watered grazing areas for cattle and sheep.

Because irrigation made farmers more productive, they produced a surplus. Some people became free to do other jobs. For the first time, people became crafts persons, religious leaders, and government workers. A division of labor developed.

Mesopotamian settlements grew in size and complexity. Most people continued to work in farming jobs. However, cities became important places. People traded goods in cities. Cities became the political, religious, cultural, and economic centers of Mesopotamian civilization.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences Write a proposal for an irrigation system that will divert floodwaters and benefit riverbank farmers.
DIRECTIONS Write a word or phrase that has the same meaning as the term given.

1. surplus __________________________________________________________  
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. irrigation _________________________________________________________  
   ___________________________________________________________________

3. division of labor ___________________________________________________  
   ___________________________________________________________________

4. Fertile Crescent ___________________________________________________  
   ___________________________________________________________________

5. silt ______________________________________________________________  
   ___________________________________________________________________

6. canal ____________________________________________________________  
   ___________________________________________________________________

DIRECTIONS Look at each set of three vocabulary terms following each number. On the line provided, write the letter of the term that does not relate to the others.

____  7. a. irrigation  b. silt  c. canal

____  8. a. surplus  b. division of labor  c. Fertile Crescent

____  9. a. hunter-gatherer  b. Mesopotamia  c. Fertile Crescent
3. people who hunt animals and gather plants for food
4. Old Stone Age
5. time before writing was invented
6. a community of people who share a common culture
7. handheld object that helps a person accomplish a task

Written Summary
Answers will vary. Sample answer: The time before there was writing was called prehistory. During this time, early ancestors of humans, known as hominids, started using stone tools. The use of stone tools marked the beginning of the Paleolithic Era.

SECTION 2
Summary
(First Page) began 1.6 million years ago, ended 10,000 years ago; Asia
(Second Page) animal hides; They hollowed out logs.

Challenge Activity
Answers will vary. Student plans should reflect an understanding of Mesolithic building methods and materials.

Fill in the Blank
1. Mesolithic Era
2. ice ages
3. land bridge
4. migrate

Descriptive Phrases
5. Possible answers—strip of land, connects two continents, allowed migration
6. Possible answers—move, cross great distances, response to climate changes

SECTION 3
Summary
(First Page) warming trend; possible answers—provide milk and food, provide wool, carry loads, pull farming tools
(Second Page) They learned to make fire; plant fibers, wool, animal skins; gods and goddesses associated with the four elements or animals, ancestors

Challenge Activity
Answers will vary. Student theories should be reasonable and should reflect an understanding of current ideas concerning the building of Stonehenge.

True/False
1. F; Megaliths are large stones that were used in religious ceremonies as monuments.
2. T
3. T
4. T

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SECTION 1
Summary
(First Page) the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; wheat and barley
(Second Page) Students should underline the sentence: Flooding destroyed crops, killed livestock, and washed away homes; from rivers; cities

Challenge Activity
Answers will vary. Student proposals should include an irrigation system that diverts floodwaters to riverbank farmers.

Definitions
Answers will vary. Sample answers:
1. more than needed
2. a way of supplying water to an area of land
3. an arrangement in which people specialize in specific tasks
4. a large arc of rich farmland extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea
5. a mix of rich soil and small rocks
6. human-made waterways

Vocabulary Terms
1. b
2. c
3. a