The Stone Ages and Early Cultures

Section 3

MAIN IDEAS
1. The first farmers learned to grow plants and raise animals in the New Stone Age.
2. Farming changed societies and the way people lived.

Key Terms and People
Neolithic Era  the last Stone Age, lasting from about 10,000 years ago to about 5,000 years ago in Egypt and Southwest Asia and later elsewhere
domestication  the process of changing plants or animals to make them more useful to humans
agriculture  the development of farming from the domestication of plants
megaliths  huge stones used as monuments or sites for religious gatherings

Academic Vocabulary
development  creation and growth

Section Summary
THE FIRST FARMERS
A warming trend brought an end to the ice ages, and new plants began to grow in some areas. As early as 10,000 years ago, in Egypt and Southwest Asia, people came to depend on wild barley and wheat for food. People soon learned that they could plant seeds to grow their own crops. This shift from food gathering to food producing defined the Neolithic (nee-uh-Li-thik) Era.

This domestication of plants led to the development of agriculture, or farming. The first farmers also learned to domesticate animals. Instead of following wild herds, they could now keep sheep and goats for milk, food, and wool. People could also use large animals like cattle to carry loads or to pull large tools used in farming. Domestication greatly improved people’s chances of surviving.
With survival more certain, people could focus on activities other than finding food. During this time, people also learned to polish stones to make specialized tools like saws and drills. People also learned how to make fire. Before learning that skill, people could use only fire that had been started by natural causes, such as lightning.

**FARMING CHANGES SOCIETIES**

People began to make clothing from plant fibers and wool as well as from animal skins. As these early farmers learned to control their own food production and to make better shelters and clothing, populations grew. In some areas farming communities developed into towns. Some groups gathered to perform religious ceremonies around huge stone monuments called **megaliths**. These people probably believed in gods and goddesses associated with the four elements—air, water, fire, and earth—or with animals. Some scholars believe that prehistoric people also prayed to their ancestors. Some societies today still hold these beliefs.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** Use the Internet or a library to research theories about how the megaliths at Stonehenge in England were built. Then write your own theory.
DIRECTIONS  On the line provided before each statement, write T if a statement is true and F if a statement is false. If the statement is false, write the correct term on the line after each sentence that makes the sentence a true statement.

_____  1. Mammoths are large stones that were used in religious ceremonies as monuments.

2. Domestication is the process of changing plants and animals to make them more useful to humans.

3. During the Neolithic Era, or New Stone Age, people learned to polish stones to make tools like saws and drills, they learned to make fire, and they learned how to produce food.

4. With the development of agriculture, or farming, people could produce their own food.
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

Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent

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