



Big Era Three
Farming and the Emergence of Complex Societies
10,000 – 1000 BCE



Landscape Teaching Unit 3.3
River Valleys and the Development of Complex Societies in Afroeurasia
4000-1500 BCE

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Why this unit?

Our current way of life is rooted in the complex societies, traditionally called civilizations, that originated in Afroeurasia between about 4000 and 1500 BCE. Many of the integral features of our own world developed in these societies during this period. We have inherited from the builders of those societies many fundamental ideas and inventions, including urban living, the state, social class hierarchies, writing, institutionalized religion, mathematics, astronomy, and wheeled transport.

This unit focuses on the earliest civilizations that arose in the valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates River (Mesopotamia, today Iraq), the Nile River (Egypt), and the Indus River (today Pakistan and northwestern India) during the fourth and third millennia BCE. The unit also considers more briefly the early civilization of the Yellow River valley in China, which emerged later than the other three. This unit alerts students to the characteristics these complex societies had in common, to some of the differences among them, and to major changes they underwent down to about 1500 BCE.

Unit objectives

Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Describe major characteristics of the complex societies (civilizations) that emerged in Afroeurasia during this period.
2. Compare the life ways of the earliest city-dwellers during the period of about 3500-2500 BCE with those of neolithic farmers.
3. Describe the changes that occurred in early complex societies in human relationships to the environment, to other humans, and to ideas.
4. Assess the advantages and disadvantages of life in complex societies compared to earlier Neolithic societies.
5. Analyze primary source documents and assess their reliability as historical evidence.

Time and materials

This teaching unit is versatile. Both lessons can stand on their own, each taking one or two 45 minute class periods. Time taken will vary, depending on how much of the lesson is used. The only materials needed are copies of the Student Handouts, pencils, and paper.

Author

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Historical context

Scholars have different ideas about where to mark the historical dividing line between the era of neolithic farming societies in Afroeurasia and the emergence of complex societies, or civilizations. Historians generally agree, however, that early complex societies had distinguishing characteristics, though not every complex society necessarily displayed all of them. These characteristics include:

Cities

The state, that is, a central governing authority in which a relatively small group of people exercised, to some extent, command over the economic and political life of everyone else. Membership in the state was based not on kinship relations but on common submission to the governing authority.

Occupational specializations (Part of the population engaged in jobs or professions other than growing food or herding animals.)

Institutions for collecting, storing, and distributing surplus products, staffed by officials and managers.

Social class hierarchy (Typically, a small privileged elite occupied the top rank, the vast majority of farmers, herders, and laborers the bottom. A minority population of people possessing commercial wealth or special skills constituted a middle group.)

Institutionalized religion.

Monumental public architecture.

Writing.

Creation and accumulation of knowledge in mathematics, engineering, astronomy, and other technical and scientific fields.

If we go back five thousand years ago, we see that the trend toward larger and denser populations practicing farming was occurring only in limited areas of Afroeurasia. In most regions, the frontier of farming was advancing slowly. However, in three regions—the valleys of the Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, and Indus rivers—startling changes were occurring. In those places, and nearly simultaneously, populations were growing at a much faster rate than at any earlier time in history, and humans were beginning to organize themselves in remarkable new ways. These three complex societies all arose within the mid-section of the [Great Arid Zone](#), that is, the belt of arid or semi-arid territory that extends from all the way across Afroeurasia. Climatologists have hypothesized that the hot, dry conditions that prevail today in those regions set in around 4000 BCE. Complex society was therefore possible only because spring runoff from wet highlands flowed into rivers that crossed arid country on their way to the sea. The Tigris and Euphrates originate in cool, green mountains of Eastern Anatolia. The Indus flows from the Tibetan Himalayas. The Nile has its source in highland Ethiopia and tropical East Africa.

In fact, we may think of the three early river valley civilizations as all emerging in *one* region, the middle part of the Great Arid Zone. All three occupied approximately the same belt of latitude, shared a similar climate, and produced the same basic crops centered on wheat and barley. Also, trade took place between all three, by both land and sea.

Complex society appears to have arisen first in southern Mesopotamia (about 3600 BCE), then in Egypt (about 400 years later), then in the Indus valley (about 2600 BCE). In East Asia, ciliated society appeared in the Yellow River valley of northern China, but not until around 1700 BCE.

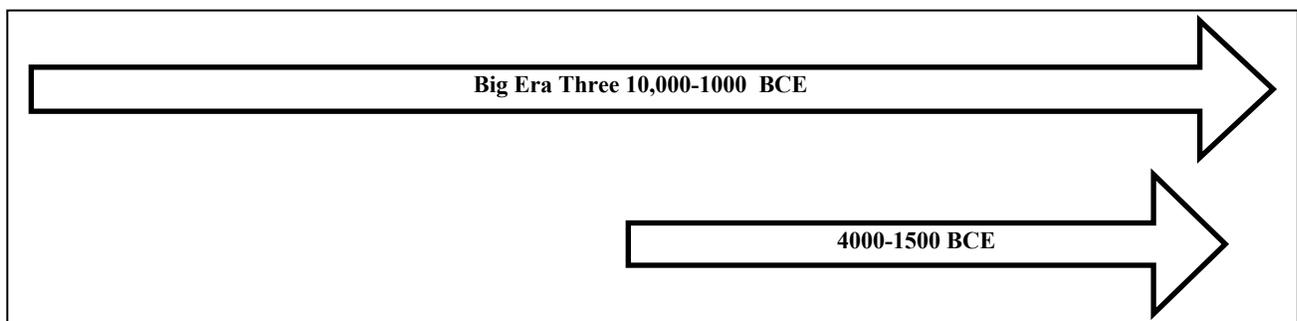
During the gradual transition to complex societies, humans' relations to the environment, to other humans, and to ideas changed.

First, the development of these societies was inseparable from humans finding new and more intensive ways to exploit the environment to produce surplus wealth and sustain growing populations.

Second, rising production and population required new institutions to manage the interactions among individuals and groups who lived in much closer proximity to one another and had more complicated economic, social, and political relations. The state served to organize and regulate human behavior on a much larger scale than had been known in the early millennia of farming.

Third, religious ideas became more systematized, and expanded their focus from the world of nature to concern with human social relations. Writing promoted the spread of ideas but also limited access to them because only a small minority achieved literacy. (For further discussion of the rise of complex societies, go to Student Handout 1.1).

This unit in the Big Era Timeline



Introductory activities

Ask students to brainstorm or discuss in groups or with a neighbor the following:

Note: 1 and 2 below can serve as a partial review of the Big Era Two Panorama Teaching Unit (“What Does it Mean to Be Human?”) and the Big Era 3.1 Teaching Unit (“Getting a Grip On the Food Supply: Domestication and Its Results”).

1. Can we describe the society of any hunter-gatherer group (such as the mammoth bone users in the Ukraine) living before about 15,000 BCE as a “civilization?” Why or why not?
 - 1.
 2. Can the society of any agricultural settlement (such as Çatal Hüyük) before about 5000 BCE be described as a “civilization?” Why or why not?
 3. What, then, would you consider the most important characteristics that define a society as a “civilization?” Explain your reasons for choosing the characteristics you identified.
 4. What reasons can you give for the fact that cities did not develop anywhere in the world until after about 4000 BCE? Explain your reasoning.
 5. What are the most important ways that life in a city differs from life in other types of human settlements? Explain your reasons for considering your choices the “most important” ones.
 6. What are the most important advantages and disadvantages of living in a city?
 - a. Explain your reasons for considering your choices the “most important” ones.
 - b. In what ways, if any, do the advantages and disadvantages of living in a city differ for various groups in a city’s population?
 7. Have students share their ideas, and then agree on a single hypothesis for each of the following, in each case supporting the hypothesis:
 - a. What the most important characteristics are that define a society as a “civilization.”
 - b. What the most important distinguishing characteristics of a city are.
 - c. What the most important advantages and disadvantages of living in a city are, taking differences between groups into account.
 8. Ask students to keep a record of the hypotheses agreed on for a, b, and c since one of the assessments at the end of the unit may require students to provide 1) all the evidence that supports, and all the evidence that contradicts, the hypotheses; and 2) their individual revision of the hypotheses in light of that evidence.

Lesson One

What Does It Take To Be a “Civilization”?

Note: The following suggested activities and discussions are all based on students having read the information in Student Handout 1.1. Share with students the questions and activities you are going to ask them to work with before they start going through the Student Handout. This helps them to read and consider it more attentively.

1. What problems were solved in ancient Southwest Asia during the period just before the earliest civilizations can be identified, about 7000 BCE to about 4000 BCE; and what new problems arose? This activity lends itself well to small group work. It can serve as a partial review of earlier information from Lesson 2 of Big Era 3.1 (“Getting a Grip On the Food Supply: Domestication and Its Results.”)
2. What were the most important differences between peoples’ lives in large agricultural settlements (such as Çatal Hüyük and Jericho) during the eighth millennium BCE and in the complex societies of Mesopotamia and Egypt during about 3500-2500 BCE?
 - a) Consider the following:
 - People’s relationship to the environment (economic organization)
 - People’s relationship to each other (political and social organization)
 - People’s systems of ideas (religion, values, the arts, science)
 - b) For which of the above is the information needed to make comparisons most lacking?
 - c) What reasons could you give for differences in the availability of information?
 - d) Explain how you decided what was “important.”
3. You are given the choice of spending your life in one of the two societies below:
 - A large agricultural settlement (such as Çatal Hüyük) during the 7000’s BCE
 - Mesopotamia or Egypt about 3500-2500 BCE
 - a) Which would you choose? Why? Would you choose differently if you were a:
 - a slave
 - a merchant
 - a scribe
 - a peasant woman
 - b) Explain the reasons for your choice.

4. What evidence might you give in favor of, or opposed to, each of the following claims. This activity lends itself well to small group work.
 - a) The earliest civilizations hardly benefited anyone other than the small, largely urban and male elites.
 - b) Some segments of the population became worse off as a result of the development of complex society (civilization).
 - c) Social hierarchies in the earliest civilizations were flexible enough so that some of those with low status could rise by their own efforts.
5. From the information in Student Handout 1.1, what can you infer about the values of people living in the complex river-valley societies during about 3500-1500 BCE? What changes in values could be identified, when and where? Explain what your inferences are based on.
6. Were the complex societies in Mesopotamia and Egypt between 3500-1500 BCE generally similar to or generally different from each other? Give evidence to support your assessment.
7. Would you agree with the statement that “early civilizations had fuzzy edges in both space and time?”
 - a) Explain your reasoning, and give evidence to support your opinion.
 - b) Would you have the same opinion about the cities in early civilizations? Why or why not?
8. What four or five things in Student Handout 1.1 helped you most in understanding what it took for a society to be a “civilization?” What questions do you still have unanswered that would help you to better understand what it took to be a “civilization?” What kind of evidence might realistically be available to answer these questions?
9. This activity could serve as assessment. You have been asked by a textbook publisher to act as their consultant on a chapter to be called “The Emergence of Complex Societies in Afroeurasian River Valleys.” Your job is to come up with a time-line that shows all the information you feel is important for students to know about this topic. Base your time-line on the information in Student Handout 1.1. The publisher also needs to know from you the reasons why you have chosen the information you have shown as being important.
10. This activity could also serve as assessment. You have been invited to give a talk in a history class of students about two years younger than you on “How Civilizations First Arose. Basing your talk on the information in Student Handout 1.1, explain the half dozen or so most important points you feel you would need to make for your audience to understand what is meant by “civilization?” What do you consider the most important information you give these students so that they will understand how complex societies arose? Explain why you decided that the things you chose to talk about were “most important.”

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.1—What Does It Take To Be A “Civilization”?

The earliest societies that have been called “civilizations” emerged in the river valleys of Afroeurasia. The first did so soon after 4000 BCE along Mesopotamia’s Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A few hundred years later, one existed in Egypt’s Nile valley, and some 500 years or so after that in the valley of India’s Indus River. China’s Yellow River valley witnessed the rise of complex society around 1700 BCE.

In the Tigris-Euphrates valley between about 7000 and 4000 BCE, exploitation of the environment intensified. Villages spread into less easily farmed areas, such as river valleys. Here floods left fertile mud in their wake, but drainage was often needed. Arid plains beyond flooded areas could be made productive only by building irrigation works. Large-scale cultivation of nut and fruit trees began. Farmers learned how to use animals not only as a one-time source of stored meat and hides, but as continuing sources of milk, wool, and fertilizer. In Mesopotamia, animals began to be used to pull carts and plows. More efficient sickles of flint, then of copper and bronze, all made from imported materials, replaced earlier ones made of native baked clay.

As food resources grew faster, so did human populations. Land close enough to water for irrigation and close to settlements to make transport feasible became more valuable. Marked differences in wealth developed. Shifts in watercourses, both natural and human-caused, led to conflicts between communities. The need to predict, direct, and use the spring river floods led to the need for large-scale cooperation and to innovations in water management engineering.

Along the edges of the more intensively farmed areas, and in some pockets among settled communities, marsh or desert dwelling hunter-gatherers maintained older ways of life, intermittently trading with sedentary populations.

Human impact on the environment became increasingly varied and widespread. Landscapes were transformed from natural to man-made. Marshes were drained. Trees gave place to cereal crops. Orchards and date palms grew where only scrub had existed before. In lower Mesopotamia over-irrigation turned some soils salty and barren. Native animals in some regions were deprived of their habitat. Towns and villages intruded on farm land. Problems of sanitation and crowding in fast-growing settlements put people in greater danger of disease and infection. With population ever denser after 4000 BCE, leaders built massive artificial hills as foundations for temples, citadels, and palaces.

Human relations became more intense and complex. Both people and resources became more concentrated. In early cities, rulers collected agricultural and commercial resources in centralized storage places, where they could be guarded and their gathering and distribution controlled.

In southern Mesopotamia, the area known as Sumer, the number of settlements identified grew from 21 to 123 between 4000 and 3000 BCE. The average size of settlements grew about five fold, and the first cities arose. During the third millennium, an estimated 80 percent of the population was urban. In Egypt, there were similar increases in the numbers and sizes of settlements at about this time. Egypt, however, remained more village-based than either Mesopotamia or the Indus valley. In the Nile valley fewer cities developed and the population was spread more evenly.

The new cities were more than just enlarged villages. They were hubs in wide-flung trade networks, promoted by the new availability of ox-drawn carts and boats. In cities, artisans, laborers, and merchants concentrated. Cities became centers of manufacturing. New technologies were used such as alloying and casting metals for tools, weapons, and luxury goods. The wheel allowed for mass production of pottery.

Surplus resources allowed the emergence of full-time specialist occupations in the cities. Some of these jobs were concerned with organization and management of people and resources: rulers, government officials, scribes, and soldiers. Others were in artisanry, manufacturing, and trade. Specialists such as priests, priestesses, and religious officials acted as intermediaries between the people and the gods and goddesses. Some city-dwellers continued to farm, walking to nearby fields. People who lived in the countryside came into the cities to trade, deliver tribute to the temple, or work on large-scale building projects.

Cities became hubs of both local and long-distance trade. Sumer is known to have imported timber, marble, metals, and semi-precious stones. References to “boats from Dilmun (modern Bahrein on the Persian gulf) bringing ivory, gold, carnelian, and lapis lazuli” appear in Sumerian royal inscriptions of the third millennium BCE. Archaeological evidence shows that sea trade connected Mesopotamia to the Harappan civilization of the Indus valley. There is also abundant evidence of thriving trade between northern Mesopotamian cities and both Anatolia (modern Turkey) and Iran.

Around 3000 BCE, Sumerian-style cylinder seals, architectural techniques, and art motifs appeared in Nile delta settlements. Soon after, Egypt was importing marble from the Red Sea coast, copper from the Sinai Peninsula, cedar and cypress wood from Lebanon and Syria, and ebony and ivory from sub-Saharan Africa. Egyptian-made stone vessels of various dates before about 2000 BCE are known from excavations in Syria, Palestine, Crete, and Greece. Both in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the ruling class financed and controlled long distance trade and also benefited most from it. But in Mesopotamia the merchants who acted as the rulers’ agents are known to have traded also on their own behalf. They also made loans to government.

Hierarchy was another hallmark of emerging complex societies. After about 4000 BCE, the social structure in densely populated regions began to resemble pyramids. At the top of this pyramid were the most powerful political and religious leaders and the wealthiest landowners. They had a grip on power, rights, privileges, and prestige, all backed by religious ideas. Just below the top were the elite officials, managers, and high-ranking military officers. They saw to

it that rulers' wishes and policies were carried out. Below this group was a minority population with special skills or with wealth gained in manufacturing or trade. The broad base of the pyramid included the vast majority of peasants and laborers, a class that had few possessions, rights, or life options. Slavery became widespread in Mesopotamia after about 2800 BCE. Many slaves had lost their freedom by being captured in war.

In Mesopotamia, women's inferiority to men was taken for granted, but they shared the social standing of their fathers and husbands. Up to about 2000 BCE, they benefited from some measure of equality. In both Sumer and Egypt women occasionally served as rulers or held high office. Priestesses could command exceptional wealth, prestige, and power. Women generally inherited equal shares of land with men, could own property, could sue in the courts, and worked in many jobs outside the home. Towards the end of the third millennium, however, an increasing emphasis on the importance of armies and conquest and on trade and manufacture as sources of wealth meant that women were increasingly excluded from the most valued occupations. Laws increasingly defined them as dependents and restricted to the home. In one Sumerian city-state, any woman speaking disrespectfully to a man was ordered to have her mouth crushed with a brick. The number of women in government or religious positions in Egypt, and in supervisory positions in Mesopotamia, declined.

States emerged in response to the need for central regulation that could be backed up with systematic coercion on a large scale. The ability of states' rulers to regulate and coerce was typically religiously supported, and buttressed by a near-monopoly of force that could command labor, tribute, and taxes. Rulers of states organized and financed public services, arranged for religious ceremonies and festivals, maintained irrigation works, controlled stores of food for famine relief, administered justice, and in some places issued written law codes.

Priests governed the earliest city-states in Mesopotamia on behalf of the city's chief god or goddess. Priestly power to coerce seems to have been based on both religious ideas and on economics because the temples controlled surplus grain and other commodities. In the third millennium, a secular leader typically replaced these religious authorities. Originally called something like "big man," he was soon described as "king." His power was based on control of the military, and his position became hereditary. A city-state normally only controlled its local hinterland of towns and villages. But city-states often warred with one another over territory and resources.

The kings of some city-states claimed to have united the whole of Sumer in southern Mesopotamia at various periods down to about 2200 BCE. At that time, Sargon became ruler of the Semitic city of Akkad in central Mesopotamia. His armies conquered all the independent Sumerian city-states. One document records that "5400 warriors ate bread daily in his presence." He established the first multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural empire that stretched from the Persian Gulf to Syria, Turkey, and Iran. His successors began to call themselves divine. Within a few generations his empire crumbled, but others followed in the second millennium.

Egypt's rulers were successful military leaders first, emerging from generations of conflict between rival towns and regions. From about 3100 BCE, the entire Nile valley from the great Delta upriver to the first of several cataracts (steep rapids) was united under a Pharaoh proclaimed as divine. His rule and that of his hereditary successors depended on the support of the powerful priesthoods of the various gods, enormous wealth based on taxes and tribute, and a monopoly of force. After about 1,000 years, central authority weakened, but from about 1570 BCE, a new dynasty arose that created an Egyptian empire extending far upriver and into Southwest Asia.

Some kind of central authority, perhaps a state, almost certainly existed in the early Harappan civilization of the Indus valley. This is suggested by the existence from around 2500 BCE of cities scattered over hundreds of miles sharing similar urban layouts with parallel streets intersecting at right angles. There is also evidence of uniformity in the size and shape of bricks, weights, and pottery. However, no direct evidence of central rule has been found: no palaces, no elaborate royal tombs, no depictions of monarchs, no inscriptions that anyone can read.

Perhaps the most significant and enduring innovations that peoples of the early civilizations contributed to history were in the realm of ideas. The people of these civilizations invented writing, developed abstract thinking in mathematics, worked out ethical codes, and experimented in the arts.

Writing emerged as a system for recording information. It overcame the inaccuracy and impermanence of memory, eased communication between widely separated people, promoted the flow of information, and made possible both the cumulative storage and the control of knowledge. According to our most reliable current information, the earliest written records appeared in Mesopotamia on clay tablets about 3,600 BCE, though some tantalizing recent evidence suggests that Egyptians may have been the first writers. Writing appears on seals in the Indus valley dating to about 2,600 BCE. In China, the earliest evidence is on bones and bronze vessels dating to around 1,600 BCE.

The earliest written signs were pictures (pictographs) of objects and notations of quantities. Gradually, the objects came to stand for ideas, such as an image foot to represent the idea of walking. Eventually, sounds of words that identified objects began to be used to write concepts for which pictures could not be made. An hypothetical example in English would be to combine the pictograph for "bee" with the one for "leaf" to create the abstract word "belief."

Writing was hard to learn because a scribe had to remember thousands of symbols. Eventually, the number of signs was reduced from thousands to hundreds, and their forms simplified. In both Mesopotamia and Egypt, knowledge of writing remained restricted to the higher ranks of society, and almost entirely to men. Knowledge of writing became quite widely used in Sumer for both commerce and government, mostly to record quantities of goods received, rations given to workers, and agricultural products distributed. In Egypt, writing was for centuries concerned mainly with royalty and religion. Most Harappan inscriptions, which have not been deciphered, have been found on seals and apparently used to identify ownership

Monumental architecture and art were symbolic expressions of hierarchy and concentrated public power. Architecture also demonstrated technological, mathematical, and engineering know-how. Examples from the fourth and third millennium include city walls, palaces, temples, and tombs. Particularly well known are the ziggurats, or temple towers, in Mesopotamia; the pyramids of Giza in Egypt; and the citadels and great water tank in the Indus valley. The ziggurat of the Sumerian city Ur, built the third millennium, was 150 feet by 200 feet at the base, and 80 feet high. Egypt's 481 foot Great Pyramid, which served as a Pharaoh's tomb, was built at about the same time. Its 2.5 million twenty-ton limestone blocks were cut to within 0.01 inches of being perfectly straight.

Works of art were also produced as symbols of wealth and status. Many were deliberately designed to make forceful statements about the majesty of gods and rulers, to communicate socially approved ways of behavior, and to reinforce the social and religious hierarchy. Others were purely decorative. In all of the early civilizations, the arts reached very high levels of skill, creativity, and sophistication.

Religious ideas heavily influenced behavior. In the societies whose writings we can read, we know that people believed in many gods (about 3000 of them in Mesopotamia). These were typically associated with forces of nature (sun, sky, earth, and certain animals such as the bull). In Egypt, an afterlife depended on divine judgment confirming that the deceased had lived a good life and on preservation of the corpse, along with grave goods that would ensure its comfort. Mesopotamia's afterlife was a loss of identity in a shadowy world of sadness. Each god had priests and priestesses that served it. They organized and carried out the rituals that celebrated, made sacrifices to, and requested favors from the divinity. They also supervised public worship, which often involved impressive spectacles.

The first evidence for the use of mathematics comes from Sumer in the fourth millennium. This society adopted both a decimal (10-base) system, later abandoned, and one based on the number 60 and its fractions and multiples. In both systems, the value of an individual number sign depended on its placement in the entire number (as in 1111, the first 1 stands for a thousand, the next for a hundred.). The Babylonians in the third millennium worked easily with fractions and solved quadratic and cubic equations. Babylon employed a calendar with a year of 360 days divided into 12 months, a week of 7 days, a day of 24 hours, and hours and minutes divided into 60 parts. Egypt's calendar had a more accurate year of 365 days, divided into 36 ten-day periods with an extra five days tacked on. Both societies practiced systematic astronomical observations, keeping records of eclipses, new moons, and motions of the planets. They used mathematics to calculate and predict the behavior of heavenly bodies, which were thought to influence human events on earth.

Note: The information in Student Handout 1.1 is based on the evidence of archaeological excavations and written documents, described and interpreted in the sources cited on pages 21-23.

Lesson Two

What Can We Tell From What They Said Themselves?

Note: The following suggested activities are all based on students having read the information in Student Handouts 1.1, 2.1, and 2.2. Share with students the questions and activities you are going to work on before they start reading the Student Handouts. This helps them to read attentively and work more productively with the questions.

2. This activity lends itself well to small group work. If students have not read Students Handout 1.1, then they can be asked to compare the Student Handouts from Lesson 2 with information in their textbook.
 - a) You have been asked to provide a readers' review comparing Student Handout 1.1 with Student Handouts 2.1 and 2.2.
 - b) Explain to prospective student readers what they can expect to get out of reading Student Handouts 1.1, 2.2, and 2.2.
 - c) Evaluate for your readers what are the advantages and disadvantages of Handout for a student trying to gain an understanding of the earliest societies called civilizations.
3. To help understand a society in the past, what are the advantages and disadvantages of written documentary evidence (such as those in Student Handout 2.1-2.4) compared to physical evidence such as skeletons, grave goods, and remains of buildings, art, household objects, and tools? Explain your reasoning.
4. This activity lends itself well to small group work. Ask half the class to work with the Documents from Mesopotamia (Student Handout 2.1 and 2.2), the other half with the Documents from Egypt (Student Handouts 2.3 and 2.4). Different aspects of the society could be assigned to different groups. Assume you are an archaeologist who has no other information about an ancient society than the five documents you are working with here. Assume that you have managed to date and translate these documents.
 - a) Using your five documents, give as well-rounded a description as you can of the society the documents came from. Consider various aspects of the society they came from: economic, social, political, religious, artistic, and intellectual.
 - b) In what ways does the information you have limit your ability to give a well-rounded description of the society they came from?
5. Compare the descriptions of a city in the Mesopotamian (Student Handout 2.1 and 2.2) and the Egyptian Document (Student Handout 2.3 and 2.4).
 - a) In what ways are the accounts similar? In what ways different? What information available in this unit might help explain any of the differences?
 - b) Which, if any, of the characteristics described were specifically urban, showing that these cities were "more than just enlarged villages?"

- c) What, if any, important characteristics of modern American cities are missing from both descriptions? Explain how you decided what was “important.”
 - d) How reliable are the two accounts as historical evidence of what the cities described were really like. Use a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely)? Explain the reasons for your rating. What reasons for accuracy or inaccuracy could the author of each description have?
6. Compare the advice to sons in Student Handouts 2.1 and 2.3.
- a) What can you infer from the Mesopotamian document about the likely occupation and social position of the father? What differences between the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian fathers’ advice could be explained by their different occupations and positions?
 - b) What can you infer from the two documents concerning how people at the time felt about the relationship between fathers and sons, between women and men, between those higher and lower in the social hierarchy?
 - c) Did the advice given pay more attention to self-interest or to morality? Explain your answer.
 - d) If an American father today were to give advice to his teenage son, what 5-10 statements from these documents might he want to include?
7. Compare Student Handouts 2.2 and 2.4 on the subjects of law and confession.
- a) What values common to both societies can be identified from the two documents?
 - b) What important differences in the two documents can you identify? Why do you consider these differences important?
 - c) In what ways would the existence of each document have contributed to upholding the social order? On what did each depend for effectiveness?
 - d) What can you infer about the main concerns of each society from the two documents?
 - e) Compare each to contemporary American ideas about justice, values, and morality. What are the main differences? Similarities?
8. Compare the Student Handouts 2.2 and 2.4 on the subject of scribes.
- a) What reasons did each father have for wanting his son to be a scribe?
 - b) What can be inferred from these two documents about the relationship between fathers and sons? What evidence, if any, from this unit would support your inference?
 - c) What can be inferred from these documents about the job and the lifestyle of a scribe?
 - d) How would you account for the similarities in the ways scribes were thought of in the two societies?
 - e) How would you rate, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely), the reliability of these documents as evidence for what the job, lifestyle, and social status of a

scribe might have been like? What reasons might there be for questioning the documents' reliability? Explain your reasons for your rating.

- f) What differences are there between the experience of school as you know it, and the school experience that can be inferred from these documents? What features of Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies might help account for some of the differences?
9. What conclusions can you draw about Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies from Student Handout 2.2 and 2.4) concerning mathematics? What information from this unit could you use to support your conclusions?
 10. What features of contemporary American life could you argue were based on, or influenced by, those developed in the earliest civilizations?
 11. This activity, or part of it, could serve as a summary assessment for the unit.
 - a) Recall the hypotheses developed and agreed on at the beginning of the unit.
 - b) What the most important characteristics are that define a society as a "civilization."
 - c) What the most important distinguishing characteristics of a city are.
 - d) What the most important advantages and disadvantages of living in a city are, taking any differences between different groups into account.
 - e) What evidence from this unit supports, and what evidence contradicts, each of the hypotheses as developed earlier?
 - f) Revise each hypothesis in accordance with the evidence you now have, and explain how you have arrived at your final version.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.1—Documents from Mesopotamia***

Document A: The Sumerian Goddess Inanna Looks After the City Agade (About 2000 BCE)

So that the warehouses would be provisioned
that dwellings would be founded in the city,
that its people would eat splendid food...
that acquaintances would dine together,
that foreigners would cruise about like unusual birds in the sky...
At that time, she filled Agade...with gold,
Delivered copper, tin, and blocks of lapis lazuli to its storehouses...
Its harbor, where ships docked, was full of excitement...
Its king, the shepherd Naram-Sin, rose like the sun on the holy throne of Agade..
Its city wall touched heaven, like a mountain....
Ships brought the goods of Sumer itself upstream [to Agade],
The highland Amorites, people ignorant of agriculture,
Came before her there with spirited bulls and spirited bucks,
Meluhhans [from the Indus valley, and] people of the black mountains,
Brought exotic wares down to her...
All the governors, temple administrators, and land registrars of the Gude'ena
Regularly supplied monthly and New Year offerings there.

Document B: A Sumerian Father Gives Advice To His Son (About 2300 BCE)

My son, let me give you instructions.
Pay attention to them !
Do not beat a farmer's son, or he will break your irrigation canal....
When you are drunk, do not judge....
Do not break into a house...
Do not speak with a girl when you are married, the [likelihood of] slander is strong...
Do not allow your sheep to graze in untested grazing grounds...
Submit to strength. Bow down to the mighty man.

Document C: A Teacher's Math Examination Question to Student (About 1700 BCE)

“Do you know multiplication, reciprocals, coefficients, balancing of accounts, administrative accounting, how to apportion all kinds of pay, divide property, and delimit shares of fields?”

Source: Gwendolyn Leick, *Mesopotamia: Invention of the City* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 70-71, 103-104, 163. Some of the language has been simplified by Anne Chapman.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.2—Documents from Mesopotamia***

Document A: *Hammurabi's Laws Seek To Uphold The Social Order In Babylon (About 1700 BCE)*

1. If a man accuses another of murder but cannot prove it, the accuser shall be put to death.
8. If a man steals, he shall repay thirty fold. If he hasn't the money, he shall be put to death.
15. If a man helps a slave to escape from the city, he shall be put to death.
117. If a man sells his wife or child to settle a debt, they shall work in the house of the buyer for three years, and regain their freedom in the fourth.
129. If a man's wife is caught lying with another man, they shall be bound and thrown into the water. If the woman's husband spares her life, the king shall spare the life of the man.
132. If the finger has been pointed at a wife because of another man, though she has not been caught lying with him she shall throw herself into the sacred river for her husband's sake.
141. If a wife goes out, plays the fool, ruins her house and belittles her husband, he may divorce her; or, if he prefers, he may marry another and keep the former wife as his maidservant.
142. If a woman hates her husband and says: "You shall not have me," her past shall be inquired into. If she had been careful and was without past sin; and her husband had been going out and greatly belittling her, she has no blame. She shall take her dowry and go back to her father.
145. If a man's wife does not give him children, he may take a concubine.
195. If a man strikes his father, they shall cut off his hand.
202. If a man strikes the cheek of his superior, he shall receive sixty strokes with an oxtail whip.
204. If a common man strikes a common man on the cheek, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.
205. If a man's slave strikes the son of a gentleman on the cheek, they shall cut off his ear.

206. If a man strikes another in a quarrel and wounds him, but swears: "I did not strike him intentionally," he shall only be responsible for paying the physician.

209. If a man strikes the daughter of another and causes a miscarriage, he shall pay ten shekels.

210. If the woman dies, they shall put his daughter to death.

Document B: A Sumerian Father Wants His Teen-Ager To Be A Scribe (About 2000 BCE)

...Why do you idle about? Go to school, recite your assignment, open your schoolbag, write your tablet, let your "big brother" write your new tablet for you. Be humble and show fear before your apprentice teacher. When you show terror, he will like you...._Never in my life did I make you carry reeds to the canebrake. I never said to you "Follow my caravans." I never sent you to work as a laborer. "Go, work and support me," I never in my life said that to you. Others like you support their parents by working... Compared to them you are not a man at all. Night and day you waste in pleasures.... Among all craftsmen that live in the land, no work is more difficult than that of a scribe. [But] it is in accordance with the fate decreed by [the god] Enlil that a man should follow his father's work.

Source: Louis Cohn-Haft, *Source Readings in Ancient History*, Vol. 1 (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1965), 66-68; 79-81; 89-91; 96-97. Some of the language has been simplified by Anne Chapman.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.3—Documents from Egypt***

Document A: Praise for Pharaoh's New City (About 1300 BCE)

His majesty—life, prosperity, health !—has built himself a city, named “Great of Victories.” All men have left their towns and are settled in its territory. Temples of the gods Amon and Set, and the goddesses Astarte and Uto, mark its four quarters. Pharaoh is in it as a god.

The Residence is full of supplies, its ponds with fish, its lakes with birds. Its granaries are so full of grain they come near to the sky. Onions and leeks are available for food, and lettuce, pomegranates, apples, olives. Its ships go out and come back to mooring, so it has supplies and food every day. One rejoices to live there.

The small in it are like the great. The young men are dressed up every day, with sweet oil on their heads and newly dressed hair. The ale of the city is tasty, so is beer from the harbor and wine of the vineyards. The singers of “Great of Victories” are sweet, being taught at Memphis [the old capital of Egypt]. So live there content, Pharaoh—thou god!

Document B: Instructions Of The Vizier Ptah-hotep To His Son (About 2450 BCE)

Let not you heart be puffed up, confident that you are a wise man. Take counsel with the ignorant as well as the wise. Good speech may be found with maidservants at the grindstones....

Wrongdoing has never brought its undertaking into port. Fraud may gain riches, but the strength of justice is that it lasts...

If you sit at the table of one greater than you, speak only when spoken to. Laugh after him.

When carrying a message from one great man to another, be accurate. Beware of making words worse through vulgar speech, and so making for hostility between them.

If you have a son who listens to you and takes care of your property as he should, do not cut your heart off from him. But if he does not carry out your instructions, if his manners in your household are wretched, if he rebels against all you say, cast him off. He is not your son at all.

If you want to make friendship last in a home to which you have access as a master, a brother or a friend, beware of approaching the women. Do not do it.

Do not be greedy, or envious of your own kindred.

Love your wife at home as is fitting. Fill her belly, clothe her back. Make her heart glad as long as you live. Do not contend with her at law, but keep her from gaining control.

Bow your back to your superior, then your reward will be as it should be. Opposition to a superior is a painful thing.

Document C: A Selection of Math Problems (About 1850 BCE)

Problems 1-6: How do you divide N loaves between 10 men, when the value of N is 1,2,6,7,8,9?

Problem 26: A quantity added to a quarter of that quantity becomes 15. What is the quantity?

Problem 50: A round field has a diameter of 9 khet. What is its area?

Problem 64: Divide 10 hekats of barley among 10 men so that each gets $\frac{1}{8}$ hekat more than the one before.

Sources: James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969), 412-3, 470-1. From the Ahmes papyrus, in J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson. *An Overview of Egyptian Mathematics*. http://www.history.mcs.st.andrews.ac.uk/HistTopics/Egyptian_mathematics.html. Some language has been simplified by Anne Chapman.

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.4—Documents from Egypt, 2

Document A: An Egyptian Father Wants His Son To Be A Scribe, About 2000 BCE

On his way to put him into the Writing School among the children of officials, he said to his son: I have seen how the laboring man is burdened. You should set your heart on pursuing writing instead. The scribe's place is in the Residence City, and he shall not be poor in it. Men greet him respectfully, and he is not clothed in the workman's apron.

If you leave the school after midday is announced, and go rollicking in the street, it is not for you. If three loaves should satisfy you, and two measures of beer, but there is still no limit to your belly, fight against it.

I have set you on the way of god. The scribe reaches the halls of the magistrates. No scribe lacks food, being fed from the property of the King's House—life, prosperity, health!

Document B: Negative Confession By the Deceased In the Underworld, Afterlife Depending On Its Truth, From *The Book Of The Dead* (About 1500 BCE)

Hail to you, O great god, judge of the dead! I know your name, and that of the forty-two gods with you who punish evildoers on the day of reckoning. Lord of Justice is your name. I have come to you; I have brought you justice; I have expelled deceit for you.

I have not committed evil against men.

I have not mistreated cattle.

I have not blasphemed a god.

I have not defamed a slave to his superior.

I have not made anyone weep.

I have not killed.

I have given no order to a killer.

I have not added to the weight of the balance.

I have not built a dam against running water.

I am pure! I am pure! I am pure!

I have not stolen.

I have not been greedy or envious.

I have not told lies.

I have not practiced usury.

I have not gossiped.

I have not committed adultery.

I have not been quarrelsome.

I have not been abusive.

May you rescue me from the devourer of the condemned dead! I have come to you without sin, without guilt, without evil, without a witness against me, without one against whom I have taken action. I have come here to testify to justice, and to bring the scales in which my character is weighed against the feather of truth into perfect balance.

Source: James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1969), 432-434 34-36. Some language has been simplified by Anne Chapman.

This unit and the Three Essential Questions

 <p>HUMANS & the ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>Research and report on the hypothesis that the civilizations of both Sumer in the Tigris-Euphrates valley and Harappa in the Indus River valley disintegrated owing to degradation of the natural environment linked to irrigated farming and urbanization.</p>
 <p>HUMANS & other HUMANS</p>	<p>Investigate evidence for the hypothesis that Egyptian, Indian, and Mesopotamian societies borrowed from each other. In what ways might such borrowing have taken place? What effects might cultural borrowing have on a receiving society? Why are foreign innovations sometimes rejected? What examples of cultural borrowing and rejection can you think of?</p>
 <p>HUMANS & IDEAS</p>	<p>Compare the social, political, and cultural purposes of monumental buildings such as temples or pyramids in early Mesopotamia or Egypt with the purposes of public monuments we may visit today in Washington, D.C.</p>

This unit and the Seven Key Themes

This unit emphasizes:

- Key Theme 1: Patterns of Population
- Key Theme 2: Economic Networks and Exchange
- Key Theme 3: Uses and Abuses of Power
- Key Theme 4: Haves and Have-Nots
- Key Theme 6: Spiritual Life and Moral Codes
- Key Theme 7: Science, Technology, and the Environment

This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

The student is able to (F) reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration in which historical developments have unfolded, and apply them to explain historical continuity and change.

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

The student is able to (E) read historical narratives imaginatively, taking into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved—their probably values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student is able to (A) compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences.

Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

The student is able to (A) formulate historical questions from encounters with historical documents, eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, historical sites, art, architecture, and other records from the past.

Historical Thinking Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

The student is able to (B) marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances and current factors contributing to contemporary problems and alternative courses of action.

Resources

Instructional resources for teachers

- Alchin, Raymond and Bridget Alchin. *Origins of a Civilization*. New Delhi: Viking, 1997. Detailed information about individual Harappan cities and settlements. Could be useful as research resource.
- Brewer, Douglas J. and Emily Teeter. *Egypt and the Egyptians*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Comprehensive background for teachers; selections also suitable for older students. Scholarly, but lively and readable text; quotes from ancient letters, law codes, hymns, funerary texts. Extensive and useful illustrations.
- Christian, David. *Maps of Time: an Introduction to Big History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. Two relevant chapters present an interesting meld of information and theory.
- Cohn-Haft, Louis. *Source Readings in Ancient History*. Volume 1: *The Ancient Near East and Greece*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965. Fourteen varied texts from Mesopotamia and Egypt, in rather clunky but reasonably readable translations.
- Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. Scholarship in colloquial language; information detailed, fascinating and easy to digest. Competent readers, mostly grade 10 and up, could handle selected passages. Great teacher resource. Absence of organization by traditional chronology or topics is refreshing but not, for those lacking spare time, efficient.

Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

Kramer, Samuel Noah. *History Begins at Sumer: 27 "Firsts" in Man's Recorded History*.

Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959. Individual selections are brief (about 3-6 pages) and readable enough to be selectively assigned to some students. Reader-friendly translations of Sumerian texts, with Kramer's clear and smooth commentaries, give intimate glimpses into life in early Sumer.

Kuhrt, Amelie. *The Ancient Near East c.3000-330 BC*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Provides considerable range of accessibly translated original source documents, useful maps, and lots of information. But it is tough to wade through. Other than as possible source for original sources, not useful for teachers or students.

Leick, Gwendolyn. *Mesopotamia: the Invention of the City*. London: Penguin Books, 2001.

Selected parts, identifiable by headings, useful for teachers and could perhaps be assigned to older students. Account of excavations, finds, and life in ten cities, in chronological order from Eridu (dating back to 4900 BCE) to Babylon (as recent as about 1800 BCE). Enlivened by quotations from varied sources in unusually accessible translations.

Lesko, Barbara S. "Women of Egypt and the Ancient Near East." In Renate Bridenthal, et al., eds. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. Interesting and readable survey that considers women in the context of the social and cultural settings in Egypt and Mesopotamia in less than twenty pages for the period of about 3100 to 1500 BCE. Accessible to students who are competent readers.

McIntosh, Jane. *A Peaceful Realm: The Rise and Fall of the Indus Civilization*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001.

Pollock, Susan. *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was*. Cambridge UP, 1999. Dense presentation, for the truly dedicated. Much detailed information drawn directly from archaeological and documentary sources.

Pritchard, James B. ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. 3d ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969. Translations of a wide range of original sources, which are so faithful to the originals that they would need "retranslation" into contemporary speech patterns to make them readable by students.

Redman, Charles L. *The Rise of Civilization*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1978. Substantive and very detailed but concise information about Mesopotamia and Egypt in the period of about 5000 to 1500 BCE, strongly tied to archaeological and documentary evidence. Gives more information, however, than most will want to deal with.

Wenke, Robert J. *Patterns in Prehistory: Humankind's First Three Million Years*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. About half of this textbook is concerned with the development of complex societies in Southwest Asia, Egypt, the Indus valley, China, and the Americas. The author has a lucid, lively, and sometimes humorous style.

Instructional resources for students

“Sumer and Its City-States.” *Calliope: Exploring World History*. 14 (Sept. 2003). A lively historical magazine for children.

“The Pyramids and Egypt’s Old Kingdom.” *Calliope: Exploring World History*. 12 (Sept. 2001). A lively historical magazine for children.

Time-Life Books. *Sumer: Cities of Eden*. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1993. Selections would make good introduction for many students. Helpful illustrations.

Correlations to National and State Standards and to Textbooks

National Standards for History

Era 2: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples, 4000-1000 BCE. 1: The student understands the major characteristics of civilization and how civilizations emerged in Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus valley.

California: History-Social Science Content Standards

Grade Six, 6.2 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush.

New York: Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum

Unit One: Ancient World – Civilizations and Religion (4000 BC – 500 AD). B.1. Compare and contrast (Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, and Yellow River civilizations).

Virginia Standards of Learning

World History and Geography to 1500 AD. Era 2: Classical civilizations and the rise of religious traditions, 1000 B.C. – 500 A.D. WHI.3. The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient river valley civilizations, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus River Valley, and China, and the civilization of the Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Kush.

World history textbooks

A Message of Ancient Days (Houghton Mifflin). Chapter 6: Mesopotamia. Lesson 1: The Land between Two Rivers, Lesson 2: The Contributions of the Sumerians, Lesson 3: The First Empires. Chapter 7: Ancient Egypt. Lesson 1: The Gift of the Nile. Lesson 2: Life in Ancient Egypt. Chapter 8: Ancient India. Lesson 1: The Indus Valley Civilization.

Ancient World: Adventures in Time and Place (Macmillan/McGraw-Hill). Chapter 3: Early Cultures. Lesson 1: Early People.

Human Heritage: A World History (Glencoe). Chapter 3: Mesopotamia. Chapter 4: Egypt.

World History: Patterns of Interaction (McDougal Littell). Chapter 2: Early River Valley Civilizations.

Conceptual links to other teaching units

In this Landscape Teaching Unit we have explored the development of dense farming and urban populations in the Tigris-Euphrates, Nile, and Indus river valleys. In the following 1,000 years, farming and city-building spread to many new areas of Afroeurasia beyond these three valleys. Also, pastoral societies, that is, peoples who made their living predominantly from herding domesticated animals across large tracts of arid and semi-arid land, came to play a much bigger role in world history, at some points violently challenging the old river valley civilizations themselves. Sophisticated technology for making bronze tools and weapons diffused widely, and networks of trade across the hemisphere became longer and denser. Several new states emerged, inventing techniques for organizing and regulating human life to a degree that Sargon and other early empire-builders could not have imagined. Landscape Teaching Unit 3.4 (“Migrations and Militarism across Afroeurasia, 2000-1000 BCE”) traces several of these historical threads.