

# Summary: Mesopotamia

## The Land of Two Rivers

People started farming in Mesopotamia over seven thousand years ago. Mesopotamia was in southwest Asia, on land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.

The southern part of Mesopotamia was called Sumer. Summers in Sumer were hot and dry. The rivers flooded and covered the land with rich soil good for growing plants.

Sumerians built high banks to control flooding. They dug canals to make river water flow into the fields of crops. Irrigation changed dry land to good farmland.

## Specialization and Cities

Sumerians grew so much food that some people did not have to farm. Some made goods, such as baskets and pots. Others took care of the canals.

As Sumerians produced more goods, they grew wealthy. Villages grew into towns and then into cities. Ur was the center of Sumerian civilization. Thousands of people lived there. It had a place for worship and laws. These are important in all civilizations.

## Writing and Wheels

Early Sumerians made pictographs in soft clay to record information. Pictographs showed goods, such as oxen. Later, people invented writing with symbols instead of pictures. These symbols are called cuneiform. People used cuneiform to write down ideas.

Scientists say Sumerians probably also invented wheels around 3,500 B.C.E. They may have used them for potter's wheels and on carts.



### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**irrigation** *noun*, a way of bringing water to dry places using ditches and canals

**civilization** *noun*, a complex society in which people make advances in the arts, religion, and law

**pictograph** *noun*, a picture that stands for a word or idea

**cuneiform** *noun*, a style of writing that used wedge shapes



### After You Read

**REVIEW** In what ways did irrigation help the people of Sumer? Highlight the sentence that tells how irrigation changed the dry land.

**REVIEW** What are some examples of Sumerian civilization? Draw a circle around two things that are important in all civilizations.

**REVIEW** For what reasons did people of Sumer probably start writing? Highlight the sentence that tells why Sumerians made pictographs.