

# Summary: Physical Geography

## Rivers and Deserts

Water and the lack of it have shaped North Africa and Southwest Asia. The area gets little rainfall. Much of the land is dry, sandy desert. The region has three major rivers: the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates.

The rivers changed the way people live. For most of history, Earth's people were hunter-gatherers. About 8,000 years ago, people began farming. The first farmers probably settled in river valleys, living around the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates.

In river valleys, it was possible to grow crops and raise animals because river valleys have both water and fertile soil. Desert soil contains sand and salt, but yearly floods improve the soil around rivers. When flooding waters flow over the riverbanks, they leave behind fertile soil that has been carried from other places.

Farmers who lived near riverbanks could use river water to grow crops. Those who lived farther away developed irrigation methods to bring water to their dry farms.

## Surrounding Waters

The Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf have also shaped the region. These bodies of water have affected climate, resources, and societies. The mild climate around the Mediterranean Sea drew settlers to the area. Early civilizations formed on its eastern shores.

The Red Sea has been an important trade route since ancient times. Goods and ideas traveled across the sea and shaped the cultures on its shores. The Persian Gulf has been an important trade route, too. It holds a key position in oil-rich Southwest Asia.

The region is rich in oil. It was once covered by a huge sea. When the sea creatures died, their remains sank to the bottom. They were covered by mud and sand. Over time, heat and pressure changed the dead matter into petroleum, or oil.

Not all parts of North Africa and Southwest Asia are hot and dry. Turkey is cooler than other parts. It also gets more rain. Instead of deserts, Turkey has grasslands and forests.



### Before You Read

Find and circle each vocabulary word. Read the sentence in which the word appears.

**hunter-gatherers** *noun*, people who lived by hunting, fishing, and gathering food instead of raising it

**fertile** *adjective*, having nutrients plants need to grow

**irrigation** *noun*, the process of bringing water to dry land



### After You Read

**REVIEW** Why might farming have begun in the valleys of the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers?

Highlight the sentence that helps you answer the question.

**REVIEW** What are the two most important trade routes of the region? Draw a box around the paragraph that answers the question.