

Lesson 1 Geography of Mesopotamia

MAIN IDEAS

Geography The land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was a good region for agriculture.

Geography The environment of Mesopotamia presented several challenges to the people who lived there.

Geography Mesopotamians changed their environment to improve life.

The Land Between Two Rivers

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers support agriculture?

Mesopotamia

- Tigris and Euphrates rivers are in Southwest Asia
 - they start in mountains of today's Turkey, Kurdistan
 - flow southeast through today's Iraq to Persian Gulf
- Region is called **Mesopotamia**, "land between the rivers"
- Rivers provide water and a means for travel
 - area had few roads, so boats carried heavy loads on river currents

Fertile Soil

- Mountain rain and melting snow swelled rivers, carried soil to plains
 - overflowed onto **floodplain**—flat land bordering banks
 - deposited fine soil, or **silt**, making land fertile, good for crops

A Semiarid Climate

- **Semiarid** climate—hot summers, less than 10 inches of annual rainfall
- Crops grew in this dry region because of rivers, fertile soil
 - many farming villages across southern Mesopotamia by 4000 B.C.

REVIEW QUESTION

What made Mesopotamia a good region for farming?

Controlling Water by Irrigation

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did the climate affect farmers?

Floods and Droughts

- Annual flood unpredictable, came sometime between April and June
 - farmers didn't know when to plant or how big flood would be
- **Drought**—period without enough rain and snowfall—lowered river levels
 - made it hard to water crops; people starved if crops failed

Irrigation

- By 6000 B.C., irrigation canals carried water from rivers to fields
 - workers unclogged canals, built dams to hold back floodwaters

REVIEW QUESTION

How did Mesopotamians water their crops during droughts?

Finding Resources

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did Mesopotamians cope with a lack of resources?

Mud Houses and Walls

- Mesopotamia had no forests for wood, lacked building materials
 - used mud for bricks, plaster; these materials crumbled easily
- Area had few mountains or natural barriers so it was easy to invade
 - other regions' peoples often stole from or conquered Mesopotamians
 - Mesopotamians built mud walls around villages for protection

Finding Resources

- Mesopotamians traded their surplus grain for stone, wood, metal
 - **surplus** means more than they needed for themselves
- Digging canals, building walls, trading were done continuously
 - community leaders began to organize groups to do the work

REVIEW QUESTION

Why was trade important in Mesopotamia?

Lesson Summary

- The Tigris and Euphrates rivers made the soil of Mesopotamia good for growing crops.
- The people of Mesopotamia developed an irrigation system to bring water to crops.
- Mesopotamia had few resources. People traded surplus crops to get what they needed.

Why It Matters Now...

The Mesopotamians had to overcome a lack of resources. Today people still work to solve shortages of water, food, and resources.