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.

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**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.