Lesson 2 The First Civilization

MAIN IDEAS
Culture Food surpluses, new technology, and advanced social organization led to a complex way of life. It is called civilization.
Government A new type of government developed in Sumer that included a city and its surrounding lands.
Government Religion dominated life in Sumer, but in time, powerful men who were not priests became the political rulers.

The Rise of Civilization

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did civilization develop in the region of Sumer?

Culture Grows More Complex
• Rise of agriculture allowed people to settle in villages
• As villages grew into cities, society and culture grew more complex
  - changes led to civilization—advanced form of culture
• Most historians think civilization first began in Sumer, 3300 B.C.
  - Sumer—a region in southern Mesopotamia

Traits of Civilization
• Advanced Cities—offered many advantages
  - place to store, trade surplus grain; later, many jobs, large temples
• Specialized Workers—people do jobs requiring special skills
  - specialization and developing skills improves quality of work
  - city people must cooperate on projects and organize their society
  - in early Sumerian cities, priests organized society, acted as judges
• Complex Institutions—religion, government became institutions
  - groups of people who share a purpose, help society meet its needs
  - institutions also include schools, armies
• Record Keeping—societies must keep records of things such as food
  - usually written, but early Mesopotamians used counting sticks
  - later Mesopotamians invented world’s first system of writing
Traits of Civilization

- **Advanced Technology**—people learn better ways of doing things
  - Sumerians used canals to irrigate crops
  - created new tools, used new materials
  - made tools from bronze—a mixture of copper and tin
  - replaced softer copper metal

**REVIEW QUESTION**

Why was Sumer a good example of civilization?
Sumerian City-States

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  What new type of community developed in Sumer?

The City-States of Sumer
• Cities were centers of society, but most people lived in country
  - cities began to rule surrounding lands, villages
• City-state — self-ruled community including city and nearby farmlands
• By 3000 B.C., Sumer had at least 12 city-states
  - most, like Ur, were on fertile land by mouths of Tigris, Euphrates

Life in the City
• Slow-growing Sumerian cities had narrow, winding streets
• Walls surrounded cities; gates let people come and go
• Homes had thick mud walls to keep out heat, tunnels to get fresh air
  - rooms surrounded covered courtyard that was cooking area

The Ziggurat: City Center
• In Sumerian city, largest, most important building was the temple
  - ziggurats — Sumerian temples first built around 2200 B.C.
• Priests ran irrigation, so ziggurat was center of city life
  - priests were paid with grain, so they controlled, stored surplus
  - priests ended up controlling much of city-states’ wealth

REVIEW QUESTION
What was life like in Sumerian cities?
Changes in Leadership

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** How did the leadership of Sumer change?

**Sumerian Religion**
- Sumerian religion based on *polytheism*—belief in many gods, goddesses
  - gods of sky, wind, foothills, fresh water created and ruled world
- Each city-state worshiped own god
  - Sumerians had thousands of lesser gods
- Believed gods looked and acted like people

**Priests Become Leaders**
- Sumerians thought gods protected against flood, drought, invasion
- Priests worked to please gods in order to protect cities
  - priests claimed that they had influence with gods
  - people believed claim and accepted priest as the cities’ leaders

**Service to the Gods**
- Saw gods as rich landowners who created humans to work for them
- People followed religious rules, prayed, made offerings to gods
  - all participated in rituals, many of which were held at ziggurat
- Believed souls of dead went to land of no return—gloomy underworld
  - Scholars think hard life made Sumerians expect unhappy afterlife

**New Leaders in Sumer**
- By 3000 B.C., rich city-states were attacked by other regions, cities
- In times of war, people asked powerful men to rule, protect cities
  - later they ran city-states full-time, took some of priests’ jobs
- This type of ruler became a **king**—the highest-ranked leader of group
- By 2375 B.C., Sumer was a kingdom ruled by a single king
- Priests still tried to please gods—people thought gods let kings rule

**REVIEW QUESTION**
How did kings take over as rulers of Sumer?
Lesson Summary

- Sumer had a complex society and culture. Historians consider it the first civilization.
- Sumerian city-states were a form of government that included cities and the land around them.
- Priests were the first leaders in Sumer, but kings became leaders when the need for defense grew.

Why It Matters Now...

Cities first became important in Sumer. People today still move to cities to find jobs, education, and culture.