

## **Grade 6 Social Studies Family Update: Mesopotamia**

Dear Parents,

We have wrapped up our first unit on prehistory and will now begin the study of Mesopotamia. I hope you will find the included resources useful; please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have; I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming parent-teacher conferences!

In Partnership,  
Dr. Griggs

### **Unit Description**

In this unit, students will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to think critically about the first civilizations in Mesopotamia. We will begin by focusing on how environmental factors determined where early civilizations developed, particularly in regard to rivers and their fertile flood plains. Next, we will study the locations and characteristics of early settlements along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In a few weeks, we will turn toward the study of what is widely regarded as the first civilization--Sumeria--with an eye toward answering the big questions "What does it mean to be civilized?" and "What is needed to become a civilization?" Finally, we will evaluate the successes and failures of the great empires in the Fertile Crescent: the Akkadians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians.

### **Unit Overview**

Week 1 (November 5-9)

Film: Human Planet: Rivers, Friend and Foe (<https://vimeo.com/98552624>)

Film viewing guide formative

River systems

Diagram of a river system formative

Week 2 (November 12-16)

Geography Challenge: Early Humans and the Rise of Civilization formative

Rise of Sumerian city-states visual response activity

Effects of geography on the rise of Sumerian city-states formative

Archaeology practice: conducting a survey

Week 3 (November 19-23)

Ancient Sumer

Traits of civilization spoke diagram formative

Small summative: "Traits of civilization in my homeland" poster

Week 4 (November 26-30)

4 empires of Mesopotamia

Report card on the empires of Mesopotamia formative

Week 5 (December 3-7)

Film: "What the Ancient did for Us: Mesopotamians."

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UI0zUReqiKo>)

Revision

Big summative: Mesopotamia unit test, tentatively December 7<sup>th</sup>

### **Read to Learn More About It**

Here are some recommended books that can increase parent and student understanding of the period we are studying.

"History Alive! The Ancient World," by TCI. This is the textbook we use as a reference in class. It can also be checked out from the library for use at home. The chapters that align with this unit are 4, 5, and 6. The chapters can also be downloaded from Moodle.

"Mesopotamia," by Pamela F. Service. Service examines the social structure of a number of ancient cultures that flourished in the Fertile Crescent at the beginning of recorded history.

"The Epic of Gilgamesh," by N.K. Sandars. Sandars translated into English an epic poem found preserved on clay tablets from ancient Mesopotamia.

"Inanna: From the Myths of Ancient Sumer," by Kim Echlin. Read translations of the stories of Inanna, a goddess who appears in the 4,000-year-old Epic of Gilgamesh.

"The Ancient Near East," by Clarice Swisher. Swisher discusses the major cultures of ancient Mesopotamia.

"Babylon," by Joan Oates. Learn about one of the great capital cities of the ancient world through photos, drawings, and maps.

"The Assyrians," by Elaine Landau. Read about the civilization of the ancient Assyrians, whose great military accomplishments have earned them the title "the Romans of Asia."

### **Talk About It**

Conversations with your student on topics like those below can show that you care about history and help to increase student motivation and understanding.

#### **Natural resources**

The Tigris and Euphrates had a great impact on Mesopotamia. Discuss what natural resources are found in and around your community and their importance.

#### **Record keeping**

In order to function, societies must keep track of many things. Have a conversation with your child about records that play an important role in your lives. Discuss what might happen if these records were lost or destroyed.

#### **Social class**

A class is a social group whose members share certain economic, social, or cultural characteristics. Class systems often help to determine who holds power and who must do the less desirable jobs. Have a conversation with your child about what class means to you.

#### **Law codes**

A code of law is a set of written rules for people to obey. Work with your child to find out what law codes you are required to obey where you live. Have a conversation about other unwritten rules that you might also obey, even though they are not part of a published code.

**Military might**

Discuss the issue of military strength with your child. What kinds of countries spend a lot of money on defense?

**Captured peoples**

Assyrians and Persians treated captured peoples differently. Have a discussion with your child about these different policies.

**Make It**

Making things together with your child can be a lot of fun, and educational too!

**A handout**

Read about the grains of cereal grasses, such as wheat and rice. Create a single-page handout that includes a picture of a grain and its parts (including the bran, germ, and endosperm) and a brief explanation of their nutritional value.

**A coin**

Design a new coin that commemorates something or someone that is important to your country. Use clay to make a model of your coin, and create a simple display that briefly explains important features of the coin.