Mesopotamia Worksheet

Grade 6 – 7 social studies · early civilizations



Name: Date: Score: / 26

Why the first cities grew here

Southern **Mesopotamia** had rich soil and almost no rain. The Tigris and Euphrates carried plenty of water, but it arrived where the rivers ran, not where the fields were. So people dug channels and moved it. That is **irrigation**, and it changed everything.

Irrigated fields produced a **surplus**: more grain than the farmers themselves ate. A surplus has to be stored, counted, guarded and shared out, and all of that needs records. The first writing in the world was not poetry. It was accounting.

Digging and maintaining channels also needed organisation. Someone had to decide where a channel ran, who worked on it and who got the water. Out of those decisions came rulers, temples, taxes and eventually written law. The **city-state** grew out of a water problem.

Part A — Vocabulary match each term to its meaning (8 marks)

1. Mesopotamia	_____	A. The land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
2. Irrigation	_____	B. A trained writer who kept the records
3. Cuneiform	_____	C. A stepped temple tower at the centre of a city
4. Ziggurat	_____	D. A Babylonian king who had his laws carved in stone
5. City-state	_____	E. Moving river water onto fields through channels
6. Surplus	_____	F. Wedge-shaped writing pressed into wet clay
7. Scribe	_____	G. An independent city that governs the land around it
8. Hammurabi	_____	H. More food than the people who grew it need

Part B — Fill in the blanks (8 marks)

1. Mesopotamia means "between the _____".

2. The two rivers were the Tigris and the _____.

3. Farmers dug channels to carry water to their fields, a method called _____.

4. The wedge-shaped writing of Mesopotamia is called _____.

5. Scribes pressed their signs into wet _____.

6. A stepped temple tower at the centre of a city was a _____.

7. An independent city with its own government was called a _____.

8. _____ had his set of laws carved onto a tall stone pillar.

Part C — Cause and effect number these 1 to 4 in the order they happened (4 marks)

Step	Order
Writing is invented to keep records	
Farmers irrigate the land between the rivers	
Cities grow and people take up specialised jobs	
Fields produce more grain than the farmers need	

Part D — Read the law (4 marks)

FROM THE CODE OF HAMMURABI, ABOUT 1750 BCE

If a builder builds a house for someone and does not make its construction firm, and the house collapses and causes the death of the owner, that builder shall be put to death.

— Hammurabi, king of Babylon

1. What does this law tell you about who was held responsible for a building falling down?

2. Give one reason why carving laws onto a public stone pillar mattered, rather than keeping them in a palace.

Part E — Think it through (2 marks)

1. The earliest cuneiform tablets are lists of grain, animals and workers. Why would a society invent writing for that before using it for stories?

Mesopotamia Worksheet — Answer Key

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Part A — Vocabulary

1. **Mesopotamia** → A
2. **Irrigation** → E
3. **Cuneiform** → F
4. **Ziggurat** → C
5. **City-state** → G
6. **Surplus** → H
7. **Scribe** → B
8. **Hammurabi** → D

Part B — Fill in the blanks

1. **rivers**
2. **Euphrates**
3. **irrigation**
4. **cuneiform**
5. **clay**
6. **ziggurat**
7. **city-state**
8. **Hammurabi**

Part C — Cause and effect

1. Writing is invented to keep records → **4**
2. Farmers irrigate the land between the rivers → **1**
3. Cities grow and people take up specialised jobs → **3**
4. Fields produce more grain than the farmers need → **2**

The chain: irrigation → surplus → cities and specialised work → writing to keep track of it all. Each step makes the next one possible.

Part D — The law

1. **The builder was held responsible, and the punishment matched the harm.**
   Accept any answer noting that the person who did the work carried the consequences.
2. **Everyone could see the law, so it applied the same way to everyone and a ruler could not quietly change it.**
   Accept: people knew the rules in advance; the king was bound by them too; it limited officials inventing penalties.

Part E — Think it through

1. **Because the problem writing solved first was keeping track of a surplus, not entertainment.**
   Nobody needs a written record of a story they can tell from memory. They do need one for how much grain went into the storehouse and who it belongs to.