

Daily Life in Sumer

Name: _____ Prd: ____ Score: ____ / 15

Directions: *As you read, highlight answers in text* on the left in order to answer the questions on the right. *Then* complete the questions using the information that you have highlighted! Practice this highlighting skill!

The earliest civilizations all grew up in **fertile areas bordering great rivers**. One of the first to emerge was in Mesopotamia, *now called Iraq*. **Mesopotamia**, as the Greeks named it, *means "land between two rivers."* And those rivers were the **Tigris & Euphrates**. Here, the crescent-shaped region which developed between these two rivers was called the **Fertile Crescent**.

"Look now at everything on Earth,"
Rejoiced Ninurta, king of the land.
"The fields produce abundant grain.
They make happy the spirit of the gods."

This poem is part of a Sumerian "farmers' almanac" which served as a guide to successful farming. The land was *very* important to the people of Sumer. It was the *source* of most of the nation's wealth. And it grew a number of important crops ~ barley, wheat, vegetables & dates. Farmers had to built **dikes** to *protect* their crops from flood waters. And they also created **irrigation canals** in order to store water & transfer it to dry & needy fields. But, still, in a bad year, a **drought** or flood could bring **famine** ~ *bringing devastation to the land!*

Settlements were clustered on the river banks where houses were built of sun-dried mud bricks & stables were made of matting for their animals. The land was fertile, but Sumer had little rainfall. By summer's end, much of their soil had baked rock-hard. Irrigation allowed more land to be cultivated &, because of that, Sumer's population increased. **Surplus** food allowed some people, then, to become *specialized in skills other than farming*.

Herding was as important as growing grain to the Sumerians. Shepherds were responsible for the wool, milk, & cheese that almost everyone used. Fishing, hunting & catching wildfowl provided additional food to these people.

Complete this outline:

- I. Civilizations developed in _____
areas *along great rivers*
- A. Mesopotamia, now called _____,
" _____ "
1. _____ River
2. _____ River
- B. crescent -shaped area called _____

Drawing conclusions: **WHY** would civilizations *develop along major rivers*?

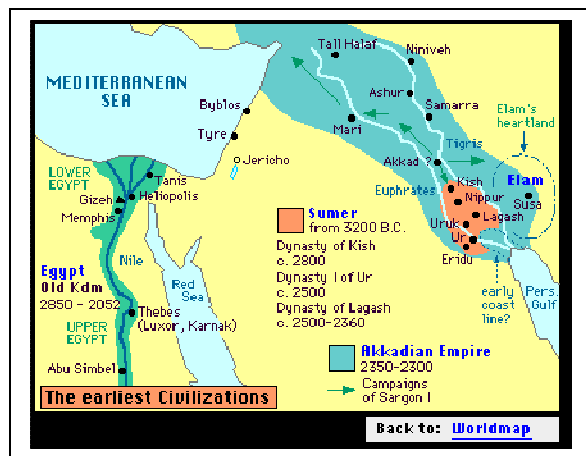
- a. good transportation c. water source
b. fertile land d. all the above

Important crops grown in Sumer included:

- 1) _____ 3) _____
2) _____ 4) _____

Name **two water management methods** in Sumer:

- 1) _____
2) _____



Some Sumerians specialized in **herding to provide** _____ & _____.

Food was provided through _____ & catching _____.

The people of Sumer were divided into three classes, or groups of people. The kings, nobles, priests & rich landowners made up the *highest* class. The next class included farmer, soldiers, tradespeople, & artisans. Slaves made up the *lowest* class. This was their social **hierarchy**.

Slaves were sometimes bought & sold for their entire lifetimes, or they could be hired for a certain period of time. Although masters owned their slaves, no one considered slaves *less than human!* (Interesting!) *Anyone* could become a slave by having bad luck or by being captured in a war. Slaves had some rights. They could own property & trade goods. They could even save money to buy their freedom!

In a Sumerian family, men were the heads of the households. They could own property & trade goods. They arranged their daughters' marriages & their sons' educations. If a man had debts, he was allowed to hire or sell his wife & children as slaves.

However, women had some power, too. When a woman married, her father usually gave a **dowry**, which was a gift of money or goods. A wife was permitted to use her dowry as she pleased. Sometimes she would use it to start her own business. Women in Sumer could be merchants, tavern owners & landowners.

From what has been found in the ruins of Sumer, we can piece together some facts about life there. *The rest can only be imagined.*

Suppose, for instance, that we are in a busy market street in the city of Lagash. Booths with all kinds of goods for sale line the mud-brick buildings. Cloth awnings (canopies) cover the booths to shade them from the hot desert sun. Two Sumerian women, Ninti & Shubad, are walking down the street. Ninti is a weaver who weaves line from flax. Shubad & her husband are farmers who grow flax & millet, a kind of grain. Both women wear simple, linen tunics that reach to their knees. Because they are not slaves, each wears a thin veil draped about her face. Ninti is wealthy, so she also wears rings & bracelets.

Imagine their conversation...

Fill-in-the-blank for the 3 classes of Sumerians:

highest: _____
_____ & _____

middle: _____
_____ & _____

lowest: _____

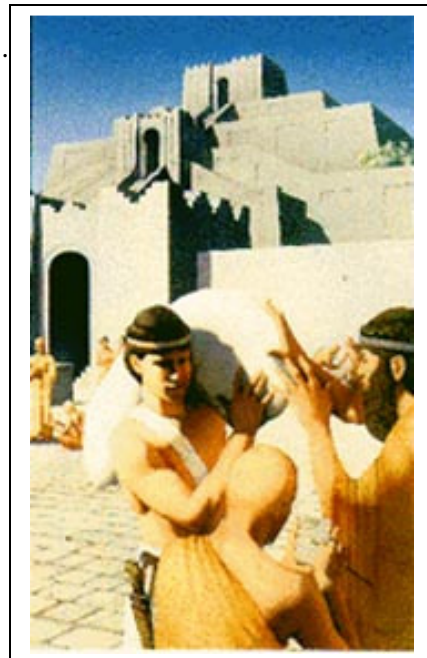
Summarize the life of a slave in one paragraph.

Rights of the head of the household ~ men could:

- 1) **own** _____
- 2) **trade** _____
- 3) **arrange** _____
& _____
- 4) **allowed to** _____
_____ **as slaves!**

A dowry was a gift of _____.

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| a. a daughter | c. possessions or money |
| b. his business | d. his wife |



market
day →

Shubad: How is business lately, Ninti? That cloth that you have been making looks very fine.

Ninti: Oh, business couldn't be better! The soldiers who have been fighting in the war against Umma tear their clothes to shreds all the time, so they buy a lot of cloth from me! The only problem is that the **flax** used to weave linen costs too much.

Shubad: Yes, our crops were short this year because of the floods. That's why the price is so high. But the new crop will be ready in two weeks.

Ninti: Business aside, how are your children?

Shubad: Oh, they're fine. But I'm worried about my oldest son, Dumuzi. His father says that we have so many debts to pay that he *might have to hire Dumuzi out as a slave for a few years!*

Ninti: Dumuzi is too young to leave home! Maybe I could help you out...

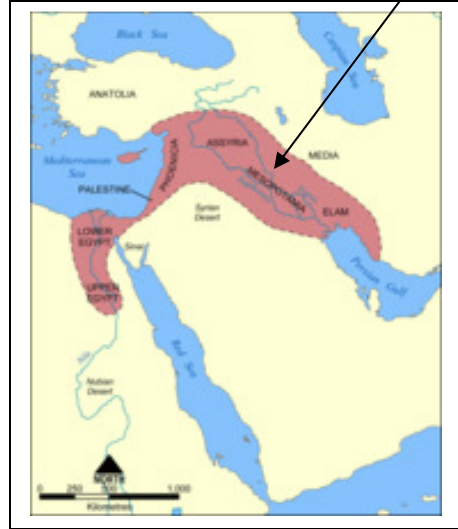
Shubad: How?

Ninti: Well, my cousin, Shara, is a very good weaver & has decided to go into business for herself. She will be needed a lot of flax to work with, & she wants to be assured of a good supply. I think she would buy all the flax that you grow.

Shubad: This is just what we need ~ to sell everything we grow! My entire dowry was used to buy the flax field, & I sometimes wonder if I made the right decision. We have nothing to spare. Is it possible that your cousin would pay in advance?

Ninti: Flax been in short supply lately, & I know she's anxious to secure enough to get her company started. I'll ask her right away.

the **Fertile Crescent** in Ancient Mesopotamia



BONUS: Applying science to social studies:

What **seed** has been keeping civilizations of the world healthy for 5,000 years? It **has fiber** which is a must for intestinal & colon health! It also **lowers cholesterol!** _____

(clue: It's a 4-letter word.)

An artist's rendering of the ancient city Ur →

