

Lesson 1: Civilizations

☐ Getting Started

In this unit, you will study the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. To begin, this lesson will explore what a civilization is. **Civilization** is a word that historians use to describe a society or culture that is organized in specific ways.

Stuff You Need

- *Ancient Civilizations* by Joseph Fullman (DK Eyewitness)
- 3-ring binder
- Ancient Civilization Timeline Cards
- glue or glue stick
- hole punch
- scissors
- World History Timeline

Ideas to Think About

- How can modern people learn about the cultures of ancient civilizations?
- What are the characteristics of a civilization?

Things to Know

- Historians use the term **civilization** to describe a society or culture that is organized in specific ways.
- Characteristics of a civilization can include successful development of agriculture (farming), a large population center (like a city), a variety of specialized jobs, a ruling government, a division of people into social and economic classes, a shared language and belief system, and the development of art, architecture, and other advancements.

☐ Reading and Questions

Read pages 6-7 of *Ancient Civilizations*. This reading will describe some of the common features of ancient civilizations. After you've completed the reading, answer the following questions.

1. In what ways does the successful development of agriculture (farming) help civilizations develop?

2. Why do you think most ancient civilizations develop along major rivers like the Nile?

3. What are some benefits of a shared writing system in an ancient civilization?

4. In what ways is our country a civilization?

Activities

☐ Activity 1: Social Structure

The pyramid image on p. 7 shows the hierarchy (social arrangement) of the Mayan civilization. Although some ancient civilizations had a slightly different structure, most followed a similar pattern. You can use that image to help you fill out the pyramid on the "Social Structure" page. Then answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

☐ Activity 2: Exploring the Timeline

Starting with this unit and throughout this year, you will build a timeline of several ancient cultures, including the ancient peoples of Mesopotamia and Egypt. In this lesson, you'll explore the timeline binder and cards and prepare your binder for future lessons. In later lessons, you'll add events to your timeline and can feel free, at any time, to add your own events to the timeline by creating your own timeline card.

Use a hole-punch to add holes to your timeline, and place your timeline pages into a 3-ring binder. If you already started a timeline binder in the 10-12 level of Beyond the Page during the unit on the Aztec, Inca, and Mayan peoples, you should continue to use that same binder for the 11-13 level as well. Feel free to create a decorative cover for your binder if you wish.

Throughout this unit and later units on the ancient world, you will be locating timeline cards and adding them to the appropriate pages of your timeline. You'll notice that when you open up your binder and lay the pages flat, the timeline runs from left to right across two pages with the starting date on the left and the ending date on the right. You can use glue, glue stick, or tape to attach your timeline cards above or below the timeline. Feel free to look over the timeline cards for the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt today.

You will have a lot of extra space in the timeline at first because space has been included to allow you to use this same timeline binder for units on other ancient civilizations. As you add the important dates and significant achievements of other civilizations to your binder in the future, you'll be able to compare and contrast the histories of ancient people from around the world. This visual record will allow you to answer questions like, "When the pyramids were being built in Egypt, what was happening in Europe, Asia, and the Americas?" Or "When and how did agriculture emerge around the world?" Your timeline will eventually become an exciting record of world history!

☐ **Activity 3: Getting Ready to Learn About Ancient Egypt**

In Lesson 3, you'll begin learning about the civilizations in and around Mesopotamia. After that lesson, you will focus on ancient Egypt. In this activity, you'll take some time to think about what you already know about ancient Egypt and to write down some of the questions that you would like to answer about ancient Egypt as you work through this unit. As you complete this activity, review the characteristics of a civilization. Did ancient Egypt demonstrate these characteristics and in what ways that you know of? What questions about ancient Egypt do these characteristics make you wonder about?

You should spend about 5-7 minutes writing down everything you can think of that you already know about ancient Egypt on the "Brainstorming" page. Then you should spend about 5-7 more minutes writing down at least six questions that you still have about ancient Egypt. As you read materials and work on activities throughout the unit, try to find the answers to those questions.

Wrapping Up

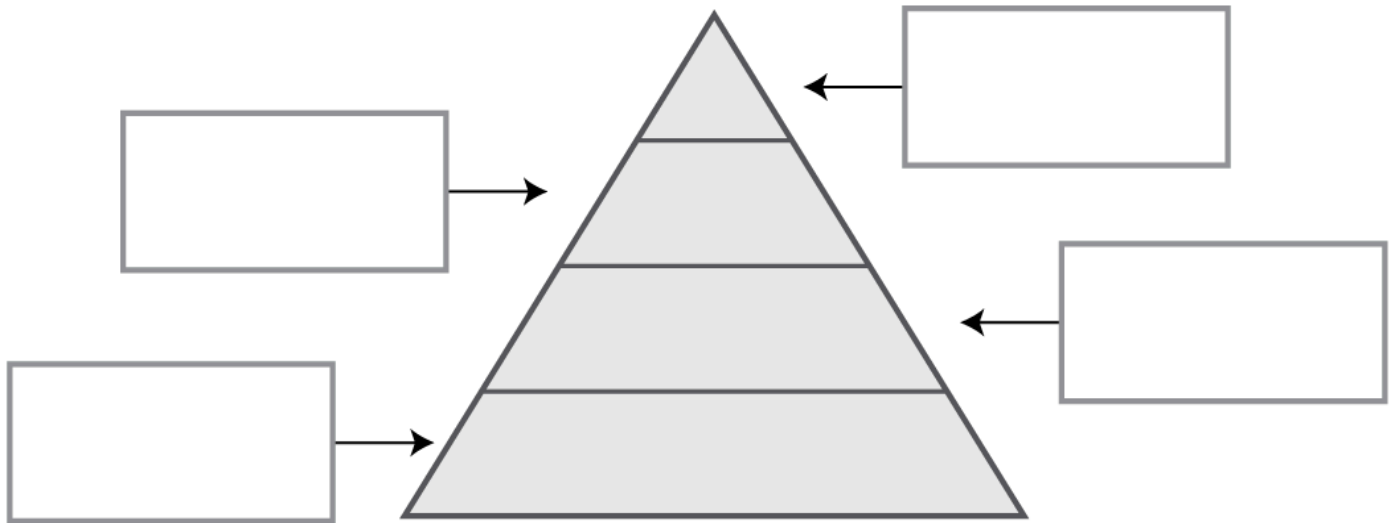
In the next lesson, you'll learn why we know so much about ancient civilizations and why there's a lot we don't know.



SOCIAL STRUCTURE



Directions: Cut out the labels from the bottom of the page and paste them in the correct spot on the ancient civilization social structure diagram. Then answer the questions.



1. Why is a pyramid or triangle a good diagram to use for the structure of ancient civilizations?

2. In some civilizations, scribes were one level above craftspeople. Why do you think scribes had a higher social structure than craftspeople?

3. Do you think this diagram also represents the economic hierarchy of ancient civilizations? What might some differences be?

priests, nobles,
and government
officials

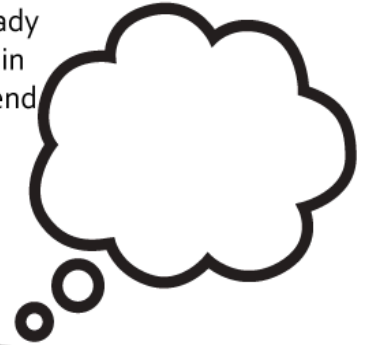
artists, scribes,
and craftspeople

ruler

farmers,
unskilled workers,
and slaves

BRAINSTORMING

Instructions: Spend 5-7 minutes writing down as much as you can that you already know about ancient Egypt in the first space provided. (You do not need to write in complete sentences — this is just brainstorming, not polished writing.) Then spend another 5-7 minutes writing down questions that you still have about ancient Egypt in the second space provided. You should have at least six questions.



What do I already know about ancient Egypt?

What do I want to know about ancient Egypt?

Lesson 1: Civilizations

Getting Started

✿ Ideas to Think About

- How can modern people learn about the cultures of ancient civilizations?
- What are the characteristics of a civilization?



Things to Know

- Historians use the term **civilization** to describe a society or culture that is organized in specific ways.
- Characteristics of a civilization can include successful development of agriculture (farming), a large population center (like a city), a variety of specialized jobs, a ruling government, a division of people into social and economic classes, a shared language and belief system, and the development of art, architecture, and other advancements.

⦿ Skills

- Analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. (SS)
- Locate and describe the major river systems and discuss the physical settings that supported permanent settlement and early civilizations. (SS)
- Identify the characteristics of a civilization. (SS)

Introducing the Lesson

Your child will begin his study of ancient civilizations by exploring what historians mean by the term "civilization."

Reading and Questions

1. In what ways does the successful development of agriculture (farming) help civilizations develop?

Successful agriculture allows people to settle in one permanent place, provides enough food for larger villages or cities, and allows people to do a variety of jobs (since not everyone has to farm).

2. Why do you think most ancient civilizations develop along major rivers like the Nile?

The banks of rivers had good soil for growing crops. Your child may also mention that the rivers provided water and transport routes.

3. What are some benefits of a shared writing system in an ancient civilization?

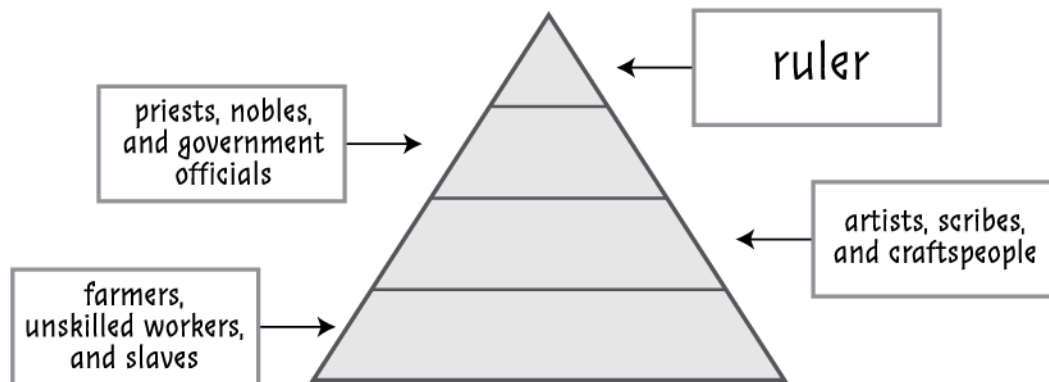
Answers include allowing governments to work more efficiently and enabling businesses to keep records.

4. In what ways is our country a civilization?

Answers will vary.

Activities**Activity 1: Social Structure**

Your child will learn about the social hierarchy of ancient civilizations in today's reading and will use that information to fill out a diagram and answer questions.

"Social Structure" Answer Key**Answer Key (continued)**

- *Why is a pyramid or triangle a good diagram to use for the structure of ancient civilizations?*
Fewer people were at the higher levels, and many more people were at the bottom levels of society.
- *In some civilizations, scribes were one level above craftspeople. Why do you think scribes had a higher social structure than craftspeople?*
Answers will vary, but your child may note that scribes had a highly skilled job, that few people were able to read and write, and that scribes were useful to both businesses and governments.
- *Do you think this diagram also represents the economic hierarchy of ancient civilizations? What might some differences be?*
Answers will vary. Your child should recognize that an economic diagram would be similar, although slaves would be at the very bottom since they weren't paid, and scribes or specialized craftspeople might be paid more.

Activity 2: Exploring the Timeline

In this activity, your child will become familiar with the timeline that she will be using throughout the 11-13 level of Beyond the Page. Your child should prepare the timeline binder and look over the cards for this unit. She does not need to locate specific cards or place them in the binder until later in the unit, beginning with Lesson 3.

In all of the units on ancient civilizations, your child will add cards to the timeline, eventually building an impressive record of world history that will allow her to compare and contrast the achievements and important historical events from civilizations as diverse as ancient Egypt, the Aztec empire, ancient India, and classical Greece. Be sure to store your child's timeline binder in a safe place when it is not being used so that she will be able to access the binder during the appropriate social studies units.

Activity 3: Getting Ready to Learn About Ancient Egypt

In this activity, your child will record what he already knows about Ancient Egypt and will brainstorm questions that he would like to answer in his study of Egyptian civilization. (He will begin learning about Egypt in Lesson 4.) Answers will, of course, vary. If your family already owns books or other resources related to ancient Egypt, you may want to remind your child of those as he begins to think about what he already knows about ancient Egyptian civilization and what he still would like to learn. Pay particular attention to the questions your child still has about ancient Egypt, and make an effort to help your child find the answers to his questions, either through the activities in later lessons or through additional research at your local library or on the Internet.

Wrapping Up**Questions to Discuss**

- In many civilizations, why do you think artwork and monuments were made for or in honor of rulers? (Answers will vary.)
- What might happen to a civilization that experienced a long drought or repeated crop failures? (Answers will vary, but your child should recognize that successful agriculture is a key aspect of civilization.)
- Do you think having a shared language is important in a civilization? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)

Things to Review

Review your child's "Social Structure" page. On the "Brainstorming" page, pay special attention to the questions he wrote about ancient Egypt. Work with your child to help him answer these questions, either in the course of completing the activities for the later lessons in this unit or with additional research.