Name _____

Date _____

MESOPOTAMIA
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THE FERTILE CRESCENT

Before settling in various parts of the world, humans lived as foragers, following the rhythms of nature and moving from place to place in search of food. Foragers are nomads, meaning they have no permanent home. They carried only what they needed—tools, clothing, and simple shelters that could be packed quickly.

Foraging Families

A typical nomadic group might include an extended family—several generations living together, including grandparents, parents, children, and relatives such as cousins. Men often left to hunt, while women remained closer to home to nurse infants and gather fruit, grains, seeds, and nuts. These were not strict gender roles and could vary over time, even within families.

These foraging families had deep knowledge of the land, including seasonal plants, animal patterns, and water sources. They would temporarily camp in an area for a few weeks or months. Eventually, local resources became scarce. When that happened, they moved on. But as the weather warmed at the end of the last ice age, some regions became so fertile that foraging families had less need to leave.

The Fertile Crescent

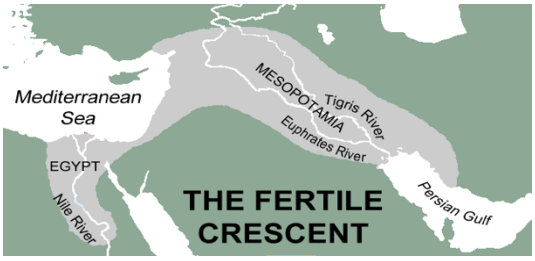
Many of these lands of abundance were located in a crescent, or boomerang-shaped region that extends from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. This rich food-growing area lies in a part of the world where most land is too dry for farming, so we call it the Fertile Crescent.

NATURAL BOUNDARIES

The Tigris and Euphrates are natural boundaries, formed by nature rather than drawn by people. Examples include rivers, mountain ranges, and deserts. Straight lines on a map usually show borders made by people, while natural borders follow the shape of the land. This is easy to see on a map of the United States, where many western states have straight borders—Colorado and Wyoming are rectangles—while many eastern states have irregular shapes because their borders follow rivers.

Between the Rivers

Some of the best farmland of the Fertile Crescent lies on a narrow strip of land between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. The two rivers flow in the same direction for hundreds of miles before joining and draining into the Persian Gulf. The Greeks called this area Mesopotamia, which means "between the rivers." Very little rain falls in Mesopotamia, but river water and the nutrients it carries enrich the soil, creating an environment rich in plants and animals.



Many Cultures

Many different civilizations flourished in this small region. The Sumerians slowly developed one of the first civilizations in the southeastern section of Mesopotamia as early as 6,500 years ago. The Sumerian civilization lasted about 2,600 years, but in time the Sumerians lost their influence. The Babylonians formed a centralized government under King Hammurabi. The Babylonian culture lasted from about 1770BCE to about 1595BCE. Various other cultures dominated part or all of the Fertile Crescent including Amorites, the Kassites, (c. 1531-1155BCE) the Hittites (c. 1370 – 1205BCE) and the Assyrians (c.890-600BCE). The land known as Mesopotamia was later controlled by the Persians, the Greeks under Alexander the Great, the Romans, and the Ottoman Turks. The land between the Tigris and Euphrates has been part of the modern nation of Iraq since 1932.

NOTE: The "c." before a date stands for "circa," a Latin word meaning "around." It is used when historians are unsure of the exact date.

Name _____

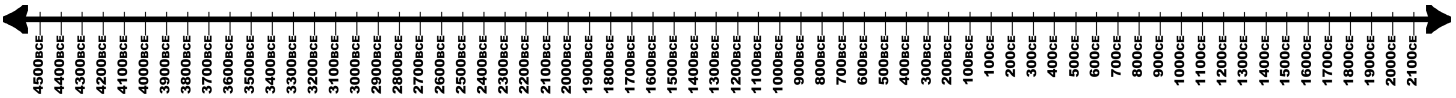
Date _____

Fill in the Blanks

About 6,000 years ago, a group of people gave up their n__m__d__c lifestyles to settle in the area between the T__g__is and the E__p__r__t__s Rivers. The Greeks later called this land M__s__p__t__m__a, which means "b__t__e__n the r__v__rs." Mesopotamia is part of the F__r__i__e C__e__c__nt, a b_o__e__a__g-shaped region that extends from the e__s__e__n shore of the M__d__t__r__a__e__n Sea to the P__r__i__n Gulf.

Several civilizations developed in Mesopotamia partly because the rivers provide the region with ab__n__a__t natural r__s__u__c__s. The S__m__r__a_s first settled near the confluence of the rivers about _____BCE. Later Mesopotamian c__v__l__z__t__o__s included the B_b__l__n_a__s and the A__s__r__a__s. Mesopotamia was later controlled by the P__r__i__ns, the G__e__ks, and the R__m__ns. Mesopotamia is now part of the m__d__rn nation of I_____.

Timeline



1. Identify on the timeline the periods when the following civilizations flourished in Mesopotamia: the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Hittites, the Assyrians, modern Iraq.

Answer in complete sentences

2. What is the Fertile Crescent?

*3. What is the dictionary definition of crescent? Can you think of a food whose name in French means crescent? Write it at the very bottom of the page if you can think of it.

*4. Why do you think people chose to settle in areas with abundant natural resources?

*5. What are the natural boundaries of Mesopotamia? Why do we call the land Mesopotamia?

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.