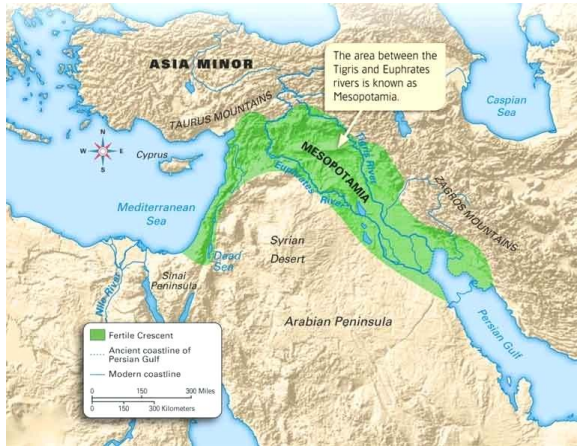


# The Land Between Two Rivers



Click image to enlarge

A great strategy for learning new vocabulary is to make a visual connection. By seeing an example of the new term, the meaning might become clearer to you. Click each term to see its related image. You can read more about

- Key Terms**
- [agriculture](#)
- [domestication](#)
- [irrigation](#)
- [levees](#)

Imagine yourself standing on a hill overlooking a broad, rich valley. Sheep are grazing on tall grasses. A fish breaks the surface of a peaceful lake. Birds are nesting in the **dense reeds** along the shore. In the air is the spicy smell of evergreen shrubs. You reach down and pick a handful of ripe berries, popping them into your mouth one by one, enjoying their sweet flavor.

For you, a hunter-gatherer living in 10,000 B.C., this valley is a wonderful spot. A spring provides fresh, cold water. Wildlife and plants to eat are everywhere. You and your family have camped here since spring where you have gathered armful after armful of grain. Food is plentiful in this valley. Perhaps you should stay here all year.

**dense** = crowded or compact:  
*a dense forest; dense population, dense reeds.*



Click image to enlarge

**What conditions allowed you and your family to settle in one place?**

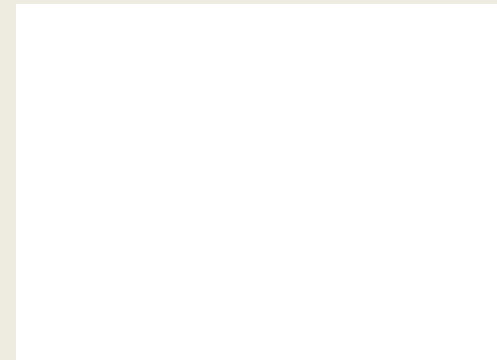
## Class Comment Board

As you read, share your thoughts, comments, and questions with the class here: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)  
No sign-in or registration is required. This is a great way for us to learn from one another! Be sure to comment while you read **and** answer the questions throughout this document that are marked in **this color**.

### Think About It:

**What did you eat for breakfast this morning? Before your meal made its way to your table, where did it come from? What do you think the raw ingredients are? What type of farm do you think the ingredients came from? How far did your food travel? Does it matter where your food comes from and how it was made?**

Take a look at this video to see how wheat is harvested (click the little film icon in the lower left-hand corner, then click the 'play' button):



If the video does not play, copy and paste this link into your browser:  
<http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk/VideoActivity.aspx?contentId=163&sectionId=66&siteId=15&titleId=169>

# Living in Settled Communities

Hunter-gatherers searched for areas where they could hunt game, harvest wild grains, gather berries and nuts, and find tasty plants and roots. Surrounded by plenty of food, they were tempted to stay for months at a time. As they became more attached to one place, they built longer-lasting homes.

The structures found at Ain Mallaha give clues to the changing lifestyle of the hunter-gatherers. The picture below (on the left) shows the remains of one structure. The picture on the right shows what archeologists believe the structure may have looked like 10,000 years ago.



Remains of Ain Mallaha Home



Reconstructed Ain Mallaha Home

Artifacts found and displayed in this reconstructed home show some of the activities that took place at the home. Notice the **fire pit** to the left of the house where meat and grain were roasted. Notice people working to pound grain with a **mortar and pestle**. Both mortar and pestle were made of stone.

Storage bins were kept along the inside wall. These bins were used for storing the **surplus** grain. Surplus grain was important. It was needed for times when food wasn't plentiful.

Both mortars and storage bins provided good reasons for the hunter-gatherers to stay permanently in one place. The mortars were much too heavy to carry around. People also didn't want to wander far because intruders might steal their precious surplus from the storage bins (Boehm, R.G., Armstrong, D.G., Hunkins, F.P., Reinhartz, D. & Lobrecht, M., 2005).

**Reading in context:** What does "surplus" mean?

Does this help?

Sur- = over, above

-plus = with the addition of

Comment on the text as you read at: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)

## A Closer Look:

**Fire pit** – a shallow hole in the ground where fires were built for cooking.



**Mortar and pestle** – stone items used to pound grain into flour. Although ancient tools, the mortar and pestle are still used today in many parts of the world. Grain is placed in the mortar and pounded using the pestle.





# Taming Animals and Sowing Seeds

As the hunter-gatherers began to settle down, they learned more about their environment – all the living and nonliving things that made up their surroundings. They observed wild grains in different stages of growth. They noticed the conditions that allowed these grains to thrive. At harvest time, they didn't gather up all the grain. They left some of the plants so their seeds or kernels could drop to the ground and sprout next season, starting a new crop.

Hunter-gatherers also learned more about the habits of the animals they hunted: gazelle, wild sheep, and wild goats. Scientists believe that they might have protected these herds by driving away wolves and other predators. Then the animals could breed and the herds would grow. In this way, people were learning to **have an influence over** the plants and animals in their environment.

The hunter-gatherers searched the countryside, taking seeds from wild grain and other edible plants. Then **they sowed these seeds** and grew their own plants closer to home. They learned to save enough seeds so they could replant the same plants the next season. They also captured wild cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs and tamed them. Slowly, people learned how to control both the growth and the behavior of plants and animals. The **domestication** of plants and animals made them more useful to humans.

Domestication causes an important change. When animals and plants are domesticated, they rely on humans for survival. Plant and animal domestication made possible the beginning of **agriculture**, or farming. Agriculture is the growing of plants and the raising of animals to supply food for humans.

Agriculture offered some important advantages. Farmers and herders could raise much more food than hunter-gatherers could collect. They could support more people on small plots of land. Perhaps most important of all, a farmer could grow more food than he needed to feed the family. The surplus could be traded or stored for winter months.

Also with the arrival of agriculture, not everyone was needed all day in the fields to raise food for the group. So, some people explored other activities. Gradually, they moved into other occupations, becoming toolmakers, builders, fishermen, craftspeople, priests, and leaders. Over time, through agriculture, people were changing their environment and their lifestyle in lasting ways (Boehm, R.G. et al., 2005).

**Think About It:** We have learned how hunter-gatherers moved from place to place in order to find food. Their lives were very difficult and survival depended on hunting and gathering food. We now learn that early farmers were able to settle permanently in one place because they learned how to "domesticate" plants and animals, which in turn, gave them more "leisure" time to learn other skills.

Comment on the text as you read at: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)



## In Other Words:

**"have an influence over"** = change normal behavior to meet the needs of the people.

**"they sowed these seeds"** = they threw, scattered, or spread the seeds over the ground.

## Think About It:

**How did people's lifestyle change as they began to domesticate plants and animals?**

## Not Enough Water...Whoa...Too Much Water!

Many farmers in the ancient world could count on rain to water their crops until harvest time. But this natural method didn't work in the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. There, rain was scarce. Remember that the "Land Between Two Rivers" is present-day Iraq, northern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and southwestern Iran. These lands are primarily desert lands. It seldom rains; therefore, rain is "scarce."



For most of the year, the land between the two rivers is scorched by the sun that bakes the soil so hard you'd need a jackhammer to drill through it. When the rain finally arrives, it causes heavy spring floods that create spongy marshes and often kill young crops. In the fall, floods could destroy the harvest. How could anyone farm such land? Yet, the **Sumerians** saw possibilities. The flooding, for example, spread rich soil, perfect for growing wheat and barley. The Sumerians found a way to bring the land to life. They created an **irrigation** system. When people use irrigation, they bring needed water to their fields through canals, ditches, **levees**, dams, and gates.

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers were slightly higher than the plain. The farmers dug canals from the rivers to the fields. Then, at the proper times in the growing cycle, they opened the gates and allowed gravity to pull the precious water down to the fields. Because the times of flooding were unpredictable, the Sumerians also needed a method of flood control. For this they made artificial lakes or ponds to hold the excess water until it was needed and built levees to protect the farms in case the canals or rivers overflowed. Irrigation farming worked well and the Sumerian farms yielded bountiful harvests of barley, wheat, and vegetables (Boehm, R.G. et al., 2005).

Comment on the text as you read at: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)

## Who In The World?

**Sumerians** = people who lived along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a place called Sumer. Sumer is one of several "city-states" in Mesopotamia that is often referred to as the "birthplace of civilization."



**Mesopotamia**  
("the land between two rivers")



**Domesticate**



Plants



Animals

**Irrigation**



Rivers Flood



**Dig Irrigation System**  
(tunnels that let flood water empty into the land.)



**Agriculture**  
(Plant new crops)



**Stable Food Supply**  
(enough food for everyone all year long)

Comment on the text as you read at: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)

## Graphic Organizer

This graphic organizer shows you the sequence of events that led to the development of agriculture.

**Using a lined piece of paper, this graphic organizer, and what you have learned so far, describe what you think an early farming settlement would look like. Be as descriptive as possible and include vocabulary from this lesson.**

Mesopotamia Early Settlement	Cause	Effect
Tigris and Euphrates Rivers	Rivers flooded annually.	After the floods, the soil was made “fertile” for growing crops.
Domestication of Plants and Animals	People learned how to tame animals and how to grow grains, vegetables, and other plants.	Population increased because the domestication of plants and animals allowed people to stay in one place.
Agriculture		
Irrigation		
Surplus		

Comment on the text as you read at: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)

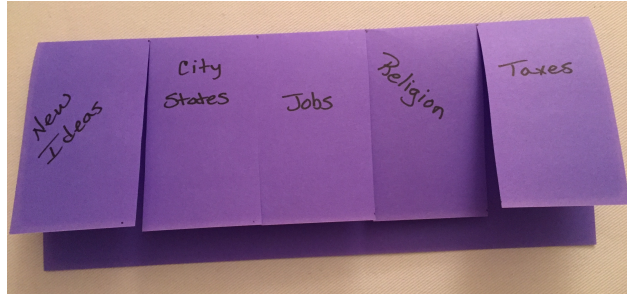
## Cause and Effect

We often wonder why something happened or what happened as a result of something else. We want to understand the reason or “cause” for that something. The word “because” can help you to understand why something happened. For example, “because” the rivers flooded annually, the soil was made fertile. So, the “effect” of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flooding annually (cause), was fertile soil that made it possible for people to grow crops.

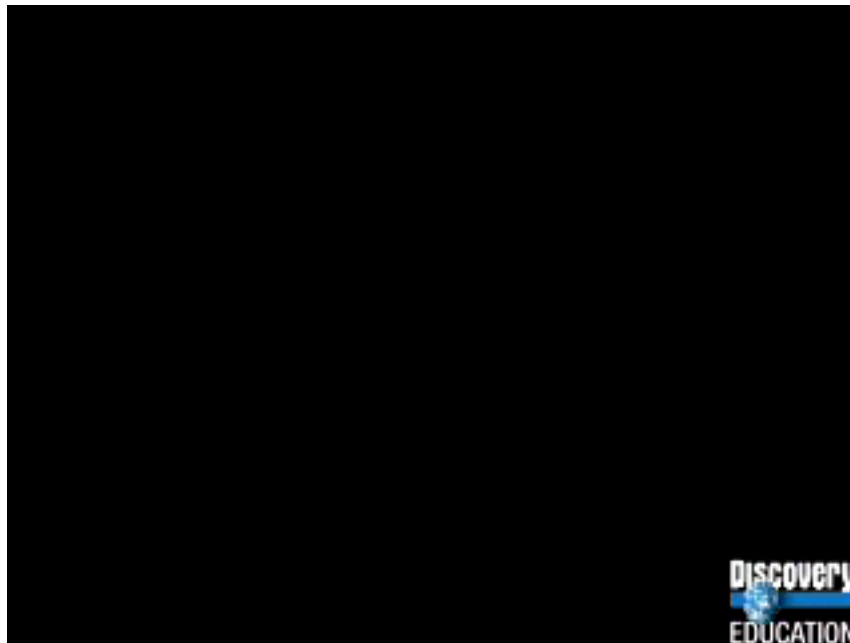
**See if you can identify the cause and effect of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Surplus on the people living along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers using a copy of this “cause and effect” chart that you have been provided.**

# So, what have you learned?

Before watching the video below, make a foldable that looks like this:



As you watch the video ("From Nomads to Farmers"), use your foldable to add information that you learn about new ideas, city states, jobs, religion, and taxes in Mesopotamia. New vocabulary will be defined for you (city-states, cuneiform, ziggurat, temple, caravan, scribe, priest, gods, burden).



(Click the little film icon in the lower left-hand corner of the video box, then click the 'play' button). If the video does not play, copy and paste this link into your browser: <https://vimeo.com/8856268>

Created by Eileen Weisslinger, July 2012. Revised October 30, 2018.

Comment on the text as you read at: [The Land Between Two Rivers](#)

## What have you learned and why does it matter?

**The early stages of the development of Mesopotamia from hunter-gatherers to the first civilization brought many important new ideas or advancements. List as many new ideas that you can recall on the comment board and describe how these new ideas lead to the next stage of development.**

## What's Coming Next?

Pack your bags because we will travel to Mesopotamia to learn more!

