Social Studies Day 3 – Egypt, the Kingdom of Kush, and Mesopotamia

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Egypt, the Kingdom of Kush, and Mesopotamia

by ReadWorks



Imagine a life directly defined by roughly a third of a year of rain and flooding. The people of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Kingdom of Kush all lived that life: their economies, power, and simple survival depended on the seasons of the rivers that ran through each empire.

Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia made up parts of the area known as the Fertile Crescent, which experienced rain every year for about 100 days, beginning in the late spring or early summer. For ancient Egypt, this caused the Nile River to flood, which saturated the normally arid land around it with water and nutrient-rich, river-born soil called silt. Ancient Egyptians are now revered as the masters of desert agriculture, for their **irrigation** technology allowed them to cultivate crops during the dry months, from a fall-season sowing to springtime harvest. Their expertise started with simply monitoring weather patterns and gauging the rise and fall of the Nile's water levels, practices by which the nation's people were able to plan their planting and harvest seasons accordingly.

Some special inventions revolving around the rainy season included the system of dikes and canals built to contain and direct the floodwaters of the Nile. By diverting water, ancient Egyptians were able to keep it from washing onto un-farmable desert terrain, where it would essentially be wasted. Instead, the ability to move water to the crops that needed it allowed for a productive growing season and higher crop yield.

Ancient Egyptians grew a variety of crops, and they were able to build cities around the abundance. They traded grains (and in surplus years, could store excess in granaries as well), made linen from flax, and sustained themselves on garden crops grown in smaller plots, often part of personal households. Cities thrived along the Nile, in large part because of the proximity to the obvious transportation, which **facilitated** trade. As the fruits of farm labor were traded, city merchants grew wealthier, and the metropolis thrived.

The same sort of growth was characteristic of the nearby kingdom of Kush, also known as Nubia. Kush was situated just south of ancient Egypt, in what is now southern Egypt and northern Sudan. Kush's two capitals, first Napata and then Meroe, were each situated along the Nile. The Kushites employed many of

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the same **irrigation** techniques as the ancient Egyptians did, taking advantage of the rainy season to keep the land fertile. Using dams and cataracts, the Kushites directed the flow of water to grow wheat, barley, lentils, peas, and even dates and mangoes. Waterwheels known as "saqia" allowed for even further movement of water to higher ground.

Midway through the golden years of Kush (called, too, the "Land of Gold" for its gold trade), the arrival of iron changed farming forever. An invasion by the Assyrians cut short the influence of Kush in Egypt, but while they lost power over their Northern neighbors, the Kushites gained knowledge of ironwork. The deserts east of the Nile near the city of Meroe were rich in iron ore, and as Kush began to make tools such as hoes and plows, crop yields increased. Again, with the proximity of the harvest to the river-the main means of trade and travel-cities like Napata and Meroe grew and enjoyed **prosperity** with the agriculture-driven commerce.

Located across the Red Sea and the Syrian Desert from Kush, there was the famous region of the Fertile Crescent called Mesopotamia. Framed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, it occupied what is now Iraq. The area experienced the same cyclical flooding periods that ancient Egypt and Kush did, and thus had to learn to adapt. The difference is, this "land between rivers" (the meaning of the origin of the name "Mesopotamia") had the flooding of not just one waterway but an entire flowing border to harness. However, like ancient Egypt and Kush, its location made it an ideal site for **irrigation** practices: as the people of the Nile did, Mesopotamians coaxed water into typically drier regions with canals. The land was routinely fertilized by rich silt washed up by the rivers; Mesopotamia supported the harvest of barley, onions, grapes, apples, and turnips. Cattle and sheep grazed on fertile grassland, and fishermen made a living selling and trading their catch.

Like the famous cities of Thebes, Meroe, and Napata, Mesopotamian cities such as Ur and Babylon sat near the rivers, again seeing success on the water because of the agricultural and trade possibilities making commerce possible and merchants rich. In each city, and in each kingdom, success and power were **facilitated** by both agricultural advancements (such as iron tools and **irrigation**) and the means to trade and sell a harvest (the rivers). The reigns of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Kush were all dependent on an uncomplicated but involved cycle: the rivers provided the water needed to grow crops like wheat, technology made **irrigation**, plowing, and harvest possible, and trade generated income to the cities along the river. In this way, waterfront settlements in each region became seats of commerce and power: they were self-sustaining metropolises.

The downfall of these cities was also woven with the success and failure of the agriculture of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Kush. Generations of tough farming and overgrazing sapped land of nutrients, and in Kush, the deforestation that accompanied the mining of iron ore caused devastating erosion. As land morphed from oasis to desert, cities lost their power: there was nothing left to grow, and nothing left to trade. In spite of their tremendous advances in agricultural technology, these ancient cultures could not combat dust for long, and when farms dried out, so too did the power and success of ancient Egyptian, Kushian, and Mesopotamian cities.

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Vocabulary

facilitate

transitive verb

definition: to make less difficult; help in progress.
Her guidance counselor's advice facilitated her college application process.
His business connections facilitated his finding a new job.
The ramp facilitates entry for people who use wheelchairs.
Spanish: facilitar
forms: facilitated, facilitates, facilitating

irrigation

noun

definition: the supplying of water to land by man-made means to aid in growing crops.
Spanish: irrigación, riego

prosperity

noun

definition: the state of succeeding or flourishing, especially financially.
Spanish: prosperidad
forms: prosperities

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1. Before you start reading...

Here are the vocabulary words that will be in this reading. Let's see how well you already know them.

Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
facilitate				
prosperity				

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2. Word Changer

Words have different forms when we use them in different ways. Write the correct vocabulary word, in its correct form, in each blank.

Her guidance counselor's advice _____ her college application process.

The Great Depression was not a time of _____ for most people.

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3. After reading and exploring the words through some activities...

Do you know these words better? Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
facilitate				
prosperity				

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Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. The economies, power, and survival of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Kingdom of Kush depended on what?

A. the Sahara Desert of Africa

B. the trade of wheat, barley, lentils, and peas

C. the trade of iron and gold established in each empire

D. the seasons of the rivers that ran through each empire

2. The normally arid land around the Nile River became saturated with water and nutrient-rich, river-born soil called silt. What caused this to happen?

A. The people in the Fertile Crescent were able to grow a variety of crops.

B. The people in the Fertile Crescent built effective irrigation systems.

C. The Nile River flooded due to heavy rains.

D. The Nile River dried out due to lack of rain.

3. The Nile River was responsible for the success of the Ancient Egyptian cities. Which evidence best supports this statement?

A. Every year, beginning in the late spring or early summer, the area known as the Fertile Crescent experienced rain for about 100 days.

B. A system of dikes and canals were built in Ancient Egypt to contain and direct the floodwaters of the Nile.

C. Ancient Egyptians are now revered as the masters of desert agriculture because their irrigation technology allowed them to cultivate crops during the dry months.

D. Cities thrived along the Nile, in large part because of the proximity to the obvious transportation, which facilitated trade.

4. Which main factor contributed to the downfall of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Kingdom of Kush?

A. bad agricultural practices

B. periods of drought

C. corruption and war

D. drastic population growth

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5. What is the main idea of this passage?

A. Ancient inventions made from iron ore were important to the success of the empires of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Kingdom of Kush.

B. Ancient civilizations in the Fertile Crescent relied on rivers and harnessed their power to develop into strong and wealthy empires.

C. The Kingdom of Kush and Mesopotamia depended on the Egyptians to develop technologies that harnessed the power of rivers.

D. Reliance on rivers was the cause of the downfall of many ancient empires.

6. Read the following sentences: "Some special inventions revolving around the rainy season included the system of dikes and canals built to contain and direct the floodwaters of the Nile. By **diverting** water, Ancient Egyptians were able to keep it from washing onto un-farmable desert terrain, where it would essentially be wasted."

As used in the passage, what does the word "**diverting**" most nearly mean?

A. drying

B. wasting

C. directing

D. drinking

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The growth of Ancient civilizations in the Fertile Crescent was aided by inventions, _____ irrigation networks and ironwork.

A. instead

B. because

C. including

D. as a result

8. How did the Kushites benefit from their knowledge of ironwork?

9. According to the passage, what two things facilitated success and power in Egypt, the Kingdom of Kush, and Mesopotamia?

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10. Read this sentence from the passage: "In this way, waterfront settlements in each region became seats of commerce and power: they were self-sustaining metropolises."

Something that is **self-sustaining** is able to continue by itself without anyone or anything else becoming involved. Use evidence from the text to explain how the metropolises, or cities, described in the passage were "self-sustaining."

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