



## LESSON 7

# ANCIENT RIVER CIVILIZATIONS

Egypt is an example of one of the great “River Civilizations” that appeared in the Middle Eastern region around 3000 B.C. Others were Persia, Arabia, Syria, Sumer, and Babylon. Since we have no written records from this time, we are left to speculate as to the reasons why these civilizations appeared at this particular time and in this particular place. Since proximity to rivers played a large role in the development of these communities, it is important to ask some questions about the influence of the rivers on the development of these ancient civilizations. Because we do not have written information, we are forced to make theories or hypotheses about how these civilizations were started.

**Materials:** Copies of the hypotheses below

**Web Sites:** None unless students choose to search on their own

### Teaching the lesson:

Based upon their knowledge of the ancient cultures, direct students to discuss in small groups which of the following hypotheses would most likely explain the growth of River Civilizations. They can make their speculations on Activity Sheet E-1: *The Growth of River Civilizations*.

### Hypotheses:

1. The annual flooding deposited a layer of silt, enriching the soil and making it suitable for farming. This rich soil was able to support large numbers of people in a small area. Even in dry years the river valley was attractive to people because of the availability of water for irrigation.
2. The growing of wheat and barley was possible because of the reliable water supply. These grains could be stored for use by towns or villages on the riverbank. This left leisure-time for other activities, such as building houses.
3. The surplus food supply meant that people could specialize in jobs, such as building, copper smithing, or trading. In this way, stable villages and towns grew up around these markets and craft centers. It was no longer necessary for everyone to be involved in hunting or farming.
4. Annual flooding and irrigation required large-scale cooperation and direction. From this need, larger communities developed. These groups created leaders and a form of government. The pharaohs of Egypt probably began as such leaders.
5. Settlements along rivers were more likely to be open to new ideas and techniques from other communities farther along the river. The river was a highway for the spread of new ideas.
6. A chance invention or discovery (e.g. irrigation wheel, grinding stone) could have dramatically increased food production, thus making larger settlements possible.

### Extended Activities:

1. Have students compare and create ancient and modern maps of the area of the river civilizations, listing both the old and the new names to connect our study to what is happening in today’s news. Ask students to discuss some of the things that seem to have changed little over the centuries.



Activity Sheet E-1:

# THE GROWTH OF RIVER CIVILIZATIONS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Gather information from the following Web site to complete questions 1 through 4 below:

<http://www.teachercreated.com/books/2405>

Click on page 59, site 1

1. What role did the annual flooding of the Nile play in the development of an agricultural society? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. How was the ancient Egyptian's life affected by the existence of a stable food supply? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What conditions are necessary for the creation of larger settlements? \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why did the Pharaohs feel it necessary to build the pyramids? Did the Nile have any influence on how and when the pyramids were built? \_\_\_\_\_

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