









# Cuneiform Writing in Sumeria

## Overview:











Students will learn about cuneiform, one of the earliest known forms of writing, that originated in Sumeria at about 4,000 BCE. They will create symbols for items in the garden and will write in the cuneiform style on clay.

## Objectives:



At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

-  **Explain** why the development of writing has been called one of mankind's greatest advances.
-  **Describe** what items from nature the Sumerians used to write with and on.
-  **List** the kind of produce grown in Sumeria.
-  **Draw** their own pictographs on clay tablets.
-  **Identify** crops in the garden that grew in Sumeria.
-  **Explain** that clay is a naturally occurring part of soil composition.

## Vocabulary:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  cuneiform    |  archeologist       |
|  pictographs  |  Mesopotamia        |
|  clay tablets |  Sumeria            |
|  financial    |  wedge-shaped reeds |
|  accounts     |  artifacts          |







## Preparation:

-  Prepare clay tablets and reeds, twigs, or sticks to be used in writing activity.
-  Gather sample crops or images of major crops grown in Sumeria.



## Learning Activities:

- I. Review the previous lessons (5 min.)


## Materials:

-  Map of the world
-  Map of Mesopotamia
-  Attached food pictures of Sumerian crops (or, if possible, harvest the crops from the garden)
-  Attached photos of:
  - drawing cuneiform tablets
  - reeds
  - wedge shaped reed pens
-  Clay
-  Sticks or reeds for students to draw with

## On the Board:

-  Vocabulary
-  Student Reflection Questions

## Suggested Snack:

-  Cauliflower salad with lentils and dates: <http://www.foolproofliving.com/roasted-cauliflower-salad-with-lentils-dates-and-tahini-dressing/>

- A. Ask a student to come up to the world map and point out where Mesopotamia was located.
  - B. Review the terms:
    - *archeologist*: a person who studies the ancient and recent human past through material remains. Archeology is a subfield of anthropology, the study of all human culture
    - *city-state*: a city that with its surrounding territory forms an independent state
  - C. Review why and how city-states developed.
    - The Sumerians had to learn to control their water supply. The complex irrigation system they designed crossed many village boundaries. In order to survive they had to learn to work together, connecting many villages along their irrigation network. This led to the transition to larger communities— the first cities.
2. Presentation: Cuneiform (10 min.)
- A. Ask students: How do we know what we know about this ancient civilization?
    - Tell students that archeologists have found clay tablets with cuneiform writing. This is the oldest known form of writing on earth. Cuneiform was based on *pictographs*: pictorial symbols for a word or phrase. In its earliest form it was written from top to bottom. There were 600 symbols in the cuneiform system. Eventually the symbols evolved into a system of straight lines. In its much later stages, cuneiform became alphabetic symbols.
  - B. Hundreds of thousands of these clay tablets have survived giving us insight into business letters, receipts, laws, hymns, stories, and daily records.
  - C. Explain that the Sumerians wrote with wedge-shaped reeds on moist clay.
  - D. Show pictures of cuneiform tablets and reed pens.
3. Activity: Cuneiform Writing on Clay tablets (25 min.)
- A. Ask students if they know what the major crops grown in Sumeria were. Project Sumerian food pictures on the board (or show students examples of the actual crops) and write the name of each under them:
    - wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils, dates, onions, leeks, garlic, lettuce, and mustard
  - B. Give each student a small piece of clay and a reed or stick.
    - Have students press the clay into a flat tablet.
    - Instruct students to create symbols for each crop and draw them on their tablet.
    - Ask students to share their pictures at the end of class.

4. **Snack:** Serve a salad that incorporates as many of the Sumerian crops as possible. (5 min.)
5. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

### Student Reflection Questions:

1. How do you think archeologists figured out what the cuneiform symbols meant?
2. Can you think of other written languages that resemble cuneiform?
3. Do you think language might ever evolve back into pictures instead of words? Why or why not?

### Assessment Questions:

1. What is cuneiform?
  - A. Forms to keep records of a city's finances
  - B. An ancient form of writing**
  - C. An irrigation system to control water
2. Which of the following were crops grown in Sumeria?
  - A. Oranges, mint, lemons
  - B. Chickpeas, barley, lentils**
  - C. Cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers
3. What is an archeologist?
  - A. Someone who studies the stars
  - B. Someone who studies plants and animals
  - C. Someone who studies artifacts to learn about past human cultures**

### Standards:

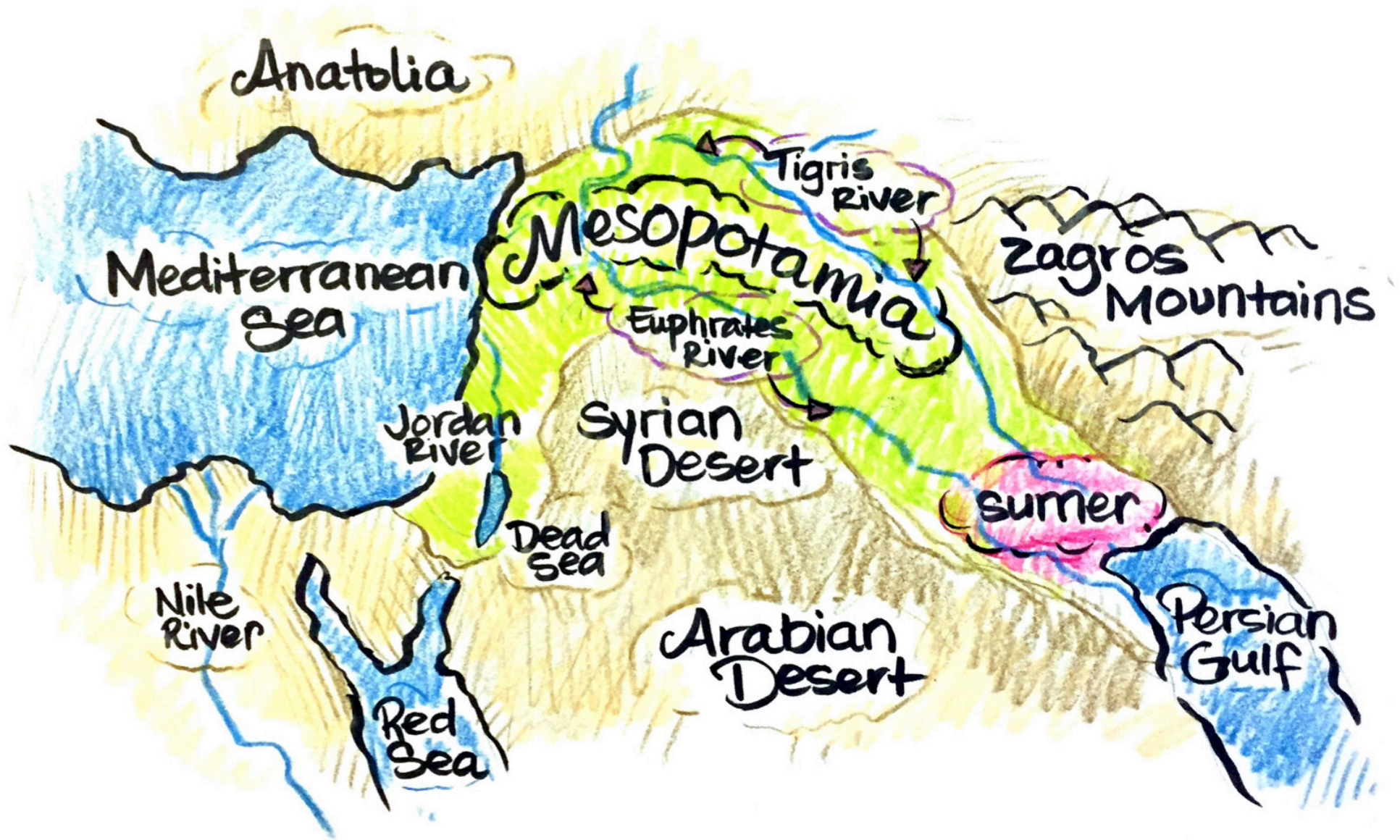
#### Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.





















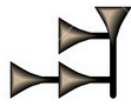




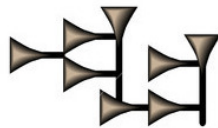
# Sumerian cuneiform



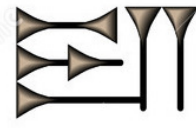
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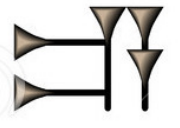
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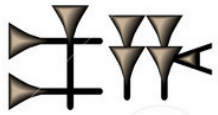
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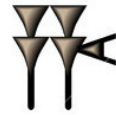
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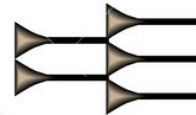
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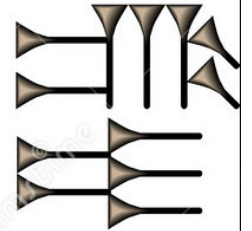
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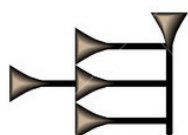
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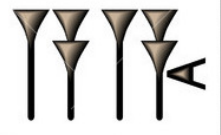
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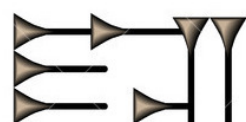
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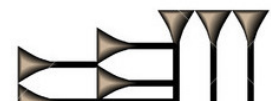
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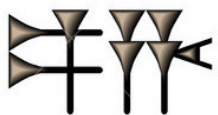
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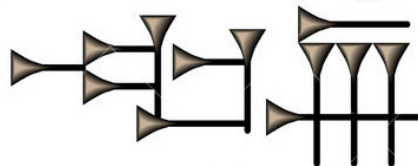
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**Y**



**Z**





