

Questions for Ancient Sumer Video and Discussion

By the end of this video and discussion, you should be able to answer the following “big questions” or *focus questions*. Think of these focus questions as potential “big idea” or “short answer” questions on a quiz or a test. When you begin to study, it is important to pay close attention to questions like these, and prepare to answer them with both historical details (facts) and analysis.

1. What was so special about the discovery of ancient ruins found in southern Iraq in the mid-19th century?
2. How did a civilization develop in this region under such seemingly difficult agricultural conditions?
3. In what ways did the environment of this region specifically shape the development of ancient Mesopotamian civilization?



As we watch the video, answer the following questions. They focus on the importance of geography and resources on the development of Sumerian Civilization.

What and where is the source of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers?

What is so special about the region between these two rivers that the ancient Greeks called *Mesotamia* (the area between two rivers)?

What technology did the ancient Sumerians invent in order to control their unpredictable water sources?

How did the ancient Sumerians use the resources available to them and build structures suitable to their environment?

In what ways did religion and the gods reflect the Sumerians fear of nature?

Document 1: Excerpt from a Sumerian Psalm

*Prayer was my rule, sacrificing my law,
The day of worship of my god my joy,
The day of devotion to my gods my
profit and gain.
What, however, seems good to one,
to a god may be displeasing;
What is spurned by oneself may find
favor with a god.
Who is there who can grasp the will
of the gods of heaven?
The plan of a god is full of mystery
– who can understand it?
How can mortals learn the ways of
a god?
He who is still alive at evening is
dead the next morning;
In an instant he is cast into grief, of a
sudden he is crushed;
This moment he sings and plays, in a
twinkling he wails like a mourner*

1. According to the psalm, what kind of relationship do the people of Sumer have with their gods? Support your answer with specific passages from the poem.

Document 2: Excerpt from The Epic of Gilgamesh

In the selection below Enkidu, tells Gilgamesh of a vision he has had of “the land of no return.”

There in the house whose people sit in darkness; dust is their food and clay their meat. They are clothed like birds with wings for covering, they see no light, they sit in darkness...

2. What is the “land of no return”?

3. What does document 2 tell us about “the land of no return?”