

# Civilizations in Mesopotamia

## 3



Remains of a Mesopotamian religious building.





## Apply What You Learned



**Summarize** Read the paragraphs, and answer the questions.

### Sumerian Sculpture

The artwork of ancient Sumer can tell us a lot about that civilization, from what kind of clothing people wore to how they defined beauty. One of the earliest known Sumerian sculptures was carved from marble. It dates to between 3500 B.C. and 3000 B.C. The sculpture is of the head of a woman with large eyes and eyebrows, balanced features, and a calm expression. Art historians think the sculpture is of a goddess. They think this because to the Sumerians, a goddess was the ideal of beauty. Historians also say that the artist placed colored material of some kind in the eyes and added hair made of gold or copper. These parts of the sculpture did not survive, but the methods were common at the time.

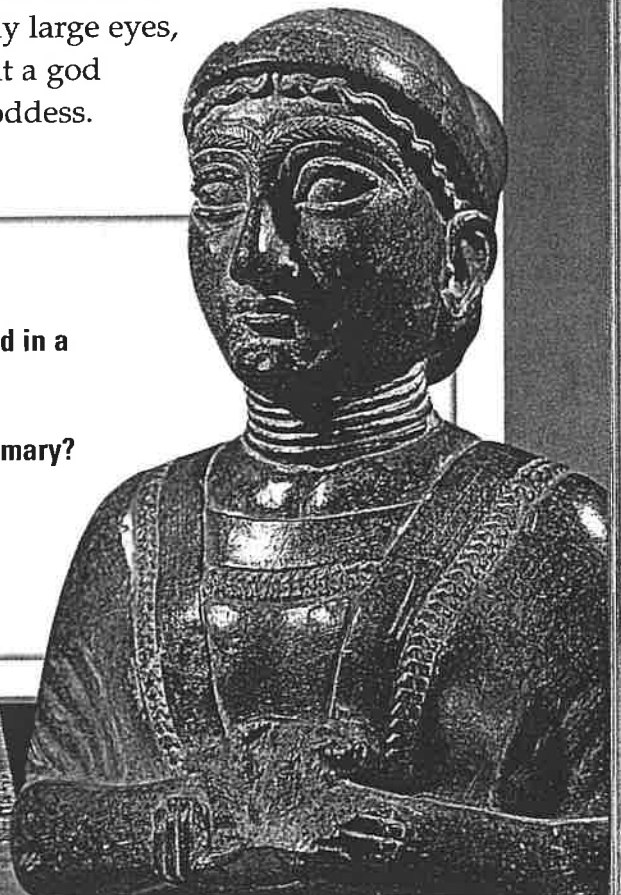
Another important Sumerian work of art is a group of marble statues that was found in a temple. Made in about 2500 B.C., these figures also have large eyes and calm expressions on their faces. However, these figures still have the colors in their eyes. Since they are full-length statues, they show the long skirts that both men and women of Sumer wore.

Art historians draw conclusions about the meanings of the statues by studying Sumerian culture. From information they have found through research, they believe that the two tallest marble statues, which have especially large eyes, represent a god and a goddess.



### Summarize

1. Which facts from the first paragraph should be included in a summary of the whole article?
2. What is one detail that would *not* be included in a summary? Why?
3. Summarize this article. How does your summary compare with those of your classmates?



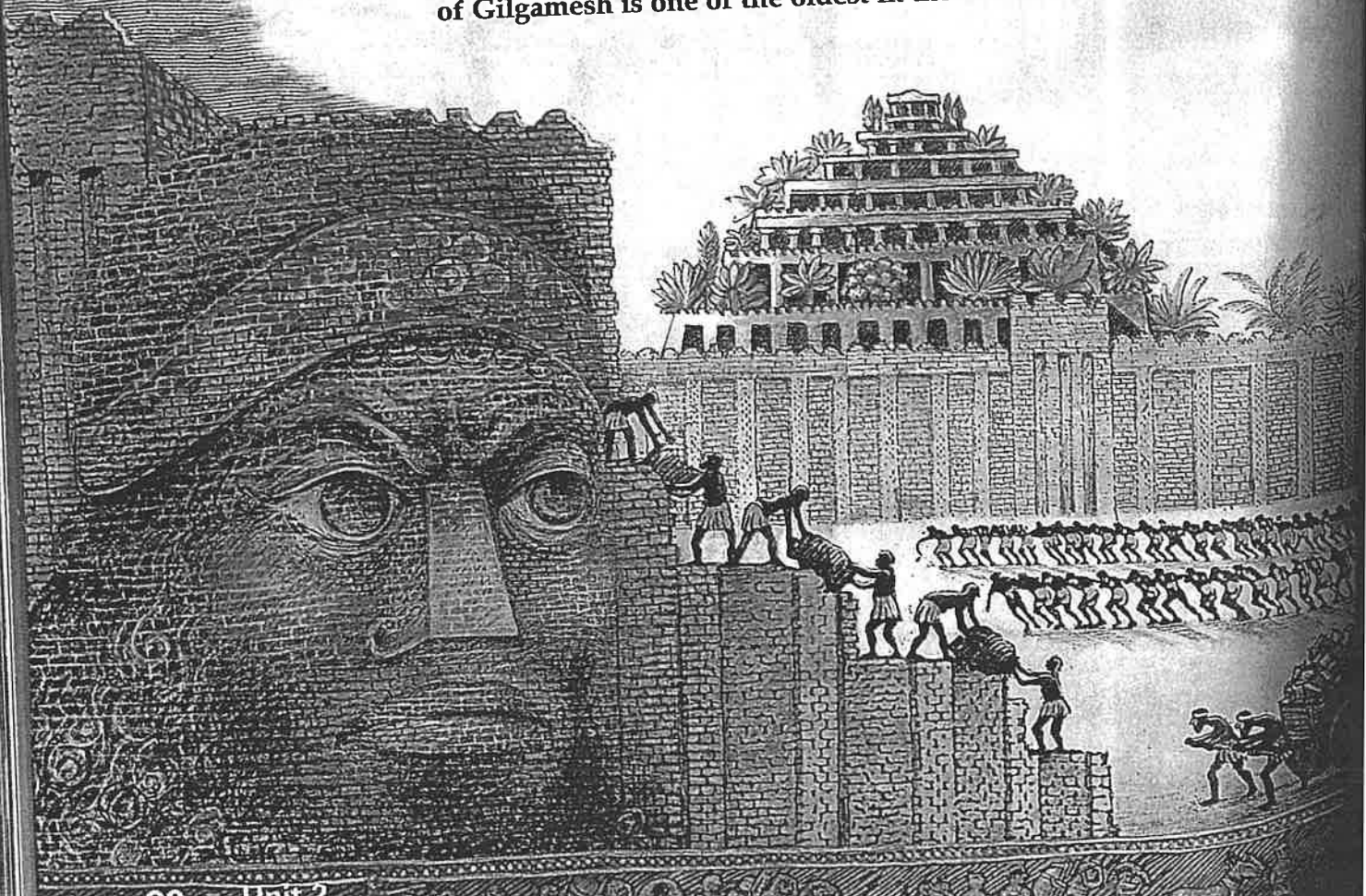
Start  
with a  
Legend



# GILGAMESH THE KING

RETOLD AND ILLUSTRATED BY LUDMILA ZEMAN

Sumer was one of the world's first civilizations. The people of Sumer believed in many gods. They also believed that their kings were part god and part human. The following story is about Gilgamesh, a real king who ruled over the ancient Sumerian city-state of Uruk. Over years, many legends formed about Gilgamesh and all that he supposedly did. These legends were passed on as oral tradition for many centuries. The story of Gilgamesh is one of the oldest in the world.





**L**ong ago in the land of Mesopotamia, a king by the name of Gilgamesh was sent by the Sun God to rule over the city of Uruk.

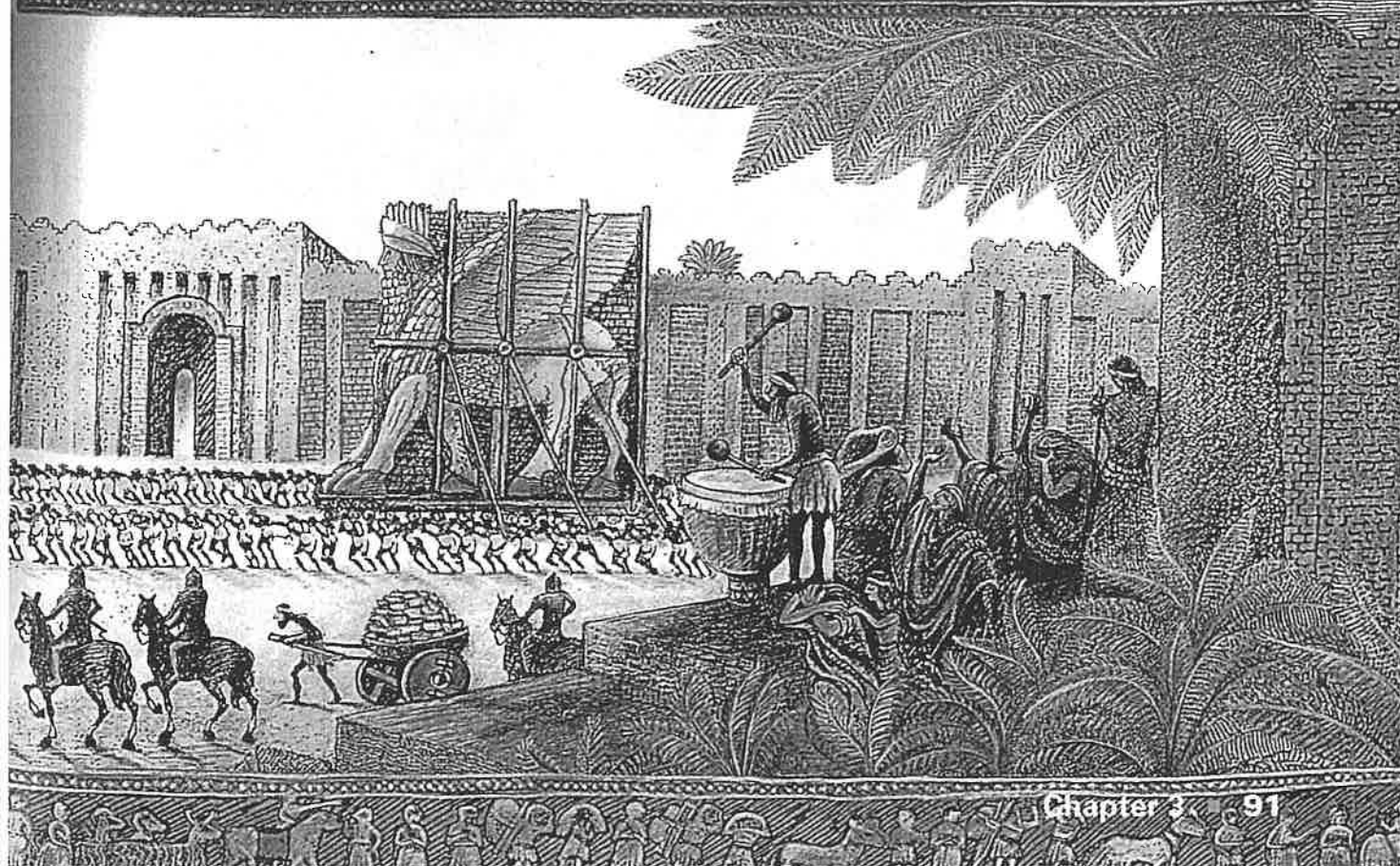
Gilgamesh was part god and part man. He looked human, but he did not know what it was to be human. He had power and wealth but he was not happy. He had everything except friends. He was always alone. Because of this he grew bitter and cruel.

One day, he decided to show how strong and powerful he was and make the people remember him forever.

So it was that Gilgamesh ordered a great wall to be built around the city. He ordered the men to leave their jobs

and families to work on it. He made the women bring food. Children were kept away so no one would stop to play with them. At first, the people helped willingly. Their king must have good reason for wanting the wall. Was an enemy planning to attack the city?

But as the wall got higher and higher, the people grew restless. How high did it have to be? It went up higher than any wall in the world, but Gilgamesh pushed on day and night. Men fainted from work and hunger. Food grew scarce. The people cried out for mercy, begging Gilgamesh to stop but he would not listen. In despair, they prayed to the Sun God for help.



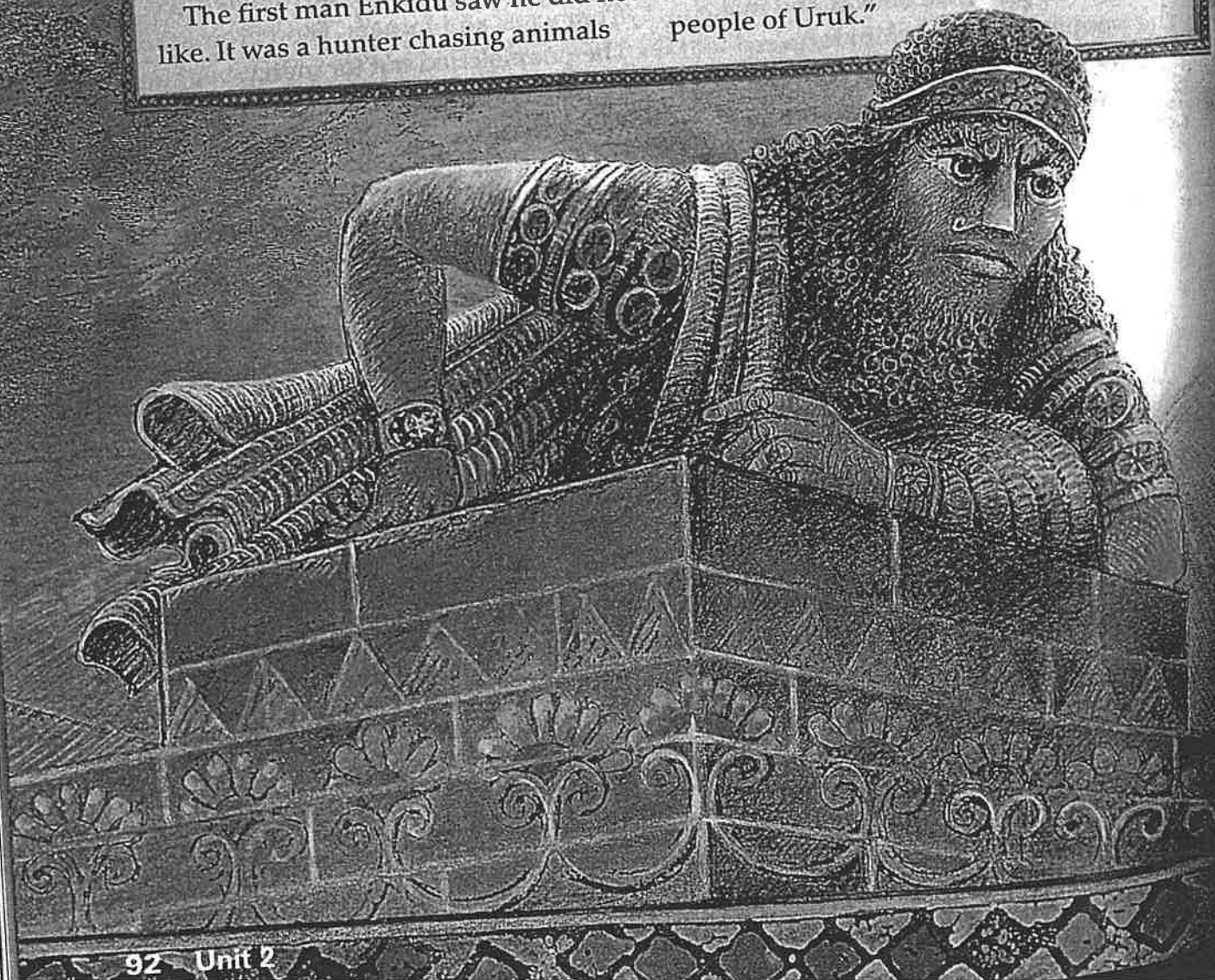


The Sun God heard their prayers and ordered the creation of another man as strong as Gilgamesh. His name was Enkidu. He was made from the clay of the earth. Since Gilgamesh had learned nothing from living with people, Enkidu was sent to live with the animals of the forest. As he got to know the animals, he learned to care for them. But he did not know human kindness for he had never seen another person.

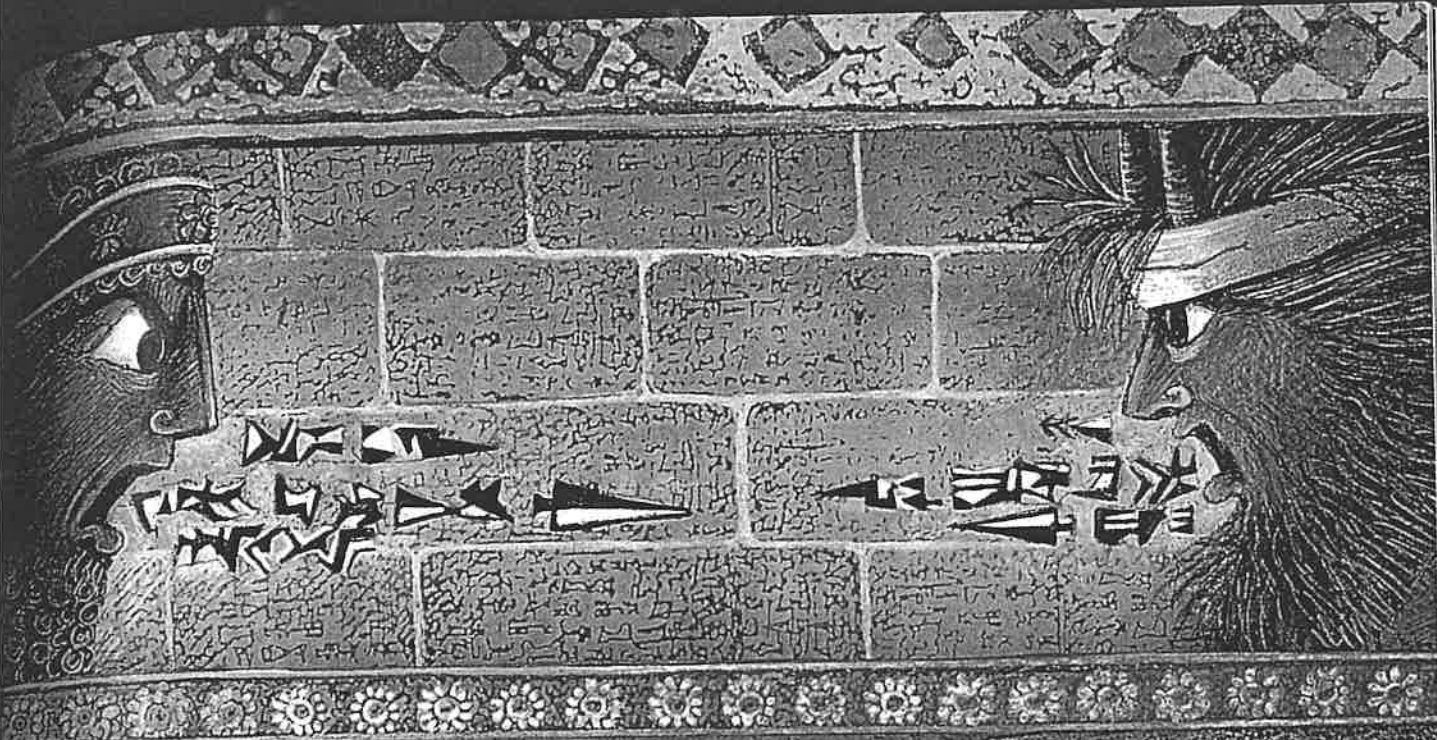
The first man Enkidu saw he did not like. It was a hunter chasing animals

through the forest, trying to kill them. Why would anyone want to do that? Enkidu wondered. He rushed to help his friends. He threw the hunter from his chariot and rescued the wounded animals. The hunter ran back to Uruk to warn Gilgamesh about the new danger in the forest. He called Enkidu "the strongest man in the world."

Gilgamesh was furious. "There is no one as strong as I am," he said. "Bring this creature to me so I can prove it. I will destroy him in front of all the people of Uruk."







Gilgamesh prepared to fight Enkidu to the death of one of them. Gilgamesh was certain that it would be Enkidu who met defeat. However, all those who listen to or read the complete legend are in for a surprise. Here's a hint—history tells us that Gilgamesh did not die. In fact, he became a well-liked leader. How do you think the legend ends?



## Response Corner

- 1 How do you think both Gilgamesh and Enkidu change as the legend continues?
- 2 Write an ending to the legend. Then find out how the legend really ends. Compare your ending to the legend's ending.

# Lesson

# 1

Time

6000 B.C.


3000 B.C.

B.C./A.D.

5000 B.C.  
Ubaid culture  
begins in southern  
Mesopotamia

4000 B.C.  
Farming spreads  
throughout southern  
Mesopotamia

3500 B.C.  
Cities develop  
in Sumer

 **WHAT TO KNOW**  
How did the world's  
major river systems support  
the development of early  
civilizations?

- ✓ Locate the major river  
systems where the  
earliest civilizations  
developed.
- ✓ Describe the physical  
settings that supported  
permanent settlements  
and early civilizations.

## VOCABULARY

tributary p. 96  
plateau p. 96  
alluvial plain p. 96  
silt p. 96

## PLACES

Sumer  
Mesopotamia  
Eridu  
Uruk  
Kish  
Ur



## SUMMARIZE

# The Land Between Two Rivers

**YOU  
ARE  
THERE**

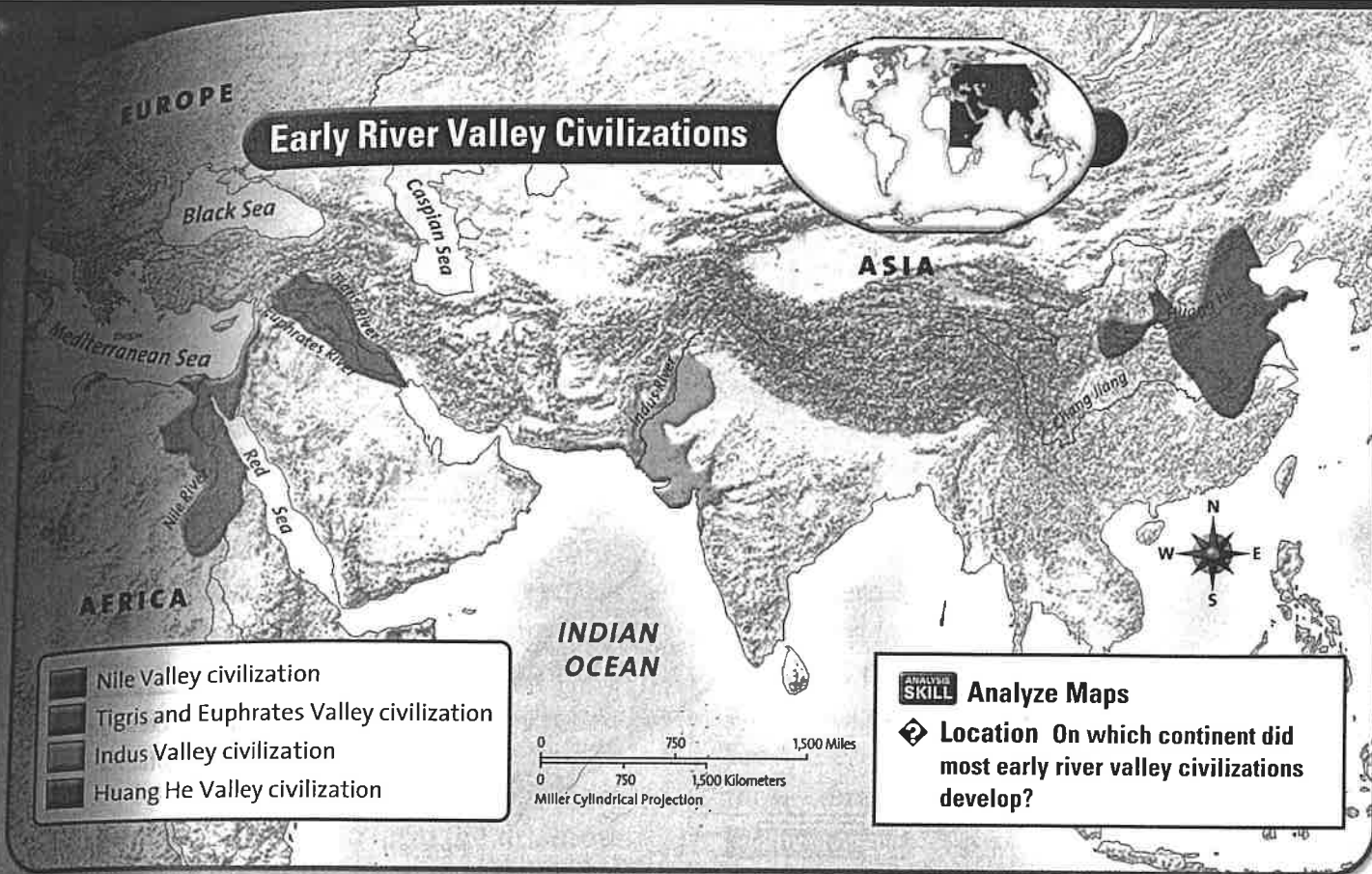
It is 4000 B.C. With a herd of goats, you and your family round a bend in the path. Then, in the early light of dawn, you see houses in the distance. Smoke from cooking fires rises lazily in the warm air as women prepare their morning meals. Nearby, fields of grain blow gently in the breeze. Men are checking their tools for the day's work and children run here and there, playing a game.

This is the village you and your family have been seeking. When you reach the nearest house, your father gives the hand signal for "peace" to the people of the village. Will your family be welcome to settle here? In friendship, your father offers some goats to the people.

## FAST FACT

At 1,700 miles in length, the Euphrates River is the longest river in southwestern Asia. Because of the region's hot, dry climate, the Euphrates River loses a large amount of water through evaporation and irrigation. Only flat-bottomed boats can travel the shallow waters of the Euphrates River.





## Importance of Major River Systems

The world's major river systems formed valleys that held a special attraction for many early people. The physical settings of these river valleys supported permanent settlements and, in time, early civilizations.

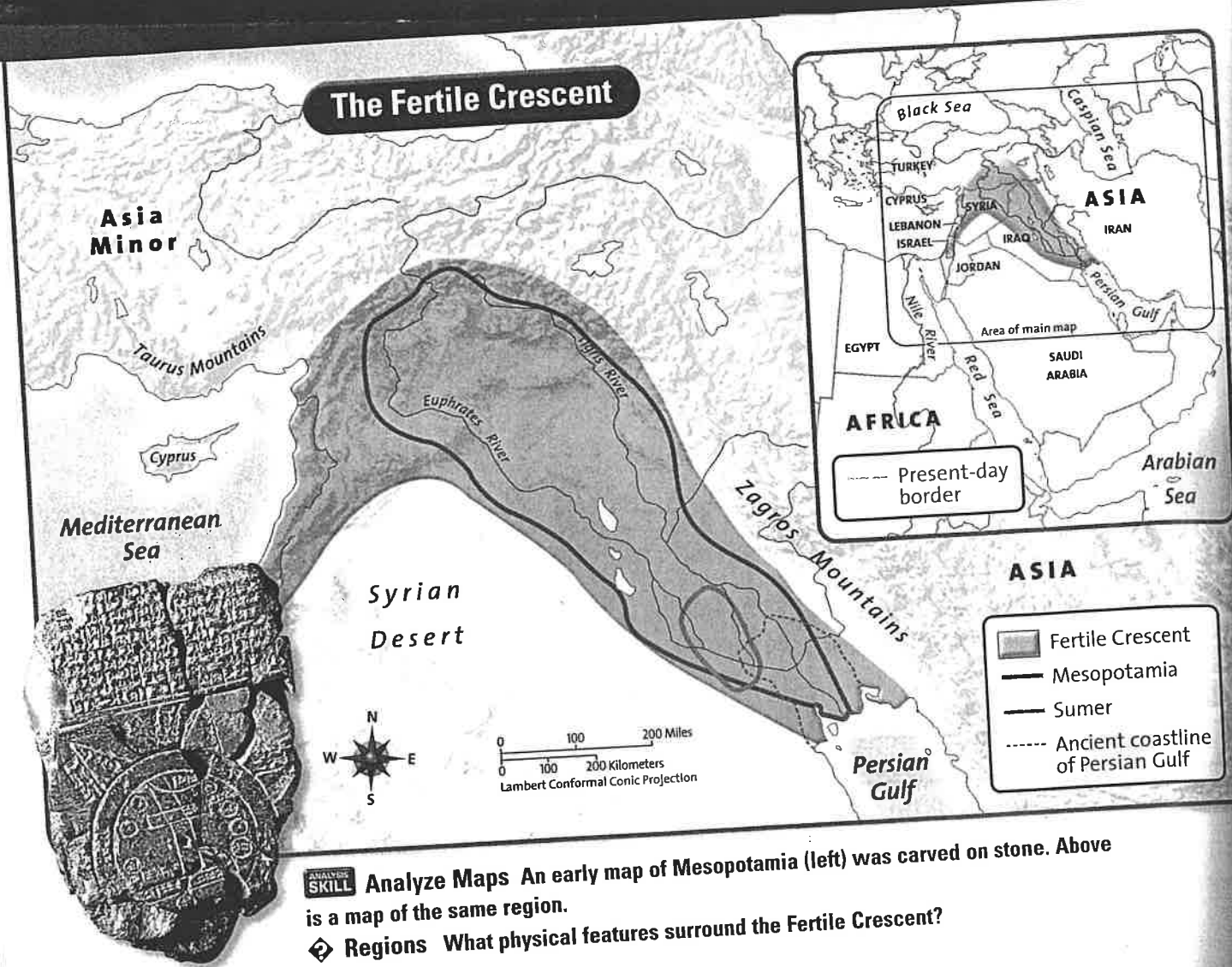
In these valleys, people found plenty of water for drinking, cooking, and bathing. Fishers speared, hooked, and netted fish from the rivers and farmers raised crops and grazed their livestock on the wide, fertile plains. With so many resources, these river valleys provided people with a good place to build permanent settlements.

Soon, these early farmers learned to grow surpluses of crops. To do this, they had to develop new agricultural techniques. With food surpluses, some people could do activities besides farming. This allowed people to create more-advanced cultures, leading to early civilizations.

The earliest civilizations developed in the valleys of four major river systems—the Tigris and Euphrates (yoo•FRAY•teez) Rivers in southwestern Asia, the Nile River in northern Africa, and the Indus River in southern Asia. Later, one formed along the Huang He (HWAHNG HUH) of eastern Asia.

### READING CHECK **SUMMARIZE**

**How did major river systems support permanent settlements?**



**ANALYZE SKILL** Analyze Maps An early map of Mesopotamia (left) was carved on stone. Above is a map of the same region.

**Regions** What physical features surround the Fertile Crescent?

## The Tigris and Euphrates

One of the world's first civilizations formed in the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This civilization arose in a land that came to be known as **Sumer** (SOO•mer).

The land of Sumer lay in the southern part of a region called the Fertile Crescent. On a map, the Fertile Crescent appears to be shaped like a crescent moon. *Fertile* refers to the rich soil found there.

From the Taurus Mountains, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers flow southeast across the Fertile Crescent. Many **tributaries**, or rivers that flow into larger rivers, join the Tigris. Eventually, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join and flow into the Persian Gulf.

Long ago, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers was known as **Mesopotamia**, meaning "the land between the rivers." Northern Mesopotamia sat on the high, flat land of a **plateau**. Southern Mesopotamia lay on the low, flat land of an **alluvial plain**, a plain formed from fine soil left behind by streams or rivers.

In the spring, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers often overflowed their banks. As the floodwaters drained, they deposited soil and tiny rocks on the land to form a new layer of **silt**. It was on this fertile soil in southern Mesopotamia that the people of Sumer built their civilization.

### READING CHECK SUMMARIZE

What made the land of southern Mesopotamia good for farming?