

Reading Literacy Standard: 1) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of texts.

*How did the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers support agriculture?* The Tigris and Euphrates rivers start in the mountains of southwest Asia. The region between the rivers was called **Mesopotamia**. The land here was mostly flat with small plants. The rivers provided water and were important for travel. It was easier to travel by boat than over land. There were very few roads on land. Boats could carry heavier loads. The currents helped move the boats down river. Rain and melting snow in the mountains caused the rivers to get bigger. The water in the rivers picked up soil as it flowed down the mountains. When this water reached the plains, it overflowed into the **floodplain**. A floodplain is the flat land that borders the banks of a river. As the water covered the floodplain, the fine soil it carried settled on the land. The fine soil deposited by rivers is called **silt**. The silt was fertile, making it good for growing crops.

The climate in Mesopotamia is **semiarid**. Usually less than 10 inches of rain a year fall there, and summers are hot. Even though the region was dry, the rivers and fertile soil made it good for farming. By 4000 B.C., many farming villages developed in southern Mesopotamia.

*To be done as a class:* How were the Tigris and Euphrates rivers important to Mesopotamia? Identify three ways specifically described in the reading and underline the sections of the text that supports your answers.

*How did the climate affect farmers?* People in Mesopotamia could not predict when the rivers would flood each year. As a result, they could not predict when to plant crops. The people also could not predict the size of the flooding. That depended on how much snow or rain fell in the mountains. Too much rain could cause huge floods that washed everything away. If too little rain or snow fell, there might not be any flooding at all.

Semiarid regions sometimes experience a **drought**. This is a time when not enough rain and snow fall. When Mesopotamia experienced a drought, the level of the rivers fell. That made it hard for farmers to water their crops, which caused crops to fail. When crops failed, many people starved.

By about 6000 B.C., farmers in Mesopotamia set up canals to get water from the rivers to their fields. This system is called irrigation.

1. Why did Mesopotamian farmers set up irrigation systems? Answer the question below and underline the section(s) of the text that supports your answer.

*How can irrigation harm farming?* Mesopotamia was known as the land between two rivers, the Tigris to the north and the Euphrates to the south. Rains were **seasonal** in this area, which meant that the land flooded in the winter and spring and water was scarce at other times. Farming in the region depended on irrigation from the rivers. Mashkan-shapir was a typical Mesopotamian city, located about 20 miles from the Tigris River and connected to the river by a network of canals. Despite a flourishing civilization, Mashkan-shapir was abandoned within only 20 years of its settlement. What could have caused this to happen so quickly?

Scientists believe irrigation played an important role in Mashkan-shapir's collapse. The same process that allowed farming in this region also eventually made it impossible to farm. There is a problem with irrigation: if water sits on the fields and evaporates, it leaves behind mineral salts. When mineral salts build up in the upper levels of the soil, it becomes poisonous for plants. Scientists believe that Mashkan-shapir's collapse was caused partly by destruction of the fields by these mineral salts.

In Mesopotamia, irrigation was essential for crop production. The rivers were higher than the surrounding floodplain because of built-up silt in the river beds, so water for irrigation flowed into the fields by gravity. Once the water was on the fields, it could not drain away because the fields were lower than the river. As the water evaporated, it not only left mineral salts behind, but also drew salts upward from lower levels of the soil. Over time, the soil became toxic and would no longer support crops. By 2300 B.C., agriculture in Mesopotamia was reduced to a tiny fraction of what it had been.

2. How can irrigation be bad for farming? Underline the section(s) of the text that supports your answer.

### Geography: Vocabulary

*Reading Literacy Standard: 4) Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 6-8 texts and topics.*

Record on the line a definition for each word. Determine the definition based on the three paragraphs that you read.

3. Mesopotamia \_\_\_\_\_
4. Floodplain \_\_\_\_\_
5. Silt \_\_\_\_\_
6. Semiarid \_\_\_\_\_
7. Drought \_\_\_\_\_
8. Seasonal \_\_\_\_\_