



Big Era Three
Farming and the Emergence of Complex Societies
10,000 - 1000 BCE



Panorama Teaching Unit
Farming and the Emergence of Complex Societies
10,000 – 1000 BCE

[PowerPoint Overview Presentation](#)
[Farming and the Emergence of Complex Societies](#)

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World History for Us All
A project of San Diego State University
In collaboration with the
National Center for History in the Schools (UCLA)
<http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu>

Why this unit?

Between 10,000 BCE and 1000 BCE an abrupt change occurred in the way many humans solved their most basic needs. No longer did all humans hunt and gather to support themselves. As a result of collective learning (generations of humans sharing and passing on knowledge), changes in the way humans acquired food gradually accumulated. The result was what we know as the Neolithic Revolution, or Agricultural Revolution—the advent of farming.

In 10,000 BCE there were no agrarian communities, no crop surpluses, no cities, no central governments, no written law codes, no monumental buildings, no written languages, no job specializations. By 1000 BCE, all of these things existed on all of the continents except for Australia and Antarctica. In addition, population increased dramatically during those 9,000 years. The spread of humans to new areas of the world (extensification) and a rise in density of population in certain areas (intensification) accompanied this growth. This growth led to an acceleration of cultural interchange among communities and of the pace of technological change. It also led to increasingly complex human social organizations and the appearance of what we call civilizations.

In 1000 BCE, only a small minority of humans lived in cities. However, networks of exchange that were centered on cities affected humans over wide areas. The world in 1000 BCE was a very different place from the world 9,000 years earlier.

Unit objectives

Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Explain what is meant by the domestication of plants and animals and why farming permitted world population to grow and people to live in much larger and denser communities.
2. Analyze the differences between a hunting-gathering way of life and a settled agricultural one.
3. Discuss how agricultural societies developed around the world.
4. Explain how and where complex societies evolved and describe their significant characteristics.
5. Describe ways in which the rate of change accelerated between 10,000 BCE and 1,000 BCE.

Time and materials

Lesson One: 30-45 minutes; paper and pencils.

Lesson Two: 45 minutes; paper and pencils.

Lesson Three: 45-60 minutes; paper, pencils, reference materials (textbooks, encyclopedias, online sources). Extension activities: additional 60-90.

Authors

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Both authors joined the World History for Us All development team in 2001.

Lesson One

Domestic Heir-lines: A Lesson in Domestication

Teacher Notes

Genetic engineering is not a modern science. From the beginning, humans learned to adapt their environments to their needs. As a result of collective learning, humans could pass on information about breeding plants and animals. Eventually, new species were developed that benefited both human beings and plants and animals.

The domestication of plants, the result of generations of careful genetic control, resulted in one of the most far-reaching developments in human history: agriculture. Gradually, travelers, traders, and migrating farmers spread new breeds of plants and animals into new regions.

A number of research methods give historians information on humans' early uses of plants and animals. Paleo-ethnobotany ("ancient- people-plants"), a branch of archaeology, is concerned with how people in the distant past used plants. Plant remains found in archaeological sites can tell us a great deal about the people who once lived there. Paleo-ethnobotanists study the remains of ancient plants (mainly seeds) preserved in archaeological contexts. These seeds can sometimes be "rescued" and used to grow species of plants that had long been thought extinct.

Early art depicting plants and animals, mentions of various species in early documents (for example, the Bible), and records and inventories like those found in Sumer and Egypt also provide information on how ancient peoples used plants and animals.

The term domestication comes from the Latin *domus*, which means house. Animals and plants that people domesticated were altered genetically for domestic use as food, fiber, and muscle power. When we talk about animals being domesticated, we are referring not only to animals that lived in association with humans rather than in the wild but also to animals whose genetic structures were changed in ways that made it impossible for them to survive in the wild. Human beings and domesticated plants and animals became dependent on one another.

Domestication took a long time, although some animals could be domesticated more easily than others, and many not at all. Although cows look relatively benign today, their ancestor, the auroch, was apparently a strong, unruly, creature who did not take to captive breeding easily. Dogs were among the first animals to be domesticated, most probably because the process was advantageous to them—they became part of the human hunting team and thus got a reliable source of food.

The process of domestication worked much like selective breeding works in modern animal husbandry. Animals that had desirable characteristics, such as the quality of their wool in the case of sheep, were favored in the selection process. Over time, selective breeding produced the farm animals and crops we depend on today.

The ability to breed animals docile enough to pull plows or be milked, along with the ability to develop cereals that were drought resistance and had large, easily harvestable seeds, permitted communities to support larger populations. In the old hunter-gathering life, the supply of wild animals and plants in any one area determined the size of a local population. People had no way to increase the supply. But people learned how to control the size of a herd or the acreage of a crop, they might occupy a given territory in much greater numbers.

Humans did not, however, go directly from hunting and gathering to farming. Depending on a number of variables, the transition might take centuries or even millennia. Domesticating the dog for use in hunting would not have led people to become fully sedentary. Fields of wild grain might have been tended and nurtured during a part of the year when a hunting-gathering community lived near those fields. If the group returned to the same spot year after year, they were likely to give the fields there more and more careful attention. Eventually, people began to collect and to save for planting the following year seeds that were particularly desirable for their size, taste, harvestability, and nutrition. At some point, a group might decide to become sedentary, depending for their survival on planted crops and domesticated sources of meat and milk. No doubt a mixed life-style—hunting and gathering part of the year, tending fields part of the year—was the reality for many people for a long time.

Procedures

1. Ask students to brainstorm:
 - a. What does the term “domestication” mean?
 - b. Why would a person want to “domesticate” a plant or animal?
 - c. How might a person go about doing this?
 - d. How long might domestication of a plant or animal take?
 - e. What changes might occur to that plant or animal?
2. Arrange students in groups of three. Ask each student in the group to list the ingredients of one of the meals she or he ate the day before, whether breakfast, lunch, or dinner.
3. Ask students to determine which particular plants and animals were in each of the meals (e.g., wheat, chicken, tomato, milk, orange).
4. Give each student a copy Student Handout 1.1, which has the following regions of the world as headings:
 - a. Africa
 - b. Southwest Asia
 - c. Central/East Asia
 - d. South Asia
 - e. Europe
 - f. The Americas (divide into North and South if desired)
 - g. Pacific Islands

5. Ask students to guess where each of the ingredients in their meal originated, then list the ingredients in the proper column on the chart.
6. Put a correct list on an overhead, using Student Handout 1.2 Answer Key
7. In a culminating discussion, ask the class how many world regions it takes to make an ordinary meal today.

Note

Domesticated plants unavailable in a region might be obtained through trade with other regions. Some plant strains native to the Americas are now indispensable in Old World cuisine. Imagine Italian cooking without tomatoes or Irish stew without potatoes. Yet, both tomatoes and potatoes were domesticated in the Americas and brought to Europe only after 1492 CE. Chocolate is the happy combination of the cacao bean, which is native to the Americas, and sugar, which was domesticated in South or Southeast Asia.

Lesson 1***Student Handout 1.1—Regions of Origin*****PLANT AND ANIMAL DOMESTICATES****Plants**

Africa	Southwest Asia	Central/ East Asia	South Asia	Europe	Americas	Pacific Islands

Animals

Africa	Southwest Asia	Central/ East Asia	South Asia	Europe	Americas

Lesson 1**Student Handout 1.2—Answer Key****PLANT AND ANIMAL DOMESTICATES****Plants**

	Southwest Asia	Central/ East Asia	South Asia	Europe	Americas	Pacific Islands
coffee millet okra sorghum watermelon yams	barley beets carrots chickpeas dates fava beans figs leeks lentils melon olive peas safflower walnuts wheat	almond apple apricot buckwheat canola seed Chinese radish cucumber garlic millet onions peach rhubarb sesame soybean spinach tea turnips water chestnut yams	cotton rice	beets cabbage carob grape hazelnut lettuce oats onion pear plum Rye	avocado cacao cashew chili pepper beans maize papaya peanut pineapple potato pumpkin squash sunflower tobacco tomato sweet potato	bananas black pepper cloves coconut eggplant grapefruit lemon mango orange sugar cane taro

Animals

Africa	Southwest Asia	Central/ East Asia	South Asia	Europe	Americas
Cat Dog	Camel Cattle Dog Donkey Goat Pig Sheep	Camel Horse Water Buffalo	Chicken	Rabbit	Dog Guinea Pig Llama/Alpaca Turkey

Extension Activities

1. Grades 6-9

- Plan a day's menu with foods that originated in just one world region.
- Discuss which regions provided the foods students like best.
- Discuss what meals might have been like in various regions before foodstuffs spread through trade and conquest
- Discuss "traditional" foods. Did Italians always have pizza? Did the Chinese always use chilies in their cuisine? Did Americans always have all-beef burgers?

2. Grades 10-12

- Have students do research on individual domesticates. Have them make oral reports to the class or hand in written projects.
- Have students do research on the history of a specific region (e.g., western Asia, India, Southeast Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Americas.) Guiding questions for the project: Which animals are mentioned in ancient literature (e.g., the Bible, epics)? Which animals were depicted in early art? Which domesticated animals are typical for certain regions?

Lesson Two

Farming: Pros and Cons

Teacher Notes

Traditional interpretations of the transition from a hunting-gathering way of life to a settled agricultural one consider farming a tremendous advantage to humans. Historians, however, have been revising their analyses of life in paleolithic societies. They are questioning what they previously assumed was the absolute desirability and inevitability of settled farming as a way of life.

This reading and accompanying activities are designed to stimulate students to think about the concept of “progress” and to help them determine whether or not they think that a hunting-gathering way of life was as “primitive” and “uncivilized” as has been popularly believed. In addition, students will analyze the historical implications of the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago.

Procedures

1. Hand out Student Handout 2.1, titled “Was Farming a Good Idea?” After students have read the piece, ask if they need any clarifications of vocabulary or terminology.
2. Begin class discussion by asking students to brainstorm what they think the terms “standard of living” and “quality of life” mean.

Note

In general, “standard of living” refers to a measure of what we have relative to what we need for subsistence. For example, we all need adequate shelter appropriate to the climate where we live. We need food, clean water, and access to health care. In addition, we need literacy and education. To measure standard of living, demographers generally calculate statistics such as life expectancy, daily caloric intake, and literacy rates. Collectively, these statistics give us an idea of how likely people in a given country or region are to have what they need for survival.

“Quality of life” refers to the degree of satisfaction and contentment we feel about our lives. Whereas standard of living is an objective measure, quality of life is more subjective. For example, some people may have little in the way of material possessions, yet they may have rich relations with family and friends, enjoy leisure pursuits that cost little, have jobs that provide sufficient food and clothing, and generally feel satisfied with their lives. Others may be wealthy and live in large homes full of appliances and gadgets, but they work long hours in demanding careers, eat fast food meals on the run, and have little time for family and leisure. These people may feel they have a poor quality of life.

Ask students to think about hunter-gatherers. What would they say about their standard of living and their quality of life? What about early farmers? What about people today? Is the standard of living and quality of life the same for everyone today?

1. Ask students to identify the point of view of the author of Student Handout 2.1. What evidence can they find in the reading to support their choice? How would they rewrite the article to make it reflect another point of view or to make it as objective as possible?
2. Ask students to take a piece of notebook paper and fold it in half vertically. On one side write, "Hunter-Gatherer Way of Life," and on the other side write, "Settled Farming." Then have students fold their paper in half horizontally. On the top half they should write "advantages" and on the bottom half "disadvantages." Ask students to write as many advantages and disadvantages for each way of life as they can think of. Several are mentioned in the reading. Encourage students to add any others that come to mind.
3. Divide the class into four groups, one each for advantages and disadvantages of hunter-gatherers and farming ways of life. Ask students in each group to compare their lists for their particular category of information and then to prepare a definitive list for the group. To conclude this discussion each group should report its individual lists and/or write them on the board.
4. Assessment: Dr. Jared Diamond, Professor of Physiology at the University of California at Los Angeles and the author of the Pulitzer Prize winning book *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, has written that the agricultural revolution had both a bright and dark side. Ask students to write letters to Dr. Diamond based on the information in Student Handout 2.1. Ask them to agree or disagree that the coming of farming had both pros and cons and to give reasons for their point of view.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.1*****Was Farming a Good Idea?**

About 10,000 years ago, farming, an apparently minor blip on the vast time-line of history, put humans on the road to the complex societies that dominate contemporary life.

Most history books present the coming of farming as perhaps the single most positive event in human history. After all, are not we better off today than hunter-gatherers were, thanks to our clever agrarian ancestors? We do not have to hunt woolly mammoths for meat, forage for roots, chew hides to soften them for clothing, or build our houses from hides, bone, and sinew. Our diets are rich in quantity and variety. Many of us have an abundance of material goods and, in many places, life expectancies have soared. Surely, our lives today are a great improvement over the lives of hunter-gatherers

As farming provided humans with much greater quantities of food than hunting and gathering could, populations grew. Storage of surpluses made it unnecessary for every woman and man to farm for themselves and their family. Job specialization became possible, with different people specializing in different tasks. Increases in population resulted in increases in social and technical complexity, which in turn led to the first cities, central governments, writing systems, law codes, and monumental buildings. Humans were on their way to the moon!

As for hunter-gatherers, clearly they had been outclassed. Or had they? In trying to understand what hunting and gathering was like, anthropologists today study the few societies of that type that remain in various parts of the world. What they have found is that hunter-gatherers are not necessarily worse off than farmers. In fact, many of them have plenty of leisure time, get a good night's sleep, and do not work nearly as hard as people in farming societies, or, for that matter, in big American corporations. For example, in the United States today a full-time work week is from 35 to 40 hours. In many high-powered professions, work weeks are considerably longer.

For hunter-gatherers, however, 12 to 15 hours a week was likely enough on average to supply their food needs. In addition, their diets were considerably more varied and healthier than the diets of settled peoples, who generally relied on high carbohydrate diets of rice, wheat, or potatoes. Hunter-gatherers had a wide array of plants and animals to choose from, so when one species was not available, often many others were.

For farmers, who increasingly relied on a single crop, an attack by locusts or a drastic change in weather could result in famine. Also, while hunter-gatherers moved seasonally from camp to camp following animal herds and leaving their trash and germs behind, farmers remained in one place. Not only did they accumulate garbage, but they also shared housing and diseases with their domesticated animals. A densely populated agrarian community provided the perfect site for a new phenomenon, the disease epidemic.

In addition to the potential for illness and bad health, farming also set in motion forces that have resulted in the development of class divisions and gender inequality. Hunter-gatherers had little opportunity to accumulate possessions. They carried only what was necessary for their immediate needs. Settled peoples, however, could begin to accumulate possessions, and with possessions came the potential for class divisions. Suddenly there were the “haves” and the “have-nots,” with the “haves” generally believing themselves entitled to order the “have-nots” around.

As for social relations between men and women, hunter-gatherer women had only a few pregnancies, and children were spaced out by about four years. That was because at four years-old a child could walk on its own as the band moved from place to place. In farming communities where women stayed put, pregnancies usually came closer together so that family size increased. Recovering from a greater number of pregnancies and caring for the needs of a larger family, women became tied to the home in ways that hunter-gatherer women were not.

There is no question that the development of settled agrarian societies set us humans on a path that has brought us to the highly advanced and technologically sophisticated way of life we enjoy today. Yet, as we look back in history to the time when the hunter-gatherer way of life was common all around the globe, we may feel a bit wistful about a lost way of life.

Lesson Three

Who is Civilized?

Teacher Notes

Between 4000 and 1000 BCE, complex societies began to appear. By 3000 BCE, Mesopotamia and Egypt were in bloom in Southwest Asia and Africa. The Harappan civilization of the Indus River valley was not far behind. By 2000 BCE, Crete was the home of the Minoan civilization, and in the Huang He (Yellow River) valley in China, the Shang dynasty was about to get underway. By 1000 BCE, the end of Big Era Three, the Olmec of Mesoamerica and the Moche of the Andes were well-established. These complex societies are the focus of this lesson.

Procedures

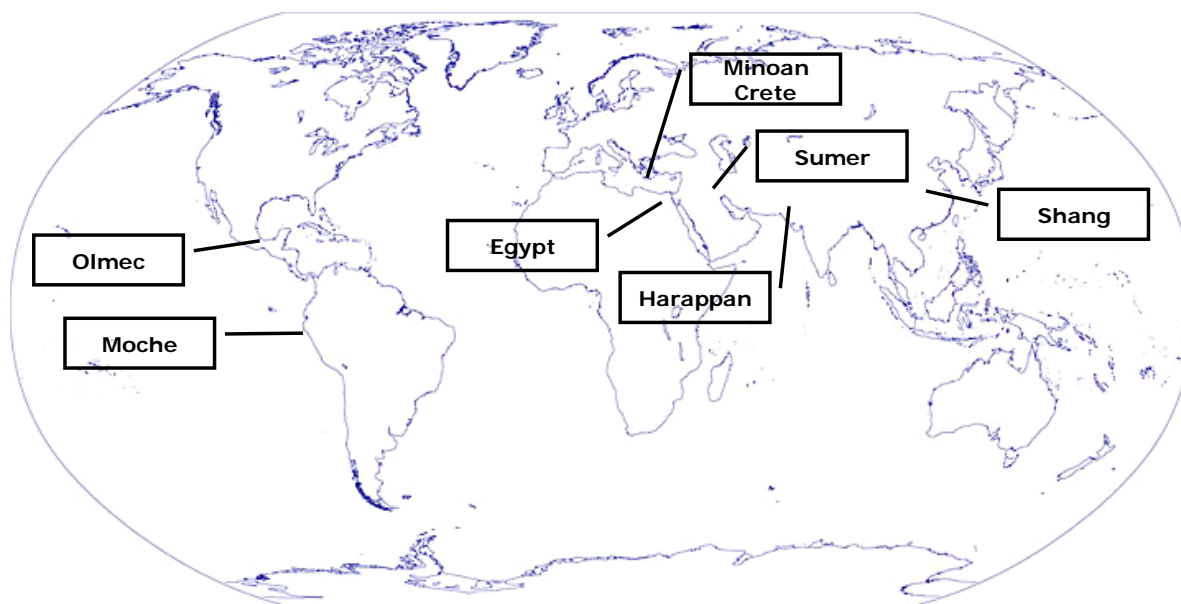
1. Ask students to list major characteristics of civilizations. They should base this list on information in the Big Era Three PowerPoint Overview Presentation: Farming and the Emergence of Complex Society. Divide students into groups according to world regions: 1) Tigris-Euphrates valley: Sumer, 2) Nile valley: Egypt, 3) Indus valley: Harappan, 4) China: Shang Dynasty, 5) Mesoamerica: Olmec, 6) South America: Moche, 7) Mediterranean: Minoan Crete.
2. Hand out to each student in the group Student Handout 3.1 titled “Evidence of Complex Society” and Student Handout 3.2 titled “Early Complex Societies”. Ask students to divide tasks among themselves and to look up information that will help them fill in their charts. They should refer to Student Handout 3.2 for information on the location of early complex societies. Students should look for specific examples for each category of information on the chart (writing system, monumental construction, form of government, and so on) and then share their information with the whole group. Students may use whatever sources are available: textbooks, encyclopedias, and on-line sources.
3. After each group of students has completed its charts, have a “scribe” from each group go to the board or the overhead to fill in the group’s findings on a “master chart” based on Student Handout 3.1. Students in other groups should enter the additional information on their charts. At the end of the process, each student should have a chart with evidence for each civilization discussed.
4. Reassembling the whole class and have students look at the similarities and differences among the various civilizations. Keep in mind that students may deduce evidence of specialized jobs and social classes from the presence of large monuments and public works that would have required forced labor and from artifacts that would indicate specialized artisans and craftsmen. Not all civilizations will necessarily have all the characteristics listed on the chart. Each civilization, however, should demonstrate a combination of political, social, economic, and cultural elements that would indicate the presence of a complex society.

Lesson 3***Student Handout 3.1—Evidence of Complex Society***

	Tigris-Euphrates Valley (Sumer)	Nile Valley (Egypt)	Indus Valley (Harrapan)	China (Shang dynasty)	Mesoamerica (Olmec)	South America (Moche)	Mediterranean (Minoan Crete)
Cities							
Central governments and law codes							
Writing and record-keeping							
Specialized jobs							
Social classes							
Complex technologies							
Highly organized religions							

Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.2—Early Complex Societies



Extension Activities

1. Grades 6-9

- Have students prepare collages either depicting characteristics of civilizations in a particular world region or depicting a particular characteristic of civilizations found in various complex societies.
- Have students write and illustrate a children's book about a particular civilization, or about one aspect (language, monuments) of several civilizations.

2. Grades 10-12

- Have students create a travel brochure for a "tour" of ancient civilizations that would include information not only about sites visitors would see but also information on meals, appropriate items to pack, modes of transportation, and so on.
- Have students research and write a report on which combination of political, economic, demographic, and environmental factors may have led to the collapse of their civilization.

This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

The student is able to (F) reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration in which historical developments have unfolded, and apply them to explain historical continuity and change.

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

The student is able to (H) utilize visual, mathematical, and quantitative data presented in charts, tables, pie and bar graphs, flow charts, Venn diagrams, and other graphic organizers to clarify, illustrate, or elaborate upon information presented in the historical narrative.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student is able to (A) compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions by identifying likenesses and differences.

Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

The student is able to (F) support interpretations with historical evidence in order to construct closely reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

Historical Thinking Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

The student is able to (B) marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances and current factors contributing to contemporary problems and alternative courses of action.

Resources

Instructional resources for teachers

Barber, Elizabeth Wayland, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women Cloth, and Society in Early Times*, New York: Norton, 1994. A readable book on early textiles. An account of how the changes associated with agriculture affected women.

Christian, David. *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Diamond, Jared. "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race." *Discover Magazine*. May, 1987

Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W.W.

- Norton, 1999. The second part of the book, titled “The Rise and Spread of Food Production,” has the chapters most relevant to this Big Era.
- Gepts, Paul. “Evolution of Crop Plants,” Department of Agronomy and Range Science, University of California, Davis. <http://agronomy.ucdavis.edu/gepts/pb143/pb143.htm>. This site has good information, photos, and links on plant domestication.
- Mears, John. “Agricultural Origins in Global Perspective.” In Michael Adas, ed., *Agricultural and Pastoral Societies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 36-70. A good, short account of agricultural origins. Not the easiest of reading, but brevity makes up for the effort required.
- McNeill, J. R. “The World According to Jared Diamond.” *The History Teacher* 34 (Feb. 2001.) A critique of Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. This essay is accessible at <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/34.2/mcneill.html>.
- McNeill, J. R., and William H. McNeill. *The Human Web: A Bird’s-Eye View of World History* New York: W. W. Norton, 2003.

Instructional resources for students

- Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates Human Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. The second part of this book, “The Rise and Spread of Food Production,” is composed of chapters that are most relevant to this era. The essays in this book are accessible for able high school students. The chapter titled “Spacious Skies and Tilted Axes” contains one of Diamond’s most compelling theses on the way in which crops and livestock as well as ideas spread.

Correlations to National and State Standards and to Textbooks

National Standards for History

Era One: The Beginnings of Human Society, 2A: The student understands how and why humans established settled communities and experimented with agriculture; 2B: The student understands how agricultural societies developed around the world. Era Two: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples, 4000 to 1000 BCE, 4: The student understands major trends in Eurasia and Africa from 4000 to 1000 BCE.

California: History-Social Science Content Standards

Grade 6.1: Students describe what is known through archaeological studies of the early physical and cultural development of mankind from the Paleolithic Era to the agricultural revolution.

Grade 6.2: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush.

Grade 6.5: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of India.

Grade 6.6: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of China.

New York: Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum

Unit One: Ancient World – Civilizations and Religions (4000 BC – 500 AD), B. Neolithic Revolution and early river civilizations, 1. Compare and contrast Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, and Yellow River Civilizations.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies

113.33 World History Studies. (c) Knowledge and Skills.

(1) History. The student understands traditional historical points of reference in world history. The student is expected to: (A) identify the major eras in world history and describe their defining characteristics; (B) identify changes that resulted from important turning points in world history such as the development of farming. (6) History. The student understands the major developments of civilizations of sub-Saharan Africa, Mesoamerica, Andean South America, and Asia. (12) Geography. The student understands the impact of geographic factors on major historic events. The student is expected to (A) locate places and regions of historical significance such as the Indus, Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, and Yellow (Huang He) river valleys and describe their physical and human characteristics. (13) Economics. The student understands the impact of the Neolithic agricultural revolution on humanity and the development of the first civilizations. The student is expected to (A) identify important changes in human life caused by the Neolithic agricultural revolution; (B) explain economic, social, and geographic factors that led to the development of the first civilizations.

Virginia Standards of Learning

World History and Geography to 1500 A.D. Era I: Human Origins and Early Civilizations, Prehistory to 1000 B.C. WHI.3 The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient river valley civilizations, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus River Valley, and China and the civilizations of the Hebrews, Phoenicians, and Kush, by a) locating these civilizations in time and place; b) describing the development of social, political, and economic patterns, including slavery; e) explaining the development of language and writing.