Early Agricultural Civilizations
Grades 6-8

Introduction

Geography played a crucial role in the development of ancient agricultural civilizations. The presence of large river systems, for example, was a major factor in determining where these civilizations would develop. Students will look at the Beginnings of Civilization map and the World Reference Atlas to find out where these civilizations were located and what geographical features exist in these areas. Use this lesson to complement a larger unit on ancient history and the development of early civilizations.

Time Frame: 2-3 class periods

Objectives and Standards

Students will:

• Map the ancient agricultural civilizations.
• Discuss why they think these civilizations were located where they were.
• Research the regions in which these civilizations were located and find out about the river systems, climate, and terrain in these places.
• Discuss the significance of geography to the development of early agricultural civilizations.

National Social Studies Standards:

• 2: Time, Continuity, and Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.
• 3: People, Places, and Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

National Geography Standards:

• 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
• 7: The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth's surface.
• 12: The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement

Maps and Materials Needed

Materials Needed:

• World Outline map:  

Additional Map Resources Used:

• World Reference Atlas:  

Procedure

1. Ask students to discuss and list the things that are needed for successful agriculture. Which of the items they listed were available before the Industrial Revolution? Ask them to think about what agriculture would have been like over three thousand years ago.

2. Ask students to look at the Beginnings of Civilization, 8000-900 B.C. map at

3. Explain to the class that by "agricultural civilization," we mean a large-scale, settled civilization whose economy was based primarily on the planting and distribution of crops (as opposed to hunting/gathering societies). Ask students to provide ideas as to why they think these early agricultural civilizations were located in these places. What was it about these parts of the world that encouraged agricultural settlement? Make sure students realize that most of these civilizations were located near major rivers.

4. Divide the class into small groups.

5. Have groups use the World Reference Atlas (http://www.maps101.com/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=items&id=3346:world&cid=8:reference-atlas) to match the major rivers listed in section 1 of their handout with the appropriate modern-day countries. They should find each country in the atlas and find the correct river on that country's map. Ask them to write the names of the rivers next to the corresponding countries in the table on their handout.

6. Once they've matched the rivers with the countries, ask students to look carefully at the four country maps and explain what the terrain is like near the river. Is it close to sea level or in the mountains? How would this terrain affect settlement and agriculture?

7. Have each group use the World Reference Atlas to investigate one of the remaining agricultural civilizations on their map (Mesoamerica, Peru, Central Africa, Greece, Vietnam, and Japan). Assign the civilizations so that all are covered by the class. Students should look at maps of the countries and regions and go to Statistics sections for these countries or for countries in these regions to see what the climate and terrain is like. Then should then describe the climate and terrain in section 2 of their handouts.
8. Have groups take turns telling the class about the region it's studied. Then discuss as a class the reasons why various parts of the world became agricultural civilizations. What did geography have to do with the development of these civilizations?

Assessment Suggestions

Check to make sure that students have:

- Participated in class discussions.
- Accurately mapped the early agricultural civilizations.
- Carefully examined the maps on the World Reference Atlas and completed their handouts with thoughtful responses.
1. Use the World Reference Atlas (http://www.maps101.com/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=items&id=3346;world&cid=8:reference-atlas) to find the countries on this list. As you look at each country map, find the river that was the center of an ancient agricultural civilization. Write the name of the river next to its country in the table. Then look carefully at the country map and explain what the terrain looks like near this river.

Choose from these river systems: Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, Indus, Yellow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>River</th>
<th>What is the terrain like near the river (is it near sea level or in the mountains?)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
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<td>Egypt</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
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2. Your group will be assigned another ancient agricultural civilization to find out more about. Use the World Reference Atlas to investigate your assigned civilization. Look at the map of the country that you've been assigned, or if you've been assigned a region, choose a country that's in that region and look at the map for that country. Then answer the questions below.

a) What is the climate like in this area?

b) What is the terrain like?