Religion, Social, and Political Order in Mesopotamia and Egypt

California Standard 6.2.3: Understand the relationship between religion and the social and political order in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Purpose: Students will learn about the religions, social classes, and political order in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Objectives:

- Students will read about the religions and social classes of Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- Students will compare the gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt.
- Students will read about the burial practices of both regions.
- Students will perform a Reader's Theater called “Beshet the Burial Priest”.
- Students will read about the Babylonian Empire.

Procedure:

- Day 1: Students will read about the religion and social classes of Sumer on pgs. 158-160 in A Message of Ancient Days.
- Day 2: Students will read the myth “The Luring of Enkidu” in A Message of Ancient Days on pgs. 164-167.
- Day 3: Introduce Egyptian gods and goddesses. Students will complete 2 worksheets helping them to associate the gods with their related symbol.
- Day 4: Read “Isis and Osiris” on pgs. 192-196 in A Message of Ancient Days.
- Day 6: Compare the gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt. (see handout)
- Day 7: Read a “Burial at Ur”. (see handout)
- Day 8: Present vocabulary for burial procedures
- Day 9: Perform a Reader’s Theater called “Beshet the Burial Priest”.
- Day 10: Read about the Babylonian Empire and the Hittites. (see handouts) Discuss.

Evaluation: Students will compare the gods of the Sumerians and Egyptians.

Note: The political order of Egypt will be discussed in the lesson on Queen Hatshepsut and Ramses II. (California Standard 6.2.7)
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The Many Egyptian Gods

**Horus**—son of Isis and Osiris. In mythology, he avenged the death of his father by killing Seth. During the battle he lost an eye, which was renewed by Isis. You see the Eye of Horus in paintings, amulets, and jewelry, representing renewal and protection. When people die, he leads them into the Underworld to be judged by weighing their hearts. He is sometimes depicted as the head of a falcon or as an entire falcon wearing a crown.

**Osiris**—one of the chief gods representing immortality. He presides over the Underworld, where he is the judge of the dead. A son of Nut and Geb, he married his sister, Isis, with whom he had a son, Horus. He is represented as a mummy in a royal crown, holding the crook and flail, the signs of sovereignty and power. Sometimes he is white (mummy wrappings), sometimes he is black (the Underworld), and sometimes he is green (spring and resurrection).

**Anubis**—messenger to Osiris and guard of the scales during the weighing of the heart ceremony. He is the god of embalming and presides over the mummification process. Priests wear his jackal head during rituals performed when working on a mummy.

**Isis**—sister and wife to Osiris, the goddess of magic and healing. She wears a headdress shaped like a cat. Some believe it is her tears for her dead husband that flood the Nile each year.

**Thoth (Troth)**—the god of wisdom and science. He is the scribe of the god world, recording all writing, counting, and measurement. Since he records time, he is also the god of the moon. He is husband to Ma’at and represented by the head of an ibis. Many times he is holding tools for writing or measuring.

**Seth (Set)**—evil brother of Osiris and therefore another son of Nut and Geb. Seth represents the lord of the desert and the god of storms, violence, and disorder. His battle with Horus illustrates the battle of night with day and the conquest of good over evil. He is represented with the head of an unidentified animal.

**Ammi**—not a god per se but a little monster who devours the souls of anyone judged impure or evil. He is part crocodile, part hippopotamus, and part lion.
Re/Amon/Amon-Re (Ra, pronounced ray)—the original god of the sun. He sails his boat across the sky between heaven and earth. Amon is the chief god in Thebes, the capital of Egypt during the New Kingdom. Eventually Re and Amon merged together to make Amon-Re, the supreme state god of Egypt. He is usually depicted with a large crown. Sometimes the crown also has the sun disc. Many pharaohs during the New Kingdom are also shown wearing this crown, representing their devotion to Amon-Re.

Ma'at—goddess of law and order and truth and balance. The Egyptians required precise order in their daily lives; they believed that without this balance and harmony, the world would be filled with destruction and chaos. Ma'at is the daughter of Re and wife of Thoth. The ostrich feather she wears on her head is put on the scales during the judgment ceremony. Sometimes Ma'at is shown sitting on the tip of the scales, and sometimes her entire body is being weighed on the scales itself.

Nut—represents the heavens as the sky goddess. She is sister and wife to Geb and mother of Osiris and Seth. Nut is believed to be one of the first gods. Usually she is represented as a lady arching over the earth god, Geb. Sometimes she is seen as a large cow, and sometimes she is depicted with stars, representing the night sky.

Re-Harakhti—merging of Horus and Re. Just as Amon-Re became the supreme state god, Re-Harakhti became seen as one of the sun gods. The falcon had the sun disc on his head, showing that he flies across the sky, carrying the sun.

Aten—another form of the sun god, this god is unlike any of the others—neither human nor animal. This sun disc with outstretched arms holds an ankh, representing everlasting life. He is the one and only god worshiped during the reign of King Akhenaten.

H'apy (Hapi)—god of the Nile and responsible for the proper workings of this precious river. He is usually shown as a long-haired man with papyrus and lotus flowers growing from the top of his head. He also has the chest of a woman, depicting fertility. He lives in a cave at the head of the Nile.
The Many Egyptian Gods (cont.)

**Ptah**—local god of Memphis, one of the ancient capitals of Egypt, and husband to Sekhmet. He is the parson of craftsmen, since it is believed that he invented the arts. He is shown as a hairless mummylike figure holding a large tool, and at the opening of the mouth ceremony during mummification, he uses the tool he holds.

**Hathor**—goddess of love, beauty, dancing, and music and protector of children and birth. She is often shown as a beautiful woman with the sun disc and horns of a cow. Sometimes she is depicted as a cow with the sun disc between her horns.

**Geb (Seb)**—the god of the earth. He usually poses below his sister-wife, Nut. Sometimes he is shown with a goose on his head, representing one of the many creation myths in which he laid the egg from which the world sprang.

**Sakhet**—brings destruction to all enemies of Re. She is the goddess of war and consulted by pharaohs. It was believed that her fiery breath was the hot winds of the Egyptian desert. She is wife to Ptah and has the head of a lion.

**Nephthys**—the nature goddess who represents the day, both before sunrise and after sunset. She is daughter of Nut and Geb, sister to Isis, wife to Seth, and mother of Anubis by Osiris. She wears on her head hieroglyphics that mean “lady of the house.”

**Mut**—goddess of Thebes and a great divine mother. She is pictured with the head of a vulture or a vulture headress.

**Bastet (Bast)**—household goddess representing joy and music. She is depicted as a cat—a prized animal in Ancient Egypt because rodents infested the granaries.
Identify Egyptian Gods

The Ancient Egyptians practiced polytheism, or the worship of many gods. Their first gods represented the natural elements that affected their daily lives, such as the sun, storms, river, and death. Each had to be encouraged and thanked in order for the people to prosper. Animals, both fierce and helpful, were also worshiped to help protect the people.

Over time, the Egyptians began to think of the gods as having human qualities, and, therefore, they were depicted with human shapes. But some of the gods retained the head of an animal. Each region in Egypt had its own special god, although gradually a few of these became worshiped throughout the land as universal gods.

As the many stories and myths were told about the gods and how they came into being, they became mixed together and changed. Therefore, many of the gods’ names, duties, and characteristics can vary from place to place, making the study of ancient religion very complex.

Use pages 118–120 to identify the figures in the Egyptian art below.
The Puzzling Egyptian Gods

Across
1. I am the sky goddess and gave birth to Osiris.
3. I am the god of death and the Underworld.
7. I am the god who presides over the mummification process.
8. I am the goddess of love and beauty.
9. I am the sun god who wears a tall crown.
11. I killed my brother Osiris and represent evil.
13. I am the creator of the arts.
15. I am the goddess with the face of a cat.

Down
2. I am responsible for the record keeping of time and measurement.
4. I am the goddess of war with the face of a lion.
5. I am wife to Osiris and goddess of magic.
6. I am the god of the earth and brother to Nut.
8. I am the guide to the Underworld and son of Isis.
10. I wear the feather of truth on my head.
12. I am the bringer of the Nile waters each year.
14. I am the one and only god of King Akhenaten.
16. I devour evil souls who do not pass the weighing of the heart ceremony.
Beshet the Burial Priest

Narrators 1-5
Hapun, Haret, Naturik,
Mintah, the priests

Beshet, Alexus, Knunum, the embalmer
Imset, Knunum's helpers
Damutef, Atif

Narrator 1: Many people believe the Ancient Egyptians were preoccupied with death. However, it was their love of life that dictated the extreme care given to those who died. The practice of mummification was a symbol of the Ancient Egyptians' desire to continue living in the next world as lavishly as they lived in this one. Beshet, one of the priests overseeing burial processes, will guide us as we learn about the many steps of the burial rites in Ancient Egypt.

Beshet: I am a priest, but rather than serve a god in a temple, I am responsible for supervising the many stages of burial. It is my job to make sure that the deceased is fully equipped to make the journey into the afterlife by observing the proper customs, rituals, and mummification steps. The entire process is quite complex.

Mintah: We believe that when a person dies, various spirits are released from the body. The ka is the person's spiritual double, or shadow. The ka is formed at birth and has an independent existence. It can move freely from place to place and enjoy life with the gods in heaven. The ka needs nourishment, so we bring offerings of food and drink to the tomb for its sustenance.

Beshet: The ba is like the soul and symbolizes the living personality. The ba has the body of a bird, because it flies out of the tomb during the day to visit its relatives and loved ones. The ba returns at night to its tomb.

Mintah: There is also the akh, or the supernatural power of the deceased. It is the akh that makes the perilous journey to the Underworld to be judged for the afterlife. With all of these spirits it is important that the body of the deceased be preserved so that its spirits can recognize it and return safely to it. Without its spirits, the deceased cannot exist in the afterlife. Here comes Alexus. He is a very old priest who remembers how things were done in the beginning.

Alexus: In the earliest days, a body was "put to rest" in the sleeping position with the elbows and knees drawn together. The body was placed in a pit dug into the hot sands. Items such as jars of food or tools were also placed in the pit for use in the afterlife. Sand was pushed over the body, allowing it to dry quickly and wither but not decay. However, these graves were subject to raids by hyenas and jackals, which dug up the bodies and chewed them to pieces. This would not do if the spirits were going to recognize the bodies and return. Therefore, we began protecting bodies in coffins made from reeds and wooden planks and sealed in tombs. Still, the coffins did not protect bodies from decay, and once again the spirits were left with no home.
Mintah: Through these many years, the technique of mummification has been perfected, allowing us to preserve the body and still bury it within a coffin and tomb for added protection. Now the spirits can enjoy a peaceful afterlife forever!

Narrator 2: Although the mummification process preserved the body, no means were ever developed to completely lay the body safely to rest. Tombs were robbed and pillaged for their riches. Even the mummies were robbed and destroyed. The word “mummy” comes from the Arabic word *mummiya*, which means “bitumen” or “resin.” Medieval doctors believed the resin covering the mummies could cure illness. For this reason, mummies were scavenged and sent to Europe, where they were ground up and swallowed as medicine.

Beshet: Originally only the wealthy and noble received such elaborate mummification. Eventually all bodies were preserved in some manner. The complexity and care taken during the mummification process indicates a person’s status. Let us head over to the west bank of the Nile to the *embalming pavilion*, or funerary workshop. Here Knunum and his helpers can explain the steps of the mummification process, which takes about 60–70 days.

Knunum: Once a body comes to our tent, we remove the clothing and lay it on a long, narrow, wooden board or table. Here you see Atif insert an instrument up through the nostrils to remove the brain.

Atif: The heart is the only organ that is saved and preserved inside the body cavity. We believe the heart is the center of all intelligence and emotions. The brain, however, is useless, and, therefore, it is removed in bits and discarded. Now I will clean the mouth and fill it with sweet-smelling oiled linens.
Beshet the Burial Priest (cont.)

Knunum: Before an incision can be made in the body, a priest wearing the mask of Anubis, the god of embalming, draws a line down the body. Another will approach, make the incision, and then be chased from the area with curses. This ritual is performed to calm the spirits, since it is forbidden to injure another Egyptian. Haret and Naturik are working on another body that has already been opened.

Haret: This morning we made the incision into the abdomen and removed the contents. The intestines were put into a jar and presented with a prayer to the sun. The diaphragm was then cut, and we removed the contents of the chest cavity, except for the heart.

Naturik: Now we will wash the inside of the body with palm wine and spices. This works as a disinfectant, flushing away all materials that might cause decay. The internal organs are then sprinkled with perfume, treated with hot resin, packaged, and placed into four separate canopic jars representing the four sons of Horus.

Haret: The lids of these jars have the heads of the gods to protect the organs. The liver is placed in a human-headed jar and the lungs in an ape-headed jar. The stomach is sealed in a jar with the head of a jackal, and a hawk-headed jar hold the intestines. Then we pack the chest and abdomen cavities with straw, sand, and rags so that it will keep its shape as it dries with the natron, or salt. We then pack the canopic jars into a large trunk or chest.

Naturik: This body is on a sloping board so that any fluids can drip away without causing a puddle inside the body. The body will stay packed in heaps of natron for about 40 days. Then it will be dried and ready for further embalming. Imset and Hapun will describe the final embalming steps.

Imset: Once the body is removed from the natron, we remove its stuffing and wash it with water and palm wine. Watch Hapun stuff the cranial cavity with resin-soaked linen. The abdomen and chest cavities are restuffed with small linen bags filled with sawdust, myrrh, and, sometimes, onions. Now he sews up the body and applies a plate of gold or beeswax over the incision.
Besht the Burial Priest (cont.)

Hapun: Imset will now rub the body with cedar oil, cumin, wax, natron, gum, wine, and milk. He then dusts the body with crushed spices, such as myrrh and cassia. In order for the spirits to recognize the body, we make it look lifelike by padding the cheeks and eye sockets with linen. Finally, it is time to plug the nose and close the eyelids. We then cover the body with molten resin from local trees, which turns very black as it dries and hardens.

Imset: The last stage is to paint on eyebrows and wrap the body in linen. Damutef is our expert in this final ritual.

Damutef: Wrapping the body usually requires about 150 yards of linen. The attention to details while wrapping depends on the social class of the individual. Someone from a higher class will have each finger, toe, and limb individually wrapped before wrapping the body as a whole. About 100 protective amulets or pieces of jewelry are placed inside the bandages to strengthen the parts of the body.

The heart scarab represents rebirth, the pillar represents strength, and the Eye of Horus restores health. We also include fragrant herbs such as sprigs of rosemary and flower bulbs. The wrapped mummy is then brushed again with resin, and the mummy mask depicting the individual is placed over the face. The entire mummy is then placed into a coffin painted with the person’s portrait so that the spirits will know where to return. During all of these steps, prayers are chanted to ensure proper preservation.

Besht: On the day of the burial, friends and relatives come to the embalming pavilion. The corpse is carried across the Nile on a barge to the cemetery in the western desert. The funeral procession consists of priests, relatives, and professional mourners who are paid to wail and tear at their garments and hair. These actions show grief for the departed and also help ward evil away from the coffin.
Beshet the Burial Priest (cont.)

Mintah: The coffin is then placed in a boat-shaped sled and drawn by oxen to the tomb. It is attended by two women mourners who represent the goddesses Isis and Nephthys. A priest waving a censer and sprinkling milk heads the procession. Behind the coffin comes the chest containing the canopic jars, followed by the person's belongings that are to be buried with the body and used in the afterlife.

Narrator 3: The Egyptians believed that in their afterlife was a paradise known as the Field of Reeds. In this version of heaven the grain grew tall and the fruit was plentiful. The dead were required to plow and tend to these fields to keep everything in order. Therefore, small statues called shabtis, or "little servants," were also buried in order to work for the deceased in the afterlife.

Alexus: A number of spells and incantations are said during the procession, many of them chosen by the person before death. These are taken from the Book of the Dead. This book contains over 200 verses, hymns, prayers, and magic spells to help the deceased make the trip to the Underworld, pass through to the Field of Reeds, and ensure a happy afterlife. Verses from the Book of the Dead are also painted on the coffin, tomb walls, and papyrus scrolls.

Knunum: Once we reach the tomb, we conduct the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth. We stand the coffin upright, and it is supported by a priest wearing the mask of Anubis. Priests and the eldest son of the deceased then scatter water over the coffin, burn incense, and touch the mouth of the mummy case with special magical implements. Spells are recited in which the god Ptah gives the dead person the ability to eat, speak, and move as if still alive. Offerings are made. Then the afterlife can be enjoyed, because the spirits that left the corpse during mummification can now know where to return.
Atif: The coffin is then placed in an outer coffin, which is a series of two or three other coffins painted with magical texts and illustrations to help the deceased in the Underworld. This added protection varies, depending on the person’s social class. Finally, the painted coffins are placed into a large stone sarcophagus, and the deceased’s belongings are arranged around the tomb.

Narrator 4: The upper part of the tomb consisted of a chapel where the statues and paintings were situated. Here priests and relatives could visit on anniversaries and festival days. The burial site itself was located at the bottom of a deep shaft to discourage grave robbers.

Naturik: Once the mummy and its belongings are in place, we sweep the burial chamber to remove all traces of human life and to keep it free from evil. Then we carefully seal the tomb forever. We break weapons to keep harm away from the dead. Relatives enjoy a funerary feast outside the tomb as the akh travels through the floor of the burial chamber into the Underworld and the Hall of Judgment.

Haret: Using the verses from the Book of the Dead, the akh moves through gateways guarded by terrifying gods such as serpents, vultures, and hippopotamuses. They stop any unworthy akh. The worthy akh reaches the Hall of Judgment, or Two Truths. Here it is judged to see if it is fit to live forever in the kingdom of Osiris and enjoy paradise in the Field of Reeds. At the judgment scene are Anubis, the god of mummification, who presides over the judgment; Thoth, the god of wisdom, who records the events; and a set of scales. The heart of the deceased is put on one side of the scale, where it is weighed against Ma’at or her feather of truth.

Imset: Forty-two gods then question the heart, accusing its owner of unthinkable crimes. The heart denies all charges, but only the goddess of truth, Ma’at, can determine whether or not it is lying.

Narrator 5: Naturally, all Egyptians hope to pass this test. They always showed hearts balanced with Ma’at’s truth and not weighed down with evil. This may have been a source of such phrases as having a “heavy heart” when we are troubled or feeling “light hearted” when we are happy. The Egyptians also gave us the heart as a symbol of emotion. Imagine what Valentine’s Day would be like if they had known the brain was actually our center of emotion and intelligence!

Imset: If the heart does not pass the test, it is tossed to Ammit, the Devourer of the Dead, who sits beside the scales. She gobbles it up and brings complete destruction on all parts of the soul and prevents it from going on to an afterlife. If the heart is innocent, the akh passes into the throne room of Osiris. Once blessed by Osiris, the deceased can then proceed to paradise in the Field of Reeds.

Besheit: This is a celebration of the life that will continue eternally in a perfect world, free from hardships. Death is only the gateway into this world, and by providing the dead with all of these things, we ensure that life’s pleasures will continue forever.
Compare Polytheism

Many of the ancient civilizations practiced polytheism, or the belief in and worship of many gods. People believed that a variety of gods controlled different parts of the earth, natural occurrences, their daily lives, and their futures. By offering gifts and prayers to the appropriate gods, they hoped to win favor and be blessed with good fortune.

There were many similarities among the ancient polytheistic religions. One of the most well-known cultures to worship many gods was the Ancient Egyptians. Use resource materials and the chart below to compare the names and roles of these gods. How are the religions similar? How are they different?

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As an extension, research the names of the gods worshiped by the Ancient Egyptians. What similarities do you find?
Burial at Ur (cont.)

On one wall of the tomb leaned the bodies of nine women believed to have been women of the king’s court. All of them wore extravagant head coverings laden with beads, gold leaves, and silver combs. The king himself was buried in a smaller room and accompanied by male servants. The passageway leading to this inner chamber was lined with the bodies of soldiers carrying daggers and golden spears. It was apparent that years earlier grave robbers had ransacked the king’s chamber and stolen most of the prized ornaments.

Although these tombs were very old, built between 2700 B.C. and 2500 B.C., they still told historians much about life in Sumer. The artifacts and relics showed that the Sumerians were skilled in building, crafts, and art. Their kings had great power and wealth and were treated as gods. Since the land of Sumer had no metals or stone and very little wood, the merchants must have traded with many lands that could provide these materials. Soldiers appeared to be well trained and carried weapons. The graves also revealed that the people had a complex writing system far ahead of other people of their time.

Activities

1. Research other ancient civilizations and compare their burial practices with those of the Sumerians at Ur. Interesting early civilizations include those in Egypt, Mexico (Aztecs and Mayans), Greece, China, Rome, Japan, and India. Discuss the similarities and differences among them, and prepare a report to present to the class.

2. Imagine you were a powerful king in Sumer. Draw and label a picture showing your burial tomb. Describe its contents and why they were included.

3. Make a chart showing how ancient burial practices varied depending on one’s social class. Discuss these differences and how this has or has not changed in modern times.
Burial at Ur

The land of Ur is barren now, a desert with only a few shepherds tending their sparse flocks. It is hard to believe that this region in ancient Sumer once held a great city surrounded by lush fields of wheat and barley. Inside the city walls, the people built grand palaces and temples to honor their kings and their gods. There were family homes, schools, workshops, other buildings of mud bricks and reeds, and a bustling marketplace.

We learn about the life, law, and history of Sumer through clay tablets that have survived the centuries. The ruins of other Sumerian cities like Ur also reveal secrets about this early civilization. In 1927 an English archaeologist named Sir Leonard Woolley was excavating in the desert sand of southern Iraq. He believed the great Sumerian city of Ur had stood on that spot thousands of years ago. As he uncovered artifacts, he found that he had indeed discovered the ancient burial site of Ur.

With the help of Arab workers, about 2,000 graves were found and documented. Most of them belonged to common people who had been buried lying on their sides as if sleeping. Inside the coffins were beads, earrings, knives, and pins. Jars of food and water, daggers, tools, mirrors, and combs were arranged around the outside. Presumably these items were buried with the dead to help them in their trip to the next world.

Woolley also unearthed 16 large tombs of stone or mud brick that contained one or more rooms. In contrast to the commoners' graves, these tombs were like underground palaces. Inside the tombs he found the bones of dead kings, as well as the bones of the people who had served them. Clues at the site revealed that the servants had entered the tombs alive and then swallowed a drug that killed them painlessly. By dying with their kings, whom they believed to be gods, they would be able to serve them in the afterlife.

One of the tombs was filled with riches and many servants' bones and must have belonged to a very powerful and popular king. At its entrance were two neat rows of the bodies of six guards with copper spears and copper helmets. Just inside the tomb stood two wagons, each pulled by three oxen. The drivers were still in the wagons, and the leather reins were decorated with deep blue stones and beads of silver.
Beshet the Burial Priest—Vocabulary and Comprehension

Write the following words on the chalkboard for students to copy on index cards for their picture dictionary. Tell students to write each word on a card. Remind them to research and write a complete definition, explanation, or example on and draw a picture.

- ba, ka, akh
- Book of the Dead
- judgment scene
- mumification, natron
- Opening of the Mouth ceremony
- Field of Reeds
- canopic jars
- sarcophagus
- embalming pavilion

Use some or all of the following questions for whole-class discussion, small-group work, or individual written assessment. Allow students to refer to Beshet the Burial Priest to answer them.

1. Why did the ancient Egyptians take such special care to preserve the body of the dead? (They believed that spirits left the body at death. For the spirits to return to the correct body, it had to be well preserved so that the spirits could identify it. Without a preserved body, the spirits had no home, and the deceased would have no afterlife.)

2. How did the earliest Egyptians preserve the bodies without mumifying them? (Bodies were preserved by burying them in the hot desert sands to dry.)

3. Briefly describe the steps for mumifying a body. (The body is taken to the embalmer’s pavilion. The brain is removed through the nostrils. The mouth is cleaned and stuffed with oiled linens. An incision is made in the torso, and all the internal organs except the heart are removed. Some are placed in special canopic jars to be buried with the deceased. The inside of the body is washed and stuffed to keep its shape. The entire body is covered in natron for 40 days and put on a slanting board to drain. The natron is removed, the body is cleaned again and restuffed with linen and herbs. The body is sewn up and covered with oils and spices. Finally, it is covered with resin and wrapped with yards of linen.)

4. Why was the heart left in the body of the mummy? (The ancient Egyptians believed it was the center of emotion and intelligence. The heart is needed by the deceased to pass the weighing of the heart ceremony in the Underworld.)

5. Describe the Egyptian form of heaven. (Afterlife in the Field of Reeds is just like life in Egypt except that there are no worries, problems, or sickness.)

6. What steps must be taken before the deceased can reach heaven? (The deceased’s ahi must pass into the Underworld and face the judgment scene. Here the heart is weighed against Ma’at’s feather of truth. If the heart is heavy, it is tossed to Anmit, who gobbles it up and destroys a chance for an afterlife. If the heart balances with truth, the ahi proceeds to Osiris and the Field of Reeds.)

7. How does the Egyptian concept of heaven compare with that of some modern religions? (Accept reasonable answers.)
The Last Babylonian Empire (cont.)

Science, especially astronomy, flourished during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Early Babylonian astronomers had developed calendars based on the phases of the moon without considering the sun. Now astronomers created a more accurate calendar. The Babylonians divided the hour into 60 minutes and developed the concept of place value using base 60. Babylonians were also the people who gave Mesopotamia its first written laws—Hammurabi’s Code.

Unfortunately Babylonian leaders made the same mistakes as the Assyrians. They worked hard to maintain their wealthy empire but did little to gain loyalty from the people they conquered. Around 550 B.C. they were vulnerable to attack from the Persians to the east. Led by Cyrus the Great, the Persian army defeated the Babylonians, paving the way for the Persian Empire to become the largest the world had ever known.

Questions and Activities:

1. How were the Assyrian and Babylonian rulers alike? Why did both empires fall?

2. What could the leaders have done to gain more loyalty from the people that they conquered?

3. What contributions did the Babylonians make to advance civilization? Make a chart or web diagram showing these achievements.

4. Draw a picture depicting one of the great building projects of King Nebuchadnezzar. Use research materials such as your social studies book, encyclopedia, or other historical texts.

5. Imagine you live in Babylonia. Write a letter to a friend describing your new king, Nebuchadnezzar. Tell about the improvements he is making in Babylon and your opinion of him as a leader. Then write a letter to a friend as if you were a Jew in Judah. What is your opinion of Nebuchadnezzar? How do these letters differ?

6. Why do you think it is important for historians to evaluate as many different sources as possible regarding a time period? How could our understanding of the past be swayed by viewing only a few sources?
Mesopotamia was a land in constant turmoil. The two major powers that fought to rule the region were the Assyrians in the north and the Babylonians in the south. By 650 B.C. the New Assyrian Empire covered the entire Fertile Crescent from the Persian Gulf to Egypt. However, the Assyrians were not popular. They took slaves, silver, gold, iron, copper, crops, and livestock from their subjects in order to build magnificent cities. The Assyrians also relocated the people who rebelled against their tyranny. This practice made them even more despised, and soon neighboring armies joined with those of Babylonia to overthrow the Assyrians.

In 612 B.C. Babylonia was once again in power, and its ruling city was the great Babylon. The Babylonians became great conquerors and traders who created trade networks that extended into Lebanon, Egypt, and Greece. In order to protect these trade routes, they sent their armies west. Leading these armies was King Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled from 605–562 B.C. He captured important cities such as Jerusalem and Tyre and drove the Egyptians out of Syria and Phoenicia, further opening a passage to the Mediterranean Sea.

As King Nebuchadnezzar moved westward, he conquered the Phoenicians, Phillistines, and Jews. These people were just as unhappy under Babylonian rule as they had been under the Assyrians. Nebuchadnezzar was forced to send troops every year to put down rebellions. In 598 B.C. the Jews in Judah refused to pay their taxes. King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and forced the Jews from their homeland to Mesopotamia. In 587 B.C. he burned the city of Jerusalem destroyed the sacred temple, and sent thousands of Jews to Babylon as slaves.

King Nebuchadnezzar did more for Babylonia than just conquer other people and take more land. He built walls and fortifications to protect Babylon and great temples to glorify the gods. He rebuilt the massive Ziggurat and created the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon. These gardens consisted of scented plants and trees that grew from high terraces inside the thick city walls. These magnificent gardens are one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.
While the Assyrians were creating an empire in Mesopotamia, the Hittites were developing a civilization in the Near East. The Hittites adopted much of the culture of the Near East. They adopted many of the regional gods and goddesses, and eventually their religion had more than a thousand deities. The Hittites built a well-fortified capital city surrounded by stone walls up to 26 feet (8m) thick and more than four miles long. This city, Hattusas, stood 3,000 feet above sea level on a rugged plateau ringed by mountains.

The Hittites learned the cuneiform writing of Mesopotamia and used it along with their own hieroglyphics. Much like Egyptian hieroglyphics, which were unraveled after the Rosetta Stone was found, the Hittite language was decoded using a clay tablet that had both Hittite and Phoenician hieroglyphics.

Societies were growing more complex. People lived in constant fear of attack from neighboring cities. The Hittites were not brutal conquerors like the Assyrians and Egyptians, so they had to develop ways to defend themselves against invasion while also building their empire. At first, they developed more advanced weapons using iron ore. They made powerful spears and hatchets that were superior to bronze weapons. But eventually the Assyrians acquired their secret and learned how to use iron. Now a new form of defense was needed.

Relations between the Hittites and the neighboring Egyptians had been strained for many years. During the reign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten (1375–1358 B.C.), the Hittites took advantage of Egypt’s weakened state. Egypt was experiencing religious upheaval because of Pharaoh Akhenaten’s command to abolish all past Egyptian gods and worship only Aten, the sun god. Using this internal distraction to their advantage, the Hittites expanded into northern Syria. Once Ramses II became pharaoh of Egypt around 1300 B.C., he set out to win Syria back—and was successful after a devastating battle. Both armies suffered heavy losses, and for years the two empires remained enemies.
THE RISE AND FALL OF EMPIRES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Suppiliuma stroked his chin. "These may be the horses that I seek," he said to his servant. They looked strong and sure-footed. They had been specially bred to draw the large Hittite war chariots. Unlike other nations, the Hittites mounted three heavily-armed men instead of two. To pull such a load at high speed into battle, the Hittites learned to master horsemen. There was even a detailed Hittite manual on horse care: when to wash them, rub them with oil, care for their feet. As a Hittite warrior, the most important things in Suppiliuma's life were his horses and his chariot.

With their mighty chariots, the Hittites conquered most of the Middle East, except for Egypt. The Hittites were more than just horsemen and conquerors, however. They borrowed cuneiform writing from the Babylonians to keep detailed records and preserve hymns and myths. They also built a beautiful capital city at Hattusa in Anatolia, which is part of modern-day Turkey. Hattusa was surrounded by walls 25 feet thick. Every 100 feet, square, double towers guarded gateways into the city. Within Hittite palaces, the walls were decorated with images of Hittites fighting battles and celebrating festivals. They depicted themselves as short and stocky with high cheekbones and recessed chins. From Hattusa the Hittite kings administered their empire through a surprisingly humane law code. Instead of following the old Babylonian law codes that required an eye for an eye, the Hittite laws were based on restitution. Arsonists were required to replace property that they set afire. Murderers could go free after they paid the family of the victim a large amount of silver, slaves, or land. Hittite society was feudal. Nobles held land from the king in return for promises of troops and chariots in time of war. Yet, after only 500 years, Hattusa was attacked by the mysterious Sea Peoples and destroyed along with most of its population.

The Middle East wasn't to be without an empire for long. The Assyrian Empire stepped into the space once filled by the Hittites. They came from the northern part of Mesopotamia. Their empire, however, was far different. Their chief deity was Ashur, the god of war. As a result, they were interested only in preserving tradition and the arts and sciences of armed conflict. Instead of law codes, the Assyrians relied on terror and intimidation to control the Middle East. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser I behaved like a typical Assyrian king when he blinded 14,000 defeated enemy soldiers and then carried them off to Assyria as slaves. The Assyrians also forced conquered peoples to move from their homes to new
lands where they were used as forced labor to build impressive cities like the capital, Nineveh. However, such actions ultimately failed, and the Assyrian kings spent much of their time crushing rebellions. At last, an alliance, including many of those who had suffered under Assyrian control, rose up and destroyed the empire.

The last and greatest Middle Eastern empire of the ancient world was that of the Persians. Their home was in modern-day Iran, but their empire stretched from the Indus Valley across the Middle East to include Egypt and the Ionian coast. The Persian kings, beginning with their founder Cyrus, ruled with wisdom and toleration. Unlike Egyptian pharaohs, Cyrus left instructions for his body to be buried in a small, simple tomb. Instead of terrorizing the people within their empire like the Assyrians did, the Persians respected local traditions and honored the local gods. They tried to interfere as little as possible with the affairs of the people within their empire, be they Egyptian, Mesopotamian, or Assyrian. The origin of this attitude can be seen in the founder of their religion, Zoroaster. This mysterious man lived sometime in the sixth century B.C. and taught that the universe was divided into good and bad, light and darkness. The god of light was Ahura Mazda. To follow him and find eternal life, one must lead a moral life based on truth. Although the empire of the Persians fell within two centuries of its foundation, there are still those who follow Zoroaster in modern-day India and Iran.

A descendant of Cyrus, Darius, constructed a great capital at Persepolis. The Persian builders borrowed architectural styles from all over the Middle East. The city was built on terraces like Babylon. Its walls were decorated with reliefs of Assyrian human-headed bulls. The doorways looked like those found in Egyptian temples. Finally, columns from far-off Greece held up the roof of the audience hall. At the time, Darius would never have dreamed that the Greeks would someday come to dominate the political and cultural life of Persia.