HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Covering the entire history of the world from the very beginning of human life up to the 5th century C.E. is a gargantuan task! Teachers have to pack almost 400,000 years of the human story into one short academic year, including 10,000 years of human settlement and 1,500 years of complex civilization. What are the main themes of this vast duration of history?

The evolution in complexity of human settlement has taken us from hunter/gatherers, to agriculturalists, to members of advanced civilizations. The culmination of this chronology is the development of empires, in which one civilization expands to control others across diverse geographic regions. This process happened differently in different parts of the world.

The geographic diversity of the world and how geography has impacted the development of civilizations is another major theme. For instance, the productive soil of the Fertile Crescent and its location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa compelled Mesopotamia to a highly advanced status among early civilizations. Greece’s rocky islands and peninsulas, moreover, influenced the development of independent city-states.

This period of world history also witnessed the development and growth of important trade routes, the birth of democracy and republican government, and the emergence of many of the world’s important religions. Giving students a thorough overview of these major themes is a challenge, but also a wonderful opportunity to broaden their perspectives on the world and its rich cultures.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

This primary source set is geared towards the 6th grade Social Studies curriculum standards. The curricular units, such as “Mesopotamia: 3500-1700 B.C./B.C.E.” and “Ancient China,” are retained here in the subheadings, about two per page, and follow the order in the standards. Sixth grade teachers can use this set throughout the year as they cover different civilizations and events.

Several of the following primary sources are parts of online exhibitions that would make good secondary source reading assignments for students, due to the explanatory narrative and development of world history themes.

Because most primary sources created during this early time period were created so very long ago, very few of them have survived to the present day. Many of the following sources are therefore creations of later time periods that depict a building or cultural tradition that represent an earlier era. Talk to your students about what kinds of sources remain, and what they (and later ones) can reveal about early civilizations.

Thèbes. Bas-relief dans l'interieur du Rhames-séion. Égypte / Bonfils. [c.1867-1899]

ADDITIONAL LINKS

- World Digital Library
- World History Lesson Plans
- World History Links Guide
- World History & Cultures newsletter (September 2009)
- The Ancient World newsletter (January 2011)
- The Legacy of Greece and Rome (Primary Source Set)
- Browse by Topic: World History and Cultures
FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION: C. 10,000-3500 BCE

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: C. 3500-1700 BCE

- Rock Painting S00176, Bethlehem, Dihlabeng District Municipality, Free State, South Africa [1986 CE]
- Agriculture Around the World (Lesson Plan)

ANCIENT EGYPT: C. 3000-700 BCE

- School exercise tablets (c. 2200-1900 BC)
- Write Like A Sumerian (Lesson Plan)

- Pyramides de Chéops et de Cheffren, le sphynx, et la temple de Cheffren [c.1869-1899]
- The Great Temple of Aboo-Simble, Nubia [c.1846-1849]

- Mummy, Ramses II [1898-1946]
- Thèbes, Bas-relief dans l'interieur du Rhames-séion [c. 1867-1899]
Ancient Israel: c. 2000-500 BCE

[Caves of Qumran where Dead Sea scrolls were found] [1958]

Palestine, Tribes, and Jerusalem [1783]

Pesher Hoshe’a. 4Q166 [Copied late first century B.C.E.] Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority (6) Translation


Hebrew Bible [c.1300]
- Hebrew Bible
- Illuminated Manuscripts (Lesson Activity)
ANCIENT INDIA: c. 2500–400 BCE

Book VII.

THE MASTER SAID:

With heart attached to Me, son of Pritha, taking refuge in Me, joining himself to Me, may the lord of all the worlds know Me perfectly, free from doubt.

This wisdom and knowledge shall I declare to thee, without reserve; knowing this, naught remains to be known in the world.

Among thousands of men, one strives for perfection; of those who strive and achieve, one knows Me truly.

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, thought, self-consciousness; these is My nature divided eightfold.

This is My lower nature; but know thou also My higher nature, as manifested Life, whereby this whole world is upheld.

(4) Know that all beings are born from this; for I am the forthcoming and withdrawal of the whole world.

Mahābhāratakālīna
Bhāratavarshācā nakāsā.
[19--?]

Compare to modern political map of India.

ANCIENT CHINA: c. 2500 BCE–200 CE

Liu sheng Huang He sao ba he dao quan tu. [c. 1824-1825]

The Analects of Confucius [1533]

China [1996]
ANCIENT GREECE, C. 800–300 BCE

Asia Minor, Corinth, ruins of the Temple of Apolo [i.e., Apollo] [c.1950-1960]


The Empire and Expeditions of Alexander the Great [1833]

Greece - Athens - The Parthenon - near view [c.1925]

Greece, Delphi, the theatre. Temple of Apollo on left [c.1950-1960]

- The Legacy of Greece and Rome (Primary Source Set)
ANCIENT ROME, c. 500 BCE-500 CE

Veduta dell' arco di Costantino, e dell' anfiteatro Flavio detto il colosseo [c.1746-1760] (Translation: “View of the Arch of Constantine and the Flavian Amphitheatre called the Colosseum”)

Rome, Baths of Caracalla [c.1860-1890]

History and Ethnology of Ancient Rome: 4 illus: fig. 1 Exhibition of captives in the forum; fig. 2 Gladiators in the theatre; fig. 3 Gladiators at funerals; fig. 4. Funeral of Emperors [1851]

Rome par la voie du Mont-Cenis / Geo Dorival. [c. 1920]

Stone bridge and San Giorgia (i.e., Giorgio), Verona, Italy [c.1890-1900]

Rome, Frescoes in house of Claudius Nero. Palace of the Caesars [c.1860-1890]

Theatrum historicum ad annum Christi quadringentesimum : in quo tum Imperii Romani tum Barbarorum circum incolentium status ob oculosponitur pars orientalis / [1712]

(Translation: “The Historical Theater in the Year 400 AD, in Which Both Romans and Barbarians Resided Side by Side in the Eastern Part of the Roman Empire” and blurb)
Teachers: Providing these primary source replicas without source clues may enhance the inquiry experience for students. This list of citations is supplied for reference purposes to you and your students. We have followed the Chicago Manual of Style format, one of the formats recommended by the Library of Congress, for each entry below, minus the access date. The access date for each of these entries is February and March, 2019.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:


FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION: c. 10,000-3500 BCE


ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: c. 3500-1700 BCE

“School exercise tablet.” Photograph. [c.2200-1900 BCE]. From Library of Congress, Cuneiform Tablets: From the Reign of Gudea of Lagash to Shalmanassar III. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?intldl/cunei:@field(DOCID+@lit(amcune000004))


ANCIENT EGYPT: c. 3000-700 BCE


ANCIENT ISRAEL: c. 2000-500 BCE


ANCIENT INDIA: c. 2500-400 BCE

“[Brahman priest, in India, painting his forehead with the red and white marks of his sect and caste].” Photograph. [c.1900-1923]. From Library of Congress, Carpenter Collection. http://www.loc.gov/item/94509889/

ANCIENT CHINA: c. 2500 BCE– 200 CE


CITATIONS CONTINUED...

ANCIENT GREECE, c. 800-300 BCE


ANCIENT ROME, c. 500 BCE– 500 CE


“History and Ethnology of Ancient Rome: 4 illus: fig. 1 Exhibition of captives in the forum; fig. 2 Gladiators in the theatre; fig. 3 Gladiators at funerals; fig. 4. Funeral of Emperors.” 1 print : engraving. [1851]. From Library of Congress, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand. http://www.loc.gov/item/2006679885/


