

Teachers Notes for the Premium TimeMaps Unit

The Ancient Middle East

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Section 1: Introduction

One Unit, Two Resources

This Premium TimeMaps Unit is based on a **sequence of maps** showing the Ancient Middle East between 3500 BCE and 500 BCE - three thousand years of history!.

This sequence is presented in **two resources**, a slide show and a series of map pages, facilitating **two approaches** to covering the topic with your students: a whole-class presentation; and individual project work, for which the institution will need a multiuser licence so that the students can access the resources for themselves.

1. Slide show

The slide show is primarily designed for use as a whole-class presentation. Commentary notes are available as an *aide memoir* for the teacher when delivering the presentation. They provide talking points on each map in the slide show.

The slide show can also be used by the students in their project work. A students' commentary is also provided.

2. Timemaps map pages

These are designed specifically for use by students in their project work.

Each map shows the Middle East at a particular date. The maps are accompanied by information about what is happening in the region at that date.

This combination of map and information makes it easy for students to use the map pages, though not so ideal for teachers to use as a class presentation (hence the slideshow, see above).

Section 2: Using the Resources

The unit can be used in one of two ways:

1. Whole-class presentation

The **slide show** is specifically designed for teachers to use as a whole class presentation, offering a visual, panoramic overview of the topic. It can be used as an introduction to the topic, or as a wrap up, or as a stand-alone resource.

A commentary is provided to help teachers cover the key points for each slide.

In Section 3 Task 2 (below), are a series of questions (they are also found at the end of the commentary), which can be answered by a single word or short phrase. The questions aim to reinforce the learning outcomes from the presentation, and can be used as a test or reinforcement exercise at the end of the presentation.

Another way might be to print the questions out and give them to the students, and ask the students to note down the answers as the slide show progresses. They can either submit their answers for marking, or collaborate in small groups to come up with an agreed set of answers.

2. Student-based enquiry work

Students use the maps, plus linked information, to find out for themselves about the topic. In the process, they gain knowledge and understanding of the topic, whilst at the same time developing analytical and other thinking skills.

Students can use either **map pages** or **slide show**. In the map pages, the linked information is right next to the maps; in the slide show, it is in the student commentary.

In either case the institution will need a multiuser licence.

Both slide show and map pages are built around the same series of maps, following the history of the Middle East from 3500 BCE to 500 BCE.

Simple forward/back navigation buttons (and in the map pages, a timeline below the maps) make it easy to move through the map sequence.

To start the sequence of map pages, click on the map dated Ancient Middle East 3500 BCE.

To start the slide show, click HERE.

Teachers may wish to combine the whole-class presentation approach with the student-based approach - for examples, see Section 4.

Section 3: Suggested Activities

In this section are some suggestions to using this Premium Unit actively in the classroom.

Students can do the activities as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have direct access to this Premium TimeMap unit, for which a multi-user licence is required.

Task 1. Preparatory work - Geographical Background

Students will benefit from some preliminary work to introduce the Middle East. Some suggestions are:

1. Locate the Middle East on a world map (which could be one of the Timemaps world maps, either for 3500 BCE or for 2005 CE).
2. Discuss the region's climate. Note that it is one of the hottest and driest parts of the world. Deserts cover much of it.
3. Locate the great rivers of the region: the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, and the Nile in North Africa.

Task 2. Questions

These questions can be used with the slide show (see above; hence they also appear at the end of the slide show commentary). They can also be used in the context of student-based enquiry work, as a simple way to reinforce knowledge of the topic. If so, in place of whole class presentation, students access the slide show or map pages directly to answer the questions. These questions are followed by alternative questions which treat Ancient Egypt and Ancient Mesopotamia separately.

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. What are the two great rivers of Mesopotamia called? (*The Tigris and the Euphrates*)
2. What is the great river in Egypt? (*The Nile*)
3. Who were the people who developed the first civilization in world history? (*The Sumerians*)
4. What was the name of the writing system that they used? (*Cuneiform*)
5. By what term was the king of Egypt known? (*Pharaoh*)
6. What was the name of the early writing systems that the Egyptians used? (*Hieroglyphics*)
7. Which huge monuments did the Egyptians of the Old Kingdom build that are still in existence today? (*The Great Pyramids of Giza - just Great Pyramids, or even Pyramids, will do*)
8. A Mesopotamian king is regarded as the first emperor in world history - who was he? (*Sargon, or more specifically, Sargon of Akkad*)
9. What famous Sumerian city followed his empire as the leading power in Mesopotamia? (*Ur*)

10. Hammurabi was a great king of Babylon who created a large empire - what else is he famous for? (*A Law Code*)
11. A pharaoh who reigned only briefly and died young is today possibly the best known of all the pharaohs - who was he? (*Tutankhamen*)
12. What is the name of the seafaring and trading people who rose to wealth in the period around 1000 BCE and spread the alphabet to the Greeks? (*The Phoenicians*)
13. What people were the first to follow a monotheistic faith, so far as we know? (*The Israelites, or Jews*)
14. From the 10th century BCE, more and more of the Middle East fell under the rule of which people? (*The Assyrians*)
15. Kings from which country to the south of Egypt conquered Egypt in the 750s BCE? (*Kush*)
16. In the 10th century, the kingdom of Israel divided into two parts; what happened to the northern kingdom in 722 BCE? (*It was conquered by the Assyrians and many of its people were exiled*)
17. Which empire took over most of the Assyrian empire at the end of the 7th century BCE? (*The Babylonian empire*)
18. Who was its famous king? (*Nebuchadnezzar*)
19. What is he most famous for today? (*Any one of the following will do - captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple there, and exiled many Jews to Babylon*)
20. Egyptian attacks on the kingdom of Kush caused the Kushites to move their capital from - where to where? (*Napata to Meroë*)
21. Who was the founder of the Persian empire? (*Any of the following will do - Cyrus, Cyrus II or Cyrus the Great*)
22. He is famous as a great conqueror, and also for a particular act - what was that? (*For allowing the Jews in exile in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem*)
23. Under which ruler did the Persian empire reach its height? (*Darius, or Darius the Great*)

Alternative questions

if you wish to treat Ancient Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt separately, you can use the following questions.

Mesopotamia and its neighbors

1. What are the two great rivers of Mesopotamia called? (*The Tigris and the Euphrates*)
2. Who were the people who developed the first civilization in world history? (*The Sumerians*)
3. What was the name of the writing system that they used? (*Cuneiform*)
4. What two metals were mixed ("alloyed") to make bronze? (*Tin and copper*)

5. A Mesopotamian king is regarded as the first emperor in world history - who was he? (*Sargon, or Sargon of Akkad*)
6. What famous Sumerian city followed his empire as the leading power in Mesopotamia? (*Ur*)
7. The Amorites invaded Mesopotamia at about this time - what famous city did a group of them establish? (*Babylon*)
8. What is the name of the group of languages spoken by peoples from central Asia who were moving into the Middle East from this time? (*Indo-European*)
9. They brought with them a new weapon of war - what was it? (*The chariot*)
10. Hammurabi was a great king of Babylon who created a large empire - what else is he famous for? (*A Law Code*)
11. What is the name of the seafaring and trading people who rose to wealth in the period around 1000 BCE? (*The Phoenicians*)
12. What great contribution did they make to history? (*They spread the alphabet to western peoples, including the Greeks*)
13. What people were the first to follow a monotheistic faith, as far as we know? (*The Israelites, or Jews*)
14. From the 10th century BCE, more and more of the Middle East fell under the rule of which people? (*The Assyrians*)
15. In the 10th century, the kingdom of Israel divided into two parts; what happened to the northern kingdom in 722 BCE? (*It was conquered by the Assyrians, and many of its people were exiled*)
16. Which empire took over most of the Assyrian empire at the end of the 7th century BCE? (*The Babylonian empire*)
17. Who was its famous king? - and for what is he most famous? (*Nebuchadnezzar*)
18. What is he most famous for today? (*Any one of the following will do - captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple there, and exiled many Jews to Babylon*)
19. What Iranian people ruled a powerful state at this time? (*The Medes*)
20. Who was the founder of the Persian empire? (*Any of the following will do - Cyrus, Cyrus II or Cyrus the Great*)
21. He is famous as a great conqueror, and also for a particular act - what was that? (*For allowing the Jews in exile in Babylon to return home to Jerusalem*)
22. Under which ruler did the Persian empire reach its height? (*Darius, or Darius the Great*)

Egypt and its neighbors

1. What is the great river in Egypt? (*The Nile*)
2. By what term was the king of Egypt known? (*Pharaoh*)

3. Who was the first of these kings to unify Egypt under his rule? (*Menes*)
4. What was the name of the early writing systems that the Egyptians used? (*Hieroglyphics*)
5. In what period of Ancient Egyptian history were the Pyramids of Giza built? (*The Old Kingdom*)
6. What period followed it? (*The First Intermediate Period*)
7. During Egypt's Second Intermediate Period, a people from western Asia occupied much of the country - what were they called? (*The Hyksos*)
8. What was the name of the pharaoh who established the New kingdom of Egypt? (*Ahmose I*)
9. What is the famous burial place of the New Kingdom kings and queens, still visited by thousands of tourists today? (*The Valley of the Kings, near today's Luxor*)
10. Which was the pharaoh who abandoned the traditional polytheism of the Egyptians and tried to promote a new religion? (*Akhenaten*)
11. His wife was probably the most famous queen of Egypt before Cleopatra - what was her name? (*Nefertiti*)
12. Her son only reigned briefly, and died young - yet today he is possibly the best known of all the pharaohs - who was he? (*Tutankhamen*)
13. Why is he so well known? (*His tomb was discovered in 1926, full of the treasures which had been buried with him*)
14. The Egyptians themselves came to regard a later ruler as the greatest of all the pharaohs - his name was ? (*Rameses II*)
15. How do the Peoples of the Sea appear in history - as traders? Missionaries? Raiders? Conquerors? (*Raiders*)
16. What is the name of the king of Kush who completed the conquest of Egypt in the 8th century BCE? (*Piankhe*)
17. What is the last period of Ancient Egyptian independence called? (*The Late Dynastic Period*)
18. Egyptian attacks on the kingdom of Kush caused the Kushites to move their capital from - where to where? (*Napata to Meroë*)

Task 3. Critical thinking questions

The aim of these activities is to develop analytical thinking skills, and in particular getting students to grapple with history-specific issues such as cause and consequence, and change and continuity.

General Instructions:

1. Students read the questions below, which either they or their teacher has chosen.
2. They then go through the map sequence or slideshow (in the latter case they will have to have access to a copy of the student commentary).

3. As they do this, they carefully take notes, focusing on the questions they are answering. They should bear in mind when and where events or developments happen; why they happen; and what changes as a result of them happening.

4. Students use their notes to prepare their answers. These can be in either essay form or as presentations.

(Note to teacher: suggested answers are given in italics and brackets)

Short questions:

Students give short answers to the questions below (or a selection thereof, as determined by the teacher).

1. What does "Mesopotamia" mean - and why was this term applied to the land?

Why did this make it suitable as the location for an early civilization?

("Mesopotamia" = "Between the rivers" in Greek; it lay between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. River plains, with their spring floods bringing water and fertile mud down from the mountains, made agriculture very productive and created food surpluses to allow cities, writing, and all the other paraphernalia of civilization to develop)

2. One of the lands dealt with in this unit has been called the "Gift of the Nile" - which was this, do you think? - and why?

(Egypt - simply put, without this great river bringing water and fertile mud to this land there could have been no civilization in this dry desert region - see also the above answer)

3. The Sumerians achieved several "firsts" in world history. What were these and why were they important?

(Cities, well-organized states, writing, astronomy, organized armies. Students should mention at least two of these, preferably three.)

4. How was bronze made, what was it used for, and what impact did its use have on early Middle Eastern civilization?

(Bronze is made when molten copper and tin is "alloyed" - that is, mixed - together. Its use encouraged trade routes to spread out in order to bring these metals, which are widely scattered over the Middle East and neighboring regions, to Mesopotamia, which has neither)

6. The centuries between the 12th century BCE and the 9th century BCE were ones of great turbulence. They were also ones in which important advances took place. What were these? Why were they important?

(An answer should include some or all of the following - the rise of the use of iron (much cheaper and superior to bronze, especially for agriculture and warfare), the spread of alphabetic scripts (bringing literacy to many more people), the fall of large states allowing new, smaller ones like the Phoenician city-states and the Israelite kingdoms to flourish (each of which had a major contribution to make to later progress) - any others?)

7. Account for 1) the rise of the Assyrian Empire, and 2) its fall.

(It had turned itself into a militaristic state to deal with invasions in the early first millennium BCE, which gave it a strong army; also it used terror tactics; and its policy of redistributing conquered populations weakened local resistance. Its fall was partly due to the harshness of its rule, which ironically was caused by it being a militaristic state, using terror tactics and so on; and partly to the rise of powerful and hostile new neighbours such as the Medes).

Extended exercises:

Complete one or more of the following activities. There are no right or wrong answers for them, but give reasons.

1. Carefully read the information in the slideshow (and its commentary) or map pages, and then make lists of A., the similarities between the two civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, and B., the differences.

(Answers should include the fact that the Mesopotamians lived in small city-states whereas the Egyptians lived in a single, unified state; this meant that the Egyptians were able to mobilize far larger workforces to build more spectacular monuments, such as the Pyramids; the Mesopotamian city-states was surrounded by hostile neighbors, while the Egyptians were protected from attack by large tracts of barren desert; which meant that Mesopotamia was from time to time overrun by pastoral tribes, whereas Egypt was not).

2. Choosing either Egyptian or Mesopotamian civilization, divide that civilizations history into distinct phases. Justify your answers by saying what the characteristics of each phase are. *(The idea here is to encourage students to think about how civilisations developed over time and went through different phases. For Egypt, students could follow the traditional scheme of 1. Old Kingdom and First Intermediate; 2. Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate; 3. New Kingdom and Third Intermediate; 4. Late dynastic down to the Persian conquests. Mesopotamia is more difficult, but could be as follows: 1. The Sumerian and Akkadian periods down to the empire of Ur; 2. the first Babylonian period down to the end of the Bronze Age; 3. the Age of Chaos as the Bronze Age transitioned to the Iron Age; and 4. the Age of Empires - Assyria, Babylon, and Persia)*

As a wrap up, students compare their answers and discuss.

3. Take one of the following peoples in ancient Middle Eastern history, and write (or prepare a presentation of) their history:

1. The Sumerians
2. The Babylonians
3. The Assyrians
4. The Egyptians
5. The Kushites
6. The Israelites
7. The Iranians

4. Write, or present, a history of the Israelites in the context of the broader developments taking place in the Middle East between 2000 and 500 BCE.

Section 4: Plans of Action

Here in this section are possible strategies, plans of action you might like to follow (or adapt as you see fit) for using some of these activities.

Plan A:

This plan combines the presentation approach with the student-centered enquiry approach. Do this if you are doing this topic as a major topic with the class.

1. Complete Task 1: Geographical Background.
2. Introduce the topic by presenting the slide show to the class. Use the teacher's commentary as a guide.
3. The students complete Task 4 by answering one or more of the questions given there.

They use either the map pages or the slide show (plus student commentary) to answer the question(s).

They can do this task as individuals, for their own project work. Alternatively, they can do it in small groups.

All the students or groups can be asked to do the same questions, or all to do different ones.

4. The students then write up and submit their work in essay form for marking, or prepare a presentation for showing to the class.

Plan B:

This plan will take less time than Plan A to complete.

1. Complete Task 1: Geographical Background.
2. Show the slide show to the class, using the teachers' commentary as a guide. Tell the students that there will be a test at the end.
3. Ask the questions in Task 2 to the class as a whole, with the students calling out the answers (if they remember any!).
4. Give out the questions on printed sheets (for this, use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary). Show the class the slide show again. This time they take notes in preparation for the same test again.
5. The students write their answers on this sheet and submit for marking.

Plan C:

This should take longer than Plan B to complete, but not as long as Plan A.

1. Preliminary work: Geographical Background.

2. The students are handed copies of the questions (use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary).
3. The students then work their way through the map pages or the slide show (if the latter, using the students' commentary), and as they do so they note down the answers to the questions.
4. The teacher then shows the slide show to the class as a whole, using the teachers commentary as a guide. In the course of this presentation they will give the students the answers to the questions.

Further References

This is a list of the key articles which teachers or students should find helpful.

[The Coming of Farming](#)

[Early Pastoralists](#)

[The Origins of Civilization](#)

[Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization](#)

[History of Ancient Mesopotamia](#)

[Ancient Egyptian Civilization](#)

[History of Ancient Egypt](#)

[Kingdom of Kush](#)

[Elam \(Ancient Iran\)](#)

[The Hittites](#)

[Ancient Israel](#)

[History of Ancient Palestine](#) (this includes the histories of the Canaanites and other peoples of this land)

[History of the Assyrian Empire](#)

[The Civilization of the Ancient Assyrians](#)

[Ancient Babylon](#)

[History of the Babylonian Empire](#)

[The History of the Persian Empire](#)

[The Civilization of Ancient Persia](#)