Civilization Case Study: Ur in Sumer

BEFORE YOU READ
In the last section, you read about the development of agriculture and a settled way of life. In this section, you will read about factors leading to the rise of civilizations.

AS YOU READ
Use the chart below to take notes on how civilizations develop.

FEATURES OF CIVILIZATION | EXAMPLES FROM UR
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1. Advanced Cities |  
2. |  
3. |  
4. |  
5. |  

Villages Grow into Cities (pages 19–20)
What changed as villages grew into cities?
Over time, farmers developed new tools—hoes, sickles, and plow sticks. These helped them grow even more food. They decided to plant larger areas of land. The people in some villages began to irrigate the land, bringing water to new areas. People invented the wheel for carts and the sail for boats. These new inventions made it easier to travel between distant villages and to trade.

Life became more complex as the villages began to grow. People were divided into social classes. Some people had more wealth and power than others. People began to worship gods and
goddesses that they felt would protect their crops and make their harvests large.

1. How did life become more complex?

How Civilization Develops (pages 20–21)

What makes a civilization?

One of the first civilizations arose in Sumer. It was in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers of modern Iraq. A civilization has five features.

First, a civilization has advanced cities that contain many people and serve as centers for trade.

Second, civilizations have specialized workers. Specialization is the development of skills needed for one specific kind of work. Skilled workers who make goods by hand are called artisans.

Third, civilizations have complex institutions. Government, organized religion, and an economy are examples of complex institutions.

A fourth feature of civilizations is record keeping, which is needed to keep track of laws, debts, and payments. It also creates the need for writing. Scribes were people who used writing to keep records. Cuneiform, which means “wedge-shaped,” was a form of writing invented in Sumer.

Fifth, civilizations have improved technology that can provide new tools and methods to solve problems.

Sumer had all the features of a civilization. One of the new technologies in Sumer was making a metal called bronze. The term Bronze Age refers to the time when people began using bronze to make tools and weapons.

Civilization Emerges in Ur (pages 22–23)

What was civilization like in Ur?

One of the early cities of Sumer was named Ur. The city was surrounded by walls built of mud dried into bricks. Ur held about 30,000 people. Social classes included rulers and priests, traders, craft workers, and artists.

Farmers outside the city walls raised the food for them all. Some workers dug ditches to carry water to the fields. Officials of the city government planned all this activity.

Inside the city, metalworkers made bronze points for spears. Potters made clay pots. Traders met people from other areas. They traded the spear points and pots for goods that Ur could not produce. This way of trading goods and services without money is called barter. Sometimes their deals were written down by scribes.

Ur’s most important building was the temple. Part of the temple was a ziggurat, a pyramid-shaped structure. Priests there led the city’s religious life.

3. What social classes existed in Ur?