The Indo-Europeans

BEFORE YOU READ
In the last chapter, you read about peoples who built civilizations in the great river valleys.
In this section, you will learn about the movements of two groups of people who lived on the grasslands of Asia.

AS YOU READ
Use the chart below to take notes on where each group migrated and on the features of its culture.

Indo-Europeans Migrate (pages 61–62)
Who were the Indo-Europeans?
The Indo-Europeans were a group of peoples who came from the steppes—the dry grasslands of western Asia. The Indo-Europeans rode horses and tended cattle, sheep, and goats. They spoke many different languages, but all of them came from the same original language.
For some reason, starting about 1700 B.C., the Indo-Europeans began to leave their homeland. They moved into some of the settled areas and began to conquer them. These migrations, movements of people from one region to another, took place over a long period of time.

1. What happened to the Indo-Europeans?

The Hittite Empire (pages 62–63)
Who were the Hittites?
The Hittites were one of these Indo-European peoples. They rode two-wheeled chariots and used
iron weapons to conquer Anatolia. Anatolia is also called Asia Minor. It is a huge peninsula in modern-day Turkey. The Hittites moved farther and took the ancient lands of Mesopotamia. When they moved to the south, they ran into the Egyptians. Neither side was able to defeat the other. So, they decided to make peace.

The Hittites adopted many features of the culture that had grown in Mesopotamia before they arrived. They changed others to suit their own ideas. Their laws, for instance, were less harsh than the code of Hammurabi. The Hittites ruled their Southwest Asian empire from about 2000 to 1190 B.C. Then they fell to a new wave of invaders.

2. How did the Hittites react to the culture they found in Mesopotamia?

Aryans Transform India
(pages 63–65)

Who were the Aryans?

The Aryans were another group of Indo-European people. They moved into what is now India and transformed it. They first captured the land of the people of the Indus Valley. Archaeology tells almost nothing about the Aryans. But their sacred literature, the Vedas, tells a lot about them.

The Aryans were divided into three classes of people. There were priests (Brahmins), warriors, and peasants or traders. They viewed the non-Aryans living in the area as a fourth class. Over time, they made many rules for how people in these classes, or castes, could interact with one another. People were born into their caste for life. Some “impure” people lived in a group outside this class system. They were butchers, grave diggers, and trash collectors. Because they did work that was thought unclean, they were called “untouchables.”

Over many centuries, the Aryans took more and more of what is now India. Eventually many powerful people tried to create their own kingdoms. They fought each other until one kingdom, Magadha, won control over almost all of India. Around this time, an epic poem, the Mahabharata, was written. It tells of the blending of cultures at the time. It also sets down ideals that were to become important in Hindu life.

3. What is the caste system?