

Middle East Unit – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade  
8 Class Periods

- I. Middle East Geography
- A. Where is it? This **cultural region** includes the countries of Southwest Asia and Egypt – students should be able to recognize and label the most important countries, such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, the newly formed neo-nation of Palestine. Include a map of the **Fertile Crescent**, which extend from the Persian Gulf, through the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, curving to the Levantine Coast of the Mediterranean.
- B. What is it like there? Includes deserts, as well as the **Tigris and Euphrates Rivers**, and the **Nile** in Egypt. Borders on the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf. Some mountainous areas to the north. Students should be able to recognize and label the major geographic features mentioned.
- II. Define culture and civilization – apply it to the Fertile Crescent and the beginnings of civilization.
- A. **Culture** is the total way of life that a group of people share which sets them apart from other people. **Cultural traits** include includes their language, food, dress, religion, and customs.
- B. **Civilization** – advanced culture, usually based on city living, and characterized by a written language.
- C. **Society** – an organized group of people living and working under an established set of rules and traditions.
- III. Mesopotamia
- A. Mesopotamia (*land between the rivers*) is the region between the Tigris and Euphrates, where the first civilization began.
1. Accomplishments include irrigation (example of human-environment interaction), the invention of the wheel, standard units of weights and measures, and **cuneiform** (wedge-shaped writing).
  2. **Hammurabi** is the best known of the rulers of Mesopotamia, because, as king of Babylon, he write a code of laws known as **The Code of Hammurabi**. This extensive code of laws, numbering in the region of 300 separate laws, was characterized by the phrase “an eye for an eye.” This was the first true set of laws that is extant today.
  3. Polytheism is the belief in many gods.

Egypt Unit – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade

- I. Egypt’s Geography

- A. Where is it? Locate **Egypt** on a map – make sure the students realize that although Egypt is in Africa, it is more like the nations of Southwest Asia (geographic theme of regions)
  - B. What is it like? **Nile River** dominates the physical geography of Egypt and provides not only its source of water for crops and the like, but it also enables transportation throughout the country. The **Aswan Dam** (human-environment interaction) was built in the 1960s to control flooding and to provide hydroelectric power. The Nile river floods yearly, which provides fertile soil for the farmers crops (floods, recedes, harvest). Their calendar was based on the three phases of the moon.
- II. Egypt's Early History
- III. **Pharaohs** ruled ancient Egypt. They were considered to be gods on earth, and many erected pyramids as their tombs.
- IV. Mummification
- A. This was the process in which a body was preserved and buried. It took 70 days to complete the process of mummification. Any person could be mummified
  - B. Afterlife beliefs: Ancient Egyptians were **polytheists**. They believed in life after death and that you could take things with you into the afterlife. That is why tombs were found with items such as jewelry, plates and household goods.
- V. Contributions
- A. Hieroglyphics: writing system. Pictographs.
  - B. Papyrus: compressed reeds to make paper.
  - C. Geometry: pyramids – cut stones to make pyramids.
  - D. Biology: mummification.
  - E. Architecture: pyramids.
- VI. Egypt led the way among Middle Eastern Arab nations when **Anwar Sadat** signed the Camp David Peace Accords with Israeli Prime Minister **Menachim Begin**. These were to broker a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab world in 1978. A zealous Muslim who was opposed to peace with Israel later assassinated him.

### Three Religions

- B. Three **monotheistic** religions arose in the Middle East.
- C. **Judaism** began around the year 3000 B.C., following the teachings of Abraham. Its holy book is the **Torah**, and holidays include **Yom Kippur**, Hannukah, and **Rosh Hashanah**. The holiest city of the Jews is Jerusalem, in Israel.
- D. **Christianity** came about later, branching off from Judaism, and following the teachings of **Jesus Christ**. Its holy book is the **Bible**, and holidays

include Easter and Christmas. Christians also count Jerusalem as one of their holiest cities.

- E. **Islam** arose in 622 A.D., following the teachings of **Muhammad (Mohammed)**. It has its roots in Jewish and Christian faith, with Muhammad's interpretations. Believers of Islam are called **Muslims**, and their holy book is the **Koran**. One of their religious holidays is **Ramadan**, and devout followers ascribe to the **Five Pillars of Islam**. Jerusalem is one of three holy cities of the Muslims, which also includes Mecca and Medina.

#### IV. Conflict in the Middle East

##### A. **Crusades**

From 1096-1291 a series of holy wars, or Crusades, was waged against Muslims in the Holy Land. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim Turks gained control of Jerusalem and forced Christian pilgrims out. Pope Urban II called upon Christians to fight to regain control of the Holy Lands. Although the Crusades were unsuccessful, they resulted in the exchange of goods and ideas throughout Europe, into the Middle East.

- B. **Arab-Israeli Conflict** – began in early history – modern conflict began after World War II with the establishment of the state of Israel. Jews had been coming to Palestine for many years in a movement called **Zionism**, which was a return to the traditional homeland of the Jewish people. After World War II, the United Nations partitioned Palestine, giving half to the Israelis and the other half to the Arab Palestinians. Feeling some resentment, the Arab world refused to recognize the new state of Israel, and war in the Middle East ensued.

- C. The displaced Palestinians created an organization, the **Palestinian Liberation Organization (or PLO)**, which began, often through terrorist acts, to try to regain control of the land

- D. **Persian Gulf War** was fought in 1991 between Iraq and the United Nations forces, led by the United States. **Saddam Hussein** led the Iraqi army in an invasion of Kuwait, an oil-rich nation on the Persian Gulf. The United Nations responded by attacking the Iraqis in "Operation Desert Storm," which ended the war within days.

- E. **Iran-Iraq War** – basically a conflict between **Shiite** Iranians and **Sunni** Iraqis in the late 1970s over land. Iran was led by the **Ayatollah Khomeini**, a religious leader who very much opposed the westernization of the Arab world. A government led by a religious leader, based on religious tenets, is called a **theocracy**.

**F. OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries)** – formed in 1960 to control the price and production of oil. This organization is comprised mainly of the oil-rich countries of the Middle East, though Venezuela also is a member. These nations **export** oil to the western nations. This is also called **trade**.

**G. Osama bin Laden** – he is a wealthy Saudi terrorist who funded and supported the Sept. 11 attacks. He has complained about the American support of the Israelis, and dislikes the morality of the west.

**H. Current Lebanese Crisis – Hezbollah**

A militant group, whose name translates to English as "Party of God," formed in 1982 in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It enjoys backing from Syria and Iran and is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and Israel. Hezbollah holds several seats in the Lebanese parliament. Hezbollah's political wing also provides welfare to the impoverished communities through hospitals and schools.

### **Hamas**

Branded a terrorist organization by Israel, the US and the EU, it is seen by its supporters as a legitimate fighting force defending Palestinians from a brutal military occupation.

It is the largest Palestinian militant organization, formed in 1987 at the beginning of the first intifada, or Palestinian uprising against Israel's occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

The group's short-term aim has been to drive Israeli forces from the occupied territories, through attacks on Israeli troops and settlers in the Palestinian territories and - more controversially - against civilians in Israel.

Since the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, it has taken part in local elections and won many seats. Its biggest triumph was winning parliamentary elections, in which the group won enough seats to become the majority party in the current Palestinian government.