

## History of the Fertile Crescent

### Section 3



#### MAIN IDEAS

1. The Sumerians invented the world's first writing system.
2. Advances and inventions changed Sumerian lives.
3. Many types of art developed in Sumer.

#### Key Terms

**cuneiform** the Sumerian system of writing, which used symbols to represent basic parts of words

**pictographs** picture symbols that represented objects such as trees or animals

**scribe** writer

**epics** long poems that tell the story of a hero

**architecture** the science of building

**ziggurat** a pyramid-shaped temple tower

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#### Section Summary

##### INVENTION OF WRITING

The Sumerians made one of the greatest cultural advances in history. They developed **cuneiform** (kyoo-NEE-uh-fohrm), the world's first system of writing. But Sumerians did not have pencils, pens, or paper. Instead, they used sharp reeds to make wedge-shaped symbols on clay tablets.

Sumerians first used cuneiform to keep records for business, government, and temples. As the use of cuneiform grew, simple **pictographs** evolved into more complex symbols that represented basic parts of words. Writing was taught in schools. Becoming a writer, or **scribe**, was a way to move up in social class. Scribes began to combine symbols to express complex ideas. In time, scribes wrote works on law, grammar, and mathematics. Sumerians also wrote stories, proverbs, songs, poems to celebrate military victories, and long poems called **epics**.

Write the name of the world's first system of writing.

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What is a scribe?

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Section 3, *continued*

**ADVANCES AND INVENTIONS**

The Sumerians were the first to build wheeled vehicles like carts and wagons. They invented the potter's wheel, a device that spins wet clay as a craftsperson shapes it into bowls. They invented the ox-drawn plow and greatly improved farm production. They built sewers under city streets. They learned to use bronze to make strong tools and weapons. They named thousands of animals, plants, and minerals, and used them to produce healing drugs. The clock and the calendar we use today are based on Sumerian methods of measuring time.

Which Sumerian invention greatly improved farm production?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**THE ARTS OF SUMER**

Sumerian ruins reveal great skill in **architecture**. A pyramid-shaped **ziggurat** dominated each city. Most people lived in one-story houses with rooms arranged around a small courtyard.

Underline the sentence that describes the kind of houses in which most Sumerians lived.

Sumerian artists made sculpture and jewelry. Sculptors created statues of gods for the temples, and made small objects of ivory or rare woods. Jewelers worked with imported gold, silver, and fine stones. Earrings and other items found in the region show that Sumerian jewelers knew advanced methods for putting gold pieces together.

The Sumerians also developed a special art form called the cylinder seal. The cylinder seal was a small stone cylinder that was engraved with designs and could be rolled over wet clay to decorate containers or to "sign" documents.

Name four types of musical instruments played by Sumerians.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Music played an important role in Sumerian society. Musicians played stringed instruments, reed pipes, drums, and tambourines both for entertainment and for special occasions.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** Consider the inventions of writing and the wheel. As you go through a normal day keep a list of the things you do that rely on these two inventions.

Section 3, *continued*

architecture	cuneiform	epic
pictograph	scribe	ziggurat

**DIRECTIONS** Read each sentence and fill in the blank with the word in the word pair that best completes the sentence.

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ would be hired to keep track of the items people traded. (pictograph/scribe)
2. A pyramid-shaped tower that rose above each Sumerian city was called a \_\_\_\_\_. (cuneiform/ziggurat)
3. The Sumerians developed the world's first system of writing called \_\_\_\_\_. (cuneiform/ziggurat)
4. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a long poem that tells a story of a hero. (epic/architecture)
5. The \_\_\_\_\_ was the earliest form of written communication. (pictograph/scribe)
6. The science of building is known as \_\_\_\_\_. (epic/architecture)

**DIRECTIONS** Look at each set of three terms following each number. On the line provided, write the letter of the term that does not relate to the others.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. a. pictograph                      b. ziggurat                      c. cuneiform
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. a. scribe                              b. ziggurat                      c. architecture
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. a. scribe                              b. wheel                              c. cuneiform