

Lesson One - Ancient India Geography and Early Civilizations

6.23 Locate and describe the Himalayas and the major river systems, including Indus and Ganges and evaluate the importance of each.

Engage: Watch, "Sights and Sounds of India"

1. Describe India's geography using information from the video.

2. Describe India's culture using information from the video.

Between the Mountains and the Sea

Ancient **India**, located in **South Asia**, was home to many ancient cities. The geography of South Asia enabled these cities to grow and prosper. Ancient India included territory that makes up the modern-day countries of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

The northern boundary of India is lined with vast mountain ranges. The tall **Himalayas**, which contain **Mount Everest**, are located to the northeast, while the Hindu Kush mountains rise to the northwest. The **Himalayas** and the Hindu Kush were formed millions of years ago, but they are still relatively young (the Himalayas began rising 25 million to 30 million years ago, whereas the Rocky Mountains began to form 190 million to 1 billion years ago). These mountains continue to grow several inches each year. The movement of the tectonic plates that continues to make these mountains grow is also responsible for causing many earthquakes in the Hindu Kush and Himalayas region. In 2011, a 6.9-magnitude earthquake in this region killed many people and caused a lot of damage.

The southern portion of India is surrounded by two large bodies of water—the Bay of Bengal and the **Arabian Sea**. The Arabian Sea would eventually become an important trade route between South Asia and the rest of the world. Both of these bodies of water are a part of the Indian Ocean.

A Subcontinent

Although India is part of Asia, it is geographically separated from the rest of the continent by the mountains to the north and the ocean to the south. Because of this unusual geographic separation, geographers often refer to this region as the **Indian subcontinent** or South Asia.

Water and mountains surrounded ancient India. This geographic isolation protected the people who settled in this region. It was extremely difficult for outside invaders to reach the **subcontinent** without making dangerous journeys over the mountains or across the ocean. The region also offered other benefits for its early inhabitants. It had natural water sources and a **climate** that allowed agriculture. Despite its geographic separation from civilizations in other parts of Asia and East Africa, ancient India traded with civilizations both near and far.

Answer the following questions using the article.

Where was Ancient India civilization located?

What two mountain ranges form the Northern border of India?

What two bodies of water surround India's southern portion?

What is a subcontinent?

How did India's geography benefit its early civilizations?

Watch, "India's Geographic Challenge"

Why do you think India has been free of outside interference for much of its long history?

Why do you think the most densely populated area in India is along the Ganges river?

How does India being a peninsula (surrounded by water on three sides) benefit their economy?

Rivers and River Valleys

As you have learned from studying other civilizations, sources of water are crucial to the survival of all civilizations. Two large rivers flow through modern **South Asia**, from the **Himalayas** in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south. According to ancient texts a third river, called the **Sarasvati River**, fed civilization in ancient **India**.

Two Rivers

The **Indus River** begins in the **Himalayas**. It carries melted snow from the Himalayas as it descends. It also gathers water from the melting snows of the Hindu Kush as it passes near that **mountain range**. The Indus carries sediment from the mountain waters. As the river flows through low-lying valleys, it creates a rich **alluvial plain** in present-day Pakistan—where the sediment from the river has made a flat area of fertile land. The river flows almost 1,800 miles through Pakistan before emptying into the **Arabian Sea** near the modern Pakistani city of Karachi. According to ancient texts, the Sarasvati River followed a similar path from the mountains to the Arabian Sea. While this river may have dried up thousands of years ago, the texts say it fed ancient cities along its banks.

The other major river of the region, the **Ganges River**, also begins in the Himalayas. It is fed by rainfall and melting snow from the mountains. The Ganges quickly descends to the plains below and winds its way across much of the northern part of modern-day India, flowing nearly 1,560 miles. Before it enters into the Indian Ocean at the Bay of Bengal in modern-day Bangladesh, the Ganges spreads out into smaller waterways, depositing sediment that creates a large fertile area of land known as a delta. Like the Indus, the Ganges also carries sediment from the Himalayas into the valleys, creating an alluvial plain in northern India.

Promise and Peril

The rich plains created by these rivers made ancient India and modern South Asia a good area for agriculture. They also supplied sources of water and made the **Indian subcontinent** an ideal location for the development of civilizations.

Although rivers are important water sources for the region, they also presented several challenges to early settlers. The rivers flood regularly, destroying the crops planted in the rich soil along their banks. The unique **climate** of the **subcontinent** caused these floods.

Answer the following questions using the article.

What does the text say is crucial to the survival of civilizations?

What river begins in the Himalayas, carrying melted snow and sediment as it descends through low-lying valleys, creating fertile areas of land and emptying into the Arabian Sea?

What river begins in the Himalayas, fed by rainfall and snow, and carries sediment as it flows throughout northern India, eventually depositing into the Bay of Bengal?

Because of these two rivers, it made India a good area for what?

What challenges did these rivers present for early settlers?

Watch, “Geography and Climate of India”

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

True or False: India’s geography is not very diverse.

What kind of geographic areas does India contain?

Why are monsoons important for India?

Civilization In The Indus Valley

Early farmers on the **Indian subcontinent** chose to settle near two great rivers: the Indus and the Ganges. Ancient texts also describe a third river, the Sarasvati, which is said to have dried up and no longer exists. These areas provided farmers with reliable water sources, and the flooding of the rivers provided rich fertile soil for planting. Just as in other areas of the ancient world, South Asian farmers began to farm in the river valleys, domesticated plants and animals, and formed small farming settlements.

These settlements could produce not only a stable food supply but also a **surplus**. As you have seen, a stable food supply allows people to gather in large groups and to form civilizations. The first great civilization of ancient **India** reached its peak along the Indus and Sarasvati rivers between 2600 to 1700 BCE. This society is commonly known as the Indus Valley or Harappan civilization. Archeologists are still uncovering many large cities that were part of this civilization and make new discoveries each year. The two most researched and best-known cities in the region are **Harappa** and **Mohenjo-daro**.

Harappa

Archaeologists first excavated Harappa, which is located near the modern-day Pakistani town of Sāhiwāl, in 1921. Because of the region's rich fertile land and the **monsoon climate**, agriculture was important to the life of the city. Farmers domesticated sheep, goats, and cattle, and grew wheat and barley. The excavation of the city suggests that these grains were produced in significant amounts and played an important role in the growth of the city.

At the center of Harappa was a large building that was used to store grain. It is called a *granary*. The granary was surrounded by a large, protective wall. The wall is called a **citadel**. Moving away from the citadel were rows of homes. They were constructed in a grid. Archeologists think the layout of the city suggests that the government controlled how grain was stored, protected, and handed out. This **tradition-oriented economy** relied on leadership and tradition to organize labor and production.

Archeological evidence also suggests that Harappa had wide-ranging trade networks. As early as the 3000s BCE, goods from the Indus Valley began appearing in Mesopotamian empires. Lapis lazuli, a blue stone from **South Asia** was exported to the Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian empires. Other jewels and metals also made their way to Mesopotamia from the Indus Valley. Traders from the Indus Valley sailed from Harappa to the Arabian Peninsula and some traders even continued on to Mesopotamia.

Answer the following questions using the article.

Which of the following was not a river in ancient India?

- A. Ganges
- B. Indus
- C. Sarasvati
- D. Jordan

Describe the first civilization to settle India

What do we know about Harappa because of archeological evidence?

Watch, "Indus Valley Civilization"

Describe three innovations that contribute to Mohenjo-daro being a successful civilization.

1.

2.

3.

Mohenjo-daro

Mohenjo-daro, located in modern-day Pakistan, is one of the most well-known Indus Valley cities, and it is one of the most advanced ancient cities archaeologists have discovered. It was constructed in a way similar to **Harappa**. The city was divided into two parts. One part was a largely administrative and religious center, and the other, called the lower city, was purely residential. Similar to a modern downtown, the administrative center consisted of government buildings, religious sites, and assembly areas. It was protected by a **citadel**. Like Harappa, Mohenjo-daro was home to a large granary. There was also a large water pool, which may have been used for religious reasons—or residents may have used it to keep themselves clean.

There was also a large building in the citadel that some archaeologists think was a residence where government officials and religious leaders lived. Other archeologists have argued that the ruins of Mohenjo-daro have little evidence of royalty. Most of the population probably lived in the lower city.

The lower city had small one-room houses and large multiple-story dwellings with large courtyards and individual bathrooms, suggesting the existence of separate middle and lower classes. There were also extensive water-storage and drainage systems throughout Mohenjo-daro. The extent of these systems and the fact that the drainage systems were covered made them superior to those that researchers have found in other ancient cities. Despite these drainage systems, evidence suggests that Mohenjo-daro suffered damage from several major floods, caused by the nearby **Indus River** and the tectonic uplifts between Mohenjo-daro and the sea.

Mohenjo-daro became an advanced society, in part, because it could obtain necessary resources that were not available in the region through trade with other cities in the region, as well as other civilizations. The nearby Hindu Kush mountains were rich in precious metals and gems, which the Indus Valley civilization traded for Sumerian wool, grains, and olive oil. Artifacts found in the ruins of Mohenjo-daro suggest that its citizens traded with the Mesopotamian civilizations.

Answer the following questions using the article.

What was the name of the largest city in the Indus River Valley?

What city was it built like?

What did Mohenjo-Daro have that was superior to other civilizations?

How did the Hindu Kush mountains benefit them?

What other civilization did they trade with?

Watch, "Mohenjo-Daro"

What are three ways Mohenjo-Daro compared to or contrasted from other civilizations?

1.

2.

3.

Life In Ancient India's Major Cities

The Indus Valley civilization that flourished between 2500 to 1700 BCE was sophisticated. They had written language, well-developed trade, and in-depth mathematical knowledge. The large stores of grain allowed the citizens of the major cities free time to pursue leisure activities, such as playing games.

Perhaps the best-known artifacts from the Indus Valley civilizations are square seals found in the ruins of **Mohenjo-daro**. These seals contain images of real and mythical animals as well as examples of writing. Some seals contain themes that are reflected in modern Indian and Hindu culture, including statues resembling Hindu Deities.

Historians and linguists have not been able to decode the language, which consists of 250 to 500 characters. Scholars continue to debate how the language is connected to other world language families and have not found an artifact like the Egyptian Rosetta Stone that would allow them to translate the text into a better-known ancient language. Because scholars cannot read the full written record, historians still rely on the artifacts that archaeologists have uncovered to learn more about the civilization..

The people of the Indus Valley civilization were also mathematically astute. They developed a place-value system and made advances in geometry. The practical application of their mathematical skills can be seen in their cities, which were laid out on a grid pattern. They also used a standard series of weights and measures for trade.

The River Civilization's Decline

By 1900 BCE, the **Indus River** civilizations began to decline. Deforestation destroyed the soil around the civilization's most important rivers, and the once-rich agricultural valley began to turn to desert. As food supplies decreased, people began to abandon the cities. Floods took their toll on struggling fields, and buildings began to decay. The ultimate fate of the Harappan people around 1500 BCE is unknown.

Even though a mix of floods and desertification may have contributed to the downfall of Mohenjo-daro, the geography and **climate** of the **Indian subcontinent** made it possible for it and other cities to flourish in the first place. The geographic features that separate the **subcontinent** from the rest of Asia provided natural defenses against other civilizations, and the rivers and monsoons made agriculture possible.

Answer the following questions using the article.

What makes the Indus Valley Civilization sophisticated?

Why do historians have to rely on artifacts to learn about the Indus Valley Civilizations?

Explain how the following elements contributed to their decline.

Deforestation -

Floods -

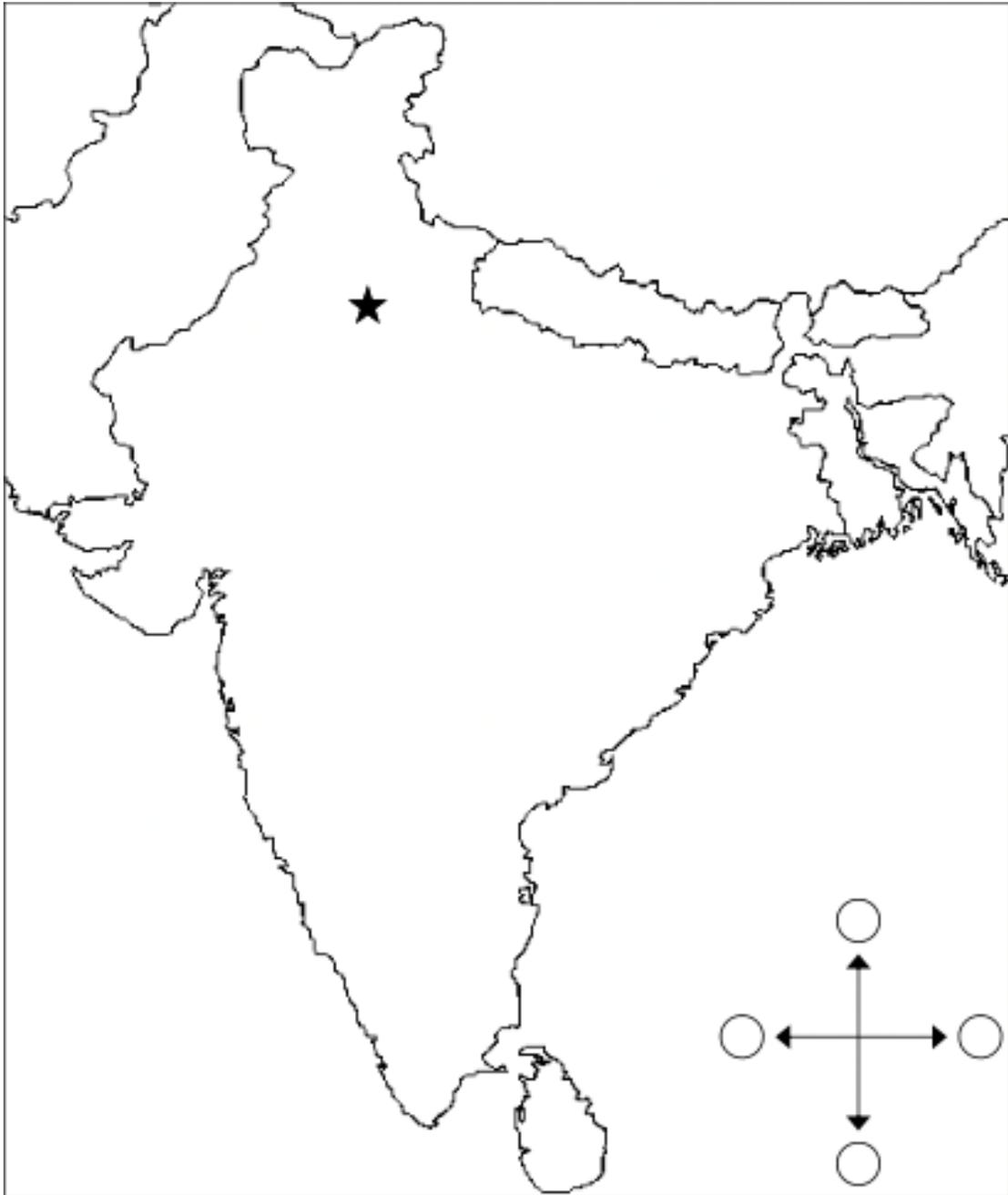
What happened to the Harrapan people?

Watch, "Decline of Indus Valley Civilizations"

Explain the reasons why the Indus Valley Civilization declined.

Activity One: India Map

Fill in the following Map and answer the geographical questions about ancient India. Use the map images on Weebly to assist you.



1. Color the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Sea of Bengal Blue

2. Label the Arabian Sea

3. Label the Indian Ocean

4. Label the Sea of Bengal

5. Color India Yellow

6. Label India

7. Draw Brown Triangles for the Himalayas

8. Label the Himalayas

9. Draw a Blue Line that follows the path of the Indus River

10. Label the Indus River

11. Draw a blue line that follows the path of the Ganges river

12. Label the Ganges River

Answer the following questions using the map and your geography notes. Write in complete sentences. Ensure that you answer every question with evidence.

7

1. What mountain range borders India to the Northeast? How did these mountains benefit the development of civilization in this area?

2. What are the two main river systems in ancient India? How did these rivers benefit the development of civilization in this area?

Activity Two: Watch the video, “Indus Valley Civilizations”

1. (3:19) Where was the Indus Valley Civilization located and why was this area such a great place to build a civilization?

2. (3:44) When did this civilization flourish and how do we know about the people?

3. (5:51) So what were some distinguishing characteristics of the Indus Valley civilization?

4. (7:47) When did the Indus Valley Civilization decline and what happened to these people?
