Lesson One: Ancient Israel Geography and Early History (Abraham & Moses)

| 6.39 On a historical map of the Mediterranean Sea, Jordan River, Sinai Peninsula, locate Asia Minor, the kingdoms of the Hittites and Phoenicians, ancient Israel, and Egypt. |
| 6.40 Examine the development of the ancient Israelites, tracing their migrations from Mesopotamia to Canaan, later called Israel, and explain the significant roles of Abraham and Moses in their history. |

Engage: “Animated History: Ancient Israelites”

| What makes Israel a unique civilization? |
| Who was Abraham and what role did he play in Israel’s history? |
| How did the religion of the ancient Israelites differ from Egypt and Mesopotamia? |
| How did the Israelites end up in Egypt? |
| Who is Moses and what role did he play in Israel’s history? |

Explain the following terms: Torah, Canaan, and Ten Commandments

Ancient Israel

Where is Israel Located?

Ancient Israel, located in the Middle East, was the home of the ancient Hebrew Israelite people whose modern descendants are called Jews. Throughout history, this land has also been called Canaan, Israel, Judah, Judea, and Palestine. The historical kingdoms of ancient Israel were located here. The land has been ruled by many other empires and kingdoms, including the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and the Ottoman Empire. Today much of the same land is home to the modern State of Israel, a country in which almost half of the world’s Jewish people live today. It is bordered to the west by the Mediterranean Sea. In ancient times, this location near the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia and the lands of the Persian Empire often placed Israel between major empires. The Dead Sea and the kingdoms of Edom and Moab bordered Israel in the south. North of Israel were the city of Damascus and the Assyrian Empire. Today, Israel is bordered by Egypt to the south, Lebanon and Syria to the north, and Jordan to the east.

Israel is about the size of New Jersey. Although Israel has a wide variety of climates for such a small country, much of Israel is desert. In the southern part of Israel is the Negev Desert. Rain only falls during the winter months. The Jordan River, the only major river in the country, is Israel’s most important source of fresh water. It flows down through the center of the country and into the Dead Sea. In ancient times, herding and farming were common. Today, elaborate irrigation systems fuel agriculture in the region and parts of Israel export products, such as olives and oranges.

The Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth—1300 feet below sea level! The water that flows into the Dead Sea from the Jordan River has no way to get out, so it evaporates in the desert heat. The evaporation produces deposits of salt, making the Dead Sea seven times saltier than the ocean. The salt deposits were, and continue to be, a valuable natural resource for Israel.
Important cities in Israel

Important cities in modern Israel include Jerusalem, the capital of Israel; Tel Aviv/Yaffa, a bustling modern city, whose metropolitan area is the largest in Israel; Haifa, a busy port on the Mediterranean coast and Beersheva (Beersheba) in the Negev desert in the south. Hebron, an ancient city with a large modern population; Bethlehem, believed to be the birthplace of Jesus; and Jericho, possibly the world’s oldest inhabited city, are located on the West Bank, on the west side of the Jordan River.

Jerusalem was the largest and most important city in ancient Israel. It is believed to have been first built around 3000 BCE. It is considered a sacred city by Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It has been at the center of conflicts between kingdoms, empires, and countries for centuries, and it has been destroyed and rebuilt at least twice. Archaeologists do not know for certain how old it is or what it originally looked like, but Jerusalem has over 2,000 archeological sites that provide a window into its many eras.

The city of Jerusalem is mentioned by name in Egyptian record from around 4,000 years ago, and it also appears throughout the Torah, the most important religious text in the Jewish faith. In ancient times, it was the site of the holy Jewish Temples and to this day, Jewish people all over the world turn toward Jerusalem to recite their daily prayers. The city has also become a source of and a center of conflict. Because Jerusalem has religious and spiritual importance to many groups, and because it sits at the crossroads of many empires, disputes over ownership of the city have continued to modern times.

Answer the following questions using the article.

1. In what part of the world is Israel located?

2. Which of the following is NOT a name for ancient Israel?
   A) Palestine
   B) Canaan
   C) Judea
   D) Jerusalem

3. Which of the following did NOT rule Israel at one time.
   A) Persia
   B) Rome
   C) Babylonians
   D) China

3. What is the Jordan River?

4. What is the Dead Sea?

Why was/is Jerusalem an important city?

Go to “Israel Maps PowerPoint” on Mr. Walls Weebly to complete the Map below.

- The sea east of Israel
- River that runs through Israel and empties into the Dead Sea
- A peninsula linking Southwest Asia to Northeast Africa
- A geographic region in the south-western part of Asia comprising most of what is present-day Turkey. It was known as “The Land of the Hatti” and was inhabited by the Hittites.
Ancient people who established an empire in Asia Minor and Syria that flourished from c. 1700 to c. 1200 BC.

An ancient civilization composed of independent city-states which lay along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea stretching through what is now Syria, Lebanon and northern Israel.

Ancient Egypt was a civilization of ancient Northeastern Africa, concentrated along the lower reaches of the Nile River in what is now the modern country of Egypt.

The Kingdom of Israel occupied the land on the Mediterranean Sea corresponding roughly to the State of Israel of modern times. Named after the Hebrew patriarch Jacob who was given the name Israel by God.
The Roots of Judaism
What role did Abraham play in the culture of the ancient Hebrews

The Torah is one of the oldest religious texts in existence today. Although it is for the most part a religious text, the Torah was also the book of law for the ancient Hebrew people. It contains stories and legends of their origins, travels, and conquests. Like the information in many ancient texts, only some of the information in the Torah has been supported by archaeological evidence.

One of the most important figures in Hebrew tradition is Abraham. The Torah states that Abraham was living in the Mesopotamian city of Ur in Sumeria. At the time, the Mesopotamian people practiced polytheism, or the belief in many gods. The Hebrew people believe that God spoke to Abraham and told him to establish a new nation. Abraham obeyed God, left Ur, and traveled to Canaan, which would become the kingdom of Israel. Abraham became the first person to practice monotheism, or the belief in a single god, in the religion that would become Judaism.

According to the Torah, Abraham was 75 years old when God called him to Canaan, and his wife, Sarah, could no longer have children. However, the Torah states that in Canaan, God made a covenant, or agreement, with Abraham, promising him that his descendants would inherit the nation of Israel. In turn Abraham agreed to worship and follow God and only God. Abraham’s promise to follow only one God would establish a religion that was different from the other ancient religions and would go on to influence the formation of other major monotheistic religions.

According to the Hebrew Bible, after Abraham agreed to the covenant, his wife Sarah gave birth to a son, Isaac, when she was 90 years old. Isaac would go on to found the nation of Israel.

The Exodus
What role does Moses play in the Jewish tradition?

One of the most important and influential stories in the Hebrew Bible is the story of the Israelites’ escape from Egypt, called the Exodus. This story became an important part of the Jewish tradition and an inspiration for many groups.

According to the Torah, Abraham’s great grandson, the Israelite patriarch Joseph, had a reputation as a man who could interpret God’s messages in dreams. The pharaoh of Egypt asked Joseph to interpret a puzzling dream. Joseph warned the pharaoh to store food during seven years of good harvests so that the people of Egypt would have food during the famine. The Torah states that a time of great famine, or a shortage of food, then came to the region and that people in most nations suffering from the famine were starving. But the Egyptians had followed Joseph’s advice and prepared for the shortages. The Israelites joined Joseph in Egypt so that they would not starve.

A later pharaoh grew concerned over the number of Israelites living in Egypt and enslaved them. He also ordered that all firstborn Israelite males should be killed. According to the Torah, the Israelites remained slaves in Egypt for...
several hundred years until they were led to freedom by Moses. When Moses was born, his mother placed him in a basket to prevent him from being killed under the pharaoh’s order. He was found by pharaoh’s daughter who raised him as a son. When he grew older, God spoke to Moses through a burning bush, commanding him to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in Canaan, the land of his forefathers.

The Hebrew Bible tells that Moses tried to convince the pharaoh to release the enslaved Israelites, but that pharaoh would not listen. God then sent ten plagues to Egypt. After the plagues, Pharaoh finally released the enslaved people, and Moses led them out of Egypt across the Red Sea, or the Sea of Reeds.

Jewish tradition states that Moses and his people journeyed in the desert for 40 years before entering Canaan. According to the Torah, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, the best known part of the Torah, at the summit of Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments formed the foundation of Jewish law and inspired numerous legal codes and traditions in later societies.

The story of the Exodus is also a powerful tale that has inspired Jewish people and others across the centuries. Jewish people have used it as an inspiration to stand up against oppression and to fight for social justice. Every year at the Passover holiday, Jewish people remember that they were enslaved in Egypt and reflect on slavery and injustice around the world.

The Exodus story also served as an inspiration for African Americans to flee slavery in early United States history and to fight for Civil Rights in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1850s, an escaped African American slave named Harriet Tubman earned the nickname “Moses” because she helped lead up to 300 enslaved people to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Over one hundred years later, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called a racially integrated and peaceful United States “the Promised Land” and spoke about being “free at last” in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

**Answer the following questions using the article.**

**What is the exodus?**

**Who was Joseph and why is he important?**

**Explain the significance of the following terms or phrases.**

**Placed In A Basket**

**Burning Bush**

**Ten Plagues**

**40 years**

**Ten Commandments**

**What ties does the exodus story have to American history?**
Watch the video, "Moses"
Briefly summarize the story of Abraham. Include information found in paragraphs 3, 4, and 5, as well as the video.

Activity One
Create two comics, one for Abraham and one for Moses that conveys the roles they played in ancient Israel’s history.

Activity Two
Imagine that Abraham and Moses met over coffee. Create a dialogue between the two based on what you have learned about them from your lesson. Use a separate sheet of notebook paper.