6.11 Explain the significance of polytheism (the belief that there are many gods) as the religious belief of the people in Mesopotamian civilizations.

6.9 Summarize Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria as successive civilizations and empires and explain the development of city-states, identify Kish, Akkad, Ur, and Nineveh, and the significance of Sargon and Hammurabi.

Engage

Have you ever heard the saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words?” Describe what the following pictures could tell us about Mesopotamian Religion, Society, and Rulers!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Rulers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Explore and Explain**

Directions: Read the following articles and answer the questions as they guide you in understanding the religion and society of ancient Mesopotamia!
Religion in Mesopotamia
What role did religion play in Mesopotamian society?

1. What is polytheism?
2. Describe two things Mesopotamians believed about their Gods and Goddesses.
3. What was the purpose of the Ziggurat?
4. Why did Ziggurats have steps instead of flat sides like pyramids?
5. What are some things they did to worship their gods?
6. How did the Mesopotamians religion influence their daily lives?

Write a short statement of what religion meant to an ancient Mesopotamian from their perspective.
A Social Pyramid

How was Mesopotamian society organized?

(1) One of the marks of civilization is the specialization of labor. Instead of everyone doing everything for themselves to meet their needs, each person in a civilization specializes in one main job that helps both themselves and others satisfy their needs. In Mesopotamia, this specialization of labor led to social classes that shaped the society.

(2) An individual’s work determined the social class to which he or she belonged. The social classes of Mesopotamian society can be illustrated in a social pyramid, with the king at the top of the pyramid and farmers and enslaved people at the bottom. Each Mesopotamian city-state was organized in this way.

(3) The king was at the top of the pyramid because he had the most power in his city-state. The higher social classes had the fewest people, but these people had the most power. Social classes based on occupations such as priests, artisans, and merchants were in the middle of the social pyramid. The largest social class, at the bottom of the social pyramid, was made of farmers and enslaved people. Though farmers comprised the largest social group, they had the least power. Enslaved people had no power at all within the society.

(4) Social levels were fairly rigid. Most of the time, children were expected to pursue the same occupations as their parents. A farmer’s child would become a farmer. A scribe’s child would become a scribe. What roles did members of each of these classes have in society?

(5) Establishing these social classes helped build Mesopotamian empires. Kings who wanted to expand their empires relied on strictly organized social classes to successfully conquer an area. The priests provided advice and guidance to the king, while average citizens built chariots, weapons, and other tools for warfare. Social classes and specialization also made some members of Mesopotamian societies highly successful at trading and bringing wealth into the kingdoms.

1. How does the specialization of labor lead to social classes

2. What shaped is used to illustrate Mesopotamian Social Classes? Why?

3. What determined what social class a person was in?

4. What does it mean that the social class system was, “rigid?”

5. How did social classes lead to the establishment of empires?

Fill in the pyramid below. Which class would you have wanted to be in? Why?
Conquering Mesopotamia
Why was Mesopotamia a prized land?

The land between the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers was very **fertile** and good for farming. The city-states in the region created **irrigation** systems to bring water to the land. Active **trade** along the rivers further enriched the city-states. All of these resources made **Mesopotamia** a desirable place for people to live and a valuable land for leaders to conquer and rule.

The earliest group of city-states that developed between the **Tigris and Euphrates Rivers** was called **Sumer**. Each **city-state** in Sumer was independent. The king of a city-state ruled over the city and the farmland that surrounded it. The Sumerian city-states were connected by a common **culture** and by trade.

Despite these common connections, the city-states sometimes fought each other, as well as outside forces, in order to gain control of more land and resources. From the **Akkadians** to the Babylonians to the Assyrians, a series of empires ruled Mesopotamia. Sometime these empires expanded from one of the city-states. Other times, outside people invaded Mesopotamia and claimed its riches.

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**Answer the following questions using the map**

1. Which civilization was the smallest?

2. Which civilization was the largest?

3. Where was Sumer located?

4. Which civilizations expanded beyond Mesopotamia?

5. Create a timeline of the civilizations that ruled Mesopotamia
The history of Mesopotamia is marked by four great empires. In between one empire’s rule and the next, there was a time of disorganization before another leader conquered the region. How did these empires come into power?

**Akkadian Empire**

Sargon was the king of Kish, a city-state in northern Mesopotamia. In the 2300s BCE, Sargon began to conquer other Sumerian city-states, destroying their defensive walls and placing them under his power.

The conquered city-states were united under the rule of Sargon and became the Akkadian Empire. The empire lasted about 200 years, and, at its peak, it covered most of Mesopotamia.

**Babylonian Empire**

Hammurabi, the king of Babylon, conquered much of Mesopotamia several hundred years after the Akkadian Empire fell apart. Hammurabi is best known for the code of laws he created in the 1700s BCE.

The Babylonian Empire was not quite as large as the Akkadian Empire. It lasted until about 1595 BCE when the neighboring Hittite Empire conquered parts of northern Mesopotamia and caused the Babylonian Empire to fall.

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Create Resumes for Sargon and Hammurabi using the graphic organizer below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sargon the Great</th>
<th>King Hammurabi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Series of Empires (c. 900–539 BCE)

What later empires ruled Mesopotamia?

After the fall of the Babylonian Empire, independent city-states once again maintained control of the region. The Assyrian Empire rose around 900 BCE, when the Assyrians began to form and train their army to conquer neighboring areas. The Assyrian army was especially good at siege warfare, using battering rams and siege towers to overcome city walls.

The Assyrian capital of Nineveh was north of Sumer on the Tigris River. At its peak, the Assyrian Empire stretched from the Persian Gulf in the east to the Nile River valley in the west. However, this empire eventually became too large for the Assyrian army to control. When the people they conquered, including the Babylonians, rose up against them in the 600s BCE, the Assyrian Empire fell.

Chaldean or Neo-Babylonian Empire

The Chaldean Empire, also known as the Neo-Babylonian Empire, replaced the Assyrian Empire. Although it was not as large as the Assyrian Empire and lasted only 75 years, it was very powerful. The Chaldean ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered much of the former Assyrian Empire and made it part of the Chaldean Empire. When conquered peoples, such as the Hebrews of Canaan, rebelled, the king brutally suppressed the rebellion and forced most of the population into exile.

Nebuchadnezzar oversaw huge building projects in Babylon. Workers constructed a double wall around the city to protect it from outside invaders. They rebuilt the city’s ziggurat. They constructed the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, where plants grew on rooftops and hung down over the sides of walls. The height of Chaldean Empire came to an end when the Persian Empire conquered it in 539 BCE.

Create a short encyclopedia entry for the Assyrian Empire and Chaldean Empire using the graphic organizer below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assyrian Empire</th>
<th>Chaldean Empire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List two facts about the Assyrian Empire.</td>
<td>1. List two facts about the Assyrian Empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did the Assyrian Empire fall?</td>
<td>2. Why did the Assyrian Empire fall?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was the king of the Chaldean Empire? What are some of the things he is known for?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did the Chaldean Empire end?</td>
<td>4. Why did the Chaldean Empire end?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluate
Directions: Answer the following questions using your notes

1. Which statement best applies to polytheism?
   A. There is a heaven.
   B. There are many gods.
   C. The spirits control your life.
   D. The universe is merely an illusion.

2. Which statement describes a reason why Mesopotamia was often a target of invasions from other civilizations?
   A. The Mesopotamian city-states did not defend each other because they had no common connections.
   B. The Mesopotamian city-states were weakened by constant warfare between one another.
   C. The Mesopotamian region contained fertile farmland and was close to rivers for access to trade routes.
   D. The city-states in Mesopotamia controlled all trade in the region and had amassed great wealth.

3. Which statement best explains why Mesopotamian kings organized the construction of ziggurats?
   A. Ziggurats gave the gods a place in the city-state from which they could better protect the people.
   B. Ziggurats showed Mesopotamians, as well as outsiders, that the city-state was wealthy and powerful.
   C. Ziggurats served as public meeting places that made it easier for officials to conduct government business.
   D. Ziggurats provided poor Mesopotamians with food and shelter so that they would not threaten the power of the king.

4. Which of these groups of people had the least amount of political power in Mesopotamian society?
   A. artisans
   B. farmers
   C. priests
   D. soldiers

5. “A Mesopotamian city-state has built a mighty ziggurat honoring the god that its citizens believe looks over the city. They are grateful to have him visit and happy to give him somewhere to stay. However, a conquering army has stormed the city-state and destroyed the ziggurat.”

Based on Mesopotamian religious beliefs, which of the statements below would best express the feelings of a person living in this city-state?
   A. “The enemy has killed our protector.”
   B. “The enemy will be punished for treating our god in this way.”
   C. “We should have done more to build up our defenses.”
   D. “We must have done something wrong to make our god leave us unprotected.”