

Short Lessons in World History

FIFTH EDITION

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Contents

Purpose of the Book ix
Maps Help Us Understand World History xi
List of Maps xv

1

The First Civilized People 1
 Introduction 1
 The People of Sumer 1
 The Land of the Nile 3
 Review: Sumer and Egypt 5
 Early African Civilizations 6
 Who Else Lived near Egypt and Sumer? 6
 China and India Begin 9
 Map Activity: Early Civilizations 10
 Review: Cradles of Civilization 11
 Crossword Puzzle: Early Civilizations 13

2

Greece and Rome 15
 Introduction 15
 The Early Greeks 16
 Greece's Golden Age 17
 Puzzle: Ancient Greece 18
 Map Review: Ancient Greece 19
 Map Review: Alexander the Great 21
 The Rise of Rome 24
 Rome Becomes Great 24
 Crossword Puzzle: The Roman Empire 26
 Rome's Decline 28
 Puzzle: The Roman Empire 29

3

Empires and Civilizations Around the World31

Introduction	31
Christian and Muslim Empires	32
India, China, and Japan.....	33
African Empires Prosper.....	34
<i>Review: Empires and Civilizations</i>	35
Civilizations in the Americas	36
<i>Puzzle: Empires and Civilizations</i>	38
<i>Review: Empires and Civilizations</i>	39
<i>Map Review: Religion and Empires</i>	39

4

The Middle Ages.....41

Introduction	41
The Dark Ages and Feudalism	42
Knights of the Middle Ages	44
The Church Grows More Powerful.....	45
The End of Feudalism in Europe.....	46
Kings and Nations Gain Power.....	47
Learning Begins Again in Europe.....	48
The Renaissance and the Reformation	50
<i>Puzzle: The Middle Ages</i>	52
<i>Crossword Puzzle: The Middle Ages</i>	53

5

Europe's Power Grows Greater55

Introduction	56
Europe Explores the World	56
Ships Used in Exploration	58
<i>Map Review: European Colonies in the Americas</i>	58
Europe—A Continent at War	61
<i>Map Review: Russia</i>	63
<i>Puzzle: A Continent at War</i>	65
Revolutions!	66
<i>Review: Revolutions</i>	67
The Beginnings of the Modern World	68
<i>Review: Revolutions</i>	69

6

The Industrial Revolution.....	71
Introduction	71
Machines and Factories.....	71
Great Britain and the Growing Industrial Revolution	72
<i>Map Review: Industrial Britain</i>	73
Money and Wealth	75
<i>Crossword Puzzle: The Industrial Revolution</i>	75
Population Changes	77
Working Conditions and Labor Unions.....	77
Positive Results of the Industrial Revolution	78
Socialism and Communism.....	78
<i>Puzzle: Industrial Revolution</i>	80

7

Empire Building and War	83
Introduction	84
Empire Building	84
East Meets West.....	86
<i>Puzzle: Empire Building</i>	87
Europe in Africa	88
<i>Map Review: Africa in 1914</i>	89
How to Start a War	90
The World at War.....	92
<i>Map Review: Europe in 1914</i>	93
A Plan for Peace.....	96
<i>Review: A Plan for Peace</i>	97

8

War Was Not a Solution.....	99
Introduction	100
Russia after the Revolution	100
Europe after the War.....	101
<i>Map Review: Europe: 1919-1929.</i>	102
A Time of Change	104
<i>Puzzle: The World Between Wars</i>	105
The End of World Peace.....	107
World War II	108
<i>Crossword Puzzle: World War II</i>	110
Another Chance for World Peace.....	112
<i>Review: World War II</i>	113

9

Communism and the Cold War.....	115
Introduction	116
The Cold War and the Iron Curtain	116
Different Brands of Communism	117
<i>Map Review and Puzzle: Postwar Europe</i>	118
Communism in Asia	120
War Again!.....	120
<i>Puzzle: Communism in Asia</i>	121
Cuba.....	122
War in Vietnam.....	122
<i>Puzzle: Communism and the Cold War</i>	124

10

The Middle East.....	127
Introduction	128
Israel.....	128
<i>Map Review: Map of the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli Conflict</i>	133
Iran	136
Iraq	137
Afghanistan.....	140
<i>Crossword Puzzle: The Middle East</i>	142
Lebanon.....	143
Jordan.....	144
Saudi Arabia.....	145
<i>Map Review: The Middle East Today</i>	145
Looking Ahead.....	146

11

Africa.....	147
Introduction	147
Redrawing the Map of Africa.....	148
Ethiopia	149
The Congo and Angola.....	149
South Africa	150
Zimbabwe	151
African Nations with Old Problems	152
<i>Puzzle: Africa</i>	154
Is Peace Only a Dream?	155
<i>Review: Africa</i>	157
<i>Map Review: Africa</i>	157

12

Asia.....	159
Introduction	159
China	160
Korea	161
<i>Review: China, South Korea, and North Korea</i>	162
India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.....	163
Vietnam	165
Japan and Southeast Asia	166
<i>Map Review: Asia</i>	167
<i>Review: Asia</i>	168

13

Europe and the Former Soviet Union.....171

Introduction172

Developments in Western Europe172

Review: Western Europe175

The Reorganization of the Soviet Union175

Developments in Eastern Europe.....176

Europe of Today178

Puzzle: Europe and Russia179

Map Review: Twenty-First-Century Europe180

14

The Americas and Today's World183

Introduction183

Danger, Drugs, and Democracy in Latin America.....184

Map Review: Latin America187

Developments in the United States and Canada.....187

Puzzle: The Americas.....189

Technology and the Space Age190

The Future: Promises and Problems191

Review: Promises And Problems.....193

Glossary.....195

Answer Key209

1 The First Civilized People

TIME LINE

DATE	EVENTS
5000 B.C.E.	Sumerians lived along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
4500 B.C.E.	Chinese civilization was beginning
4000 B.C.E.	Nile River civilization developed
3400 B.C. E.	Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt
2000 B.C.E.	Hittites used iron weapons in Asia Minor; Phoenicians developed letter alphabet
1700s B.C.E.	Hammurabi ruled Babylon and wrote his code of laws
1000 B.C.E.	Hebrews were well established in Palestine
900 B.C.E.	Nok people lived in what is now northern Nigeria
563–483 B.C.E.	Buddha's life in India
551–479 B.C.E.	Life of Confucius, China
550 B.C.E.	Persia began conquests
529 B.C.E.	Death of Cyrus the Great

≈ ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Watch for answers to these questions as you read.

- What sorts of knowledge and culture did the Sumerians have and use?
- How was life in ancient Egypt different from life in Sumer?
- What advances did other ancient civilizations make in Africa and Asia Minor?
- How were early civilizations in China and Japan different from those in Africa and Asia Minor?

INTRODUCTION

Inventions and discoveries through the ages have allowed us more and more wonderful choices of how to live. Let's look back in time and see how some early people lived. Let's also see what things they did then that help us live the way we do now.

THE PEOPLE OF SUMER

Nearly 7,000 years ago, the people of Sumer lived where the country of Iraq is today. These people, called Sumerians, developed one of the world's first **civilizations**. They built their cities in the valleys along the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. They settled along the rivers because of the rich soil and water supply. About nine out of every ten people farmed. The others were businesspeople, priests, rulers, or **traders**. **Slaves** were used by farmers and **merchants**.

invention—a device or process that did not exist before

civilization—a large group of people with a highly organized society

trader—someone whose business is buying and selling goods

slave—a person who is owned by someone else

merchant—a person who buys and sells goods

irrigation—the use of streams, ditches, canals, and other means to water crops in place of rainfall

cuneiform— wedge-shaped writing developed in Sumer

government—the system by which a country or state is governed

city-state—a city and surrounding land that make up an independent state, with its own ruler, army, and laws

trade—the exchange of money, goods, and services

law—a rule to regulate the way people act

class—a group to which certain people in society belong

religion—belief in and worship of a god or gods

temple—a building used for religious practices

priest—person

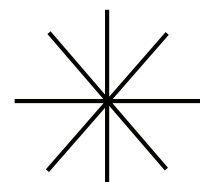
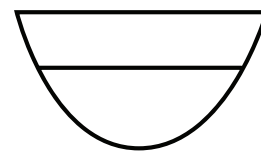
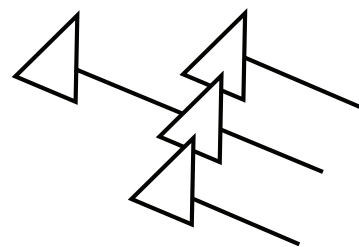
The Sumerians were the first people known to use **irrigation**. The Sumerians dug large ditches and ponds. When the river flooded, the ponds filled. When dry weather came, ditches carried water from the ponds to the fields. Without irrigation, the people of Sumer could not have raised large crops.

The earliest surviving examples of writing are Sumerian. At first, the Sumerians used picture writing, but it was too slow and hard to use. They then invented **cuneiform**. They made marks in wet clay tablets with wedge-shaped sticks. The clay was then hardened by baking to make a lasting record. Writing made record keeping possible. It also enabled one city to send messages to another.

The Sumerians had a **government**. Every nation needs some form of government. At first, each city had its own government. These cities were small city-states. The **city-states** soon learned to cooperate. They formed one nation, ruled by a king. The stronger nation could better protect itself during war. Because all cities helped with **trade** and irrigation, the people of the nation could live better.

Any nation needs **laws** to live peacefully. Sumer had some interesting laws. Anyone who said a person had committed a crime had to prove it. If not, the accuser could be put to death. If your leg was cut in a fight, you had the right to cut your enemy's leg. The laws also divided the population into three **classes**: aristocrats, commoners, and slaves. Slaves had rights and could even own land. Sometimes a slave could buy his or her freedom. On the other hand, for some crimes a free person could be made a slave.

Religion was important to the Sumerians. They built huge **temples** of clay bricks and believed that their **priests** could talk to the gods. The Sumerian religion told about the gods creating human beings. Their religion told the story of a great flood. Some of the gods decided to destroy the people on Earth by a great flood. A favored king of one city was warned by friendly gods, so he built a great boat. In this great boat, the good king took all the animals of authorized to perform the sacred the field and forest. After the rain stopped and the flood waters went down, the good king gave thanks to the friendly gods who had warned him. Flood stories such as this one are found in many cultures.



Cuneiform symbols

Native Americans—the people who lived in North America before Europeans arrived; also called Indians

canal—a waterway made by artificial means, such as digging

CIVILIZATIONS IN THE AMERICAS

We have read about great civilizations in Africa, Europe, and Asia. What about North and South America? Civilizations were also developing there.

Three groups of **Native Americans** set up empires and were highly civilized. They were the Aztecs of Mexico, the Mayas of Central America, and the Incas of South America.

For years historians have felt that the first people in the Americas came from Asia. No matter where they came from, these three early groups developed great civilizations.

By about 100 C.E., the Mayas had great city-states. Some of their temples were 200 feet high. These people knew how to use a zero in math before the Europeans did. They had a better calendar than the people of Europe. Their scientists studied astronomy, and their doctors knew about surgery.

In the late 800s, the Mayas began leaving their great cities. No one is sure why.

During the 1200s, the nomadic Aztecs began settling in the Valley of Mexico. They grew into an empire by conquering and controlling most of central Mexico. By 1500, the empire had a population of about 20 million. Their capital city, Tenochtitlan, was magnificent. It was filled with wide streets and **canals**, and many temples and palaces.



Central American temple

MONTEZUMA

Montezuma was born in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital that is now Mexico City. The Aztecs were tough, intelligent people. The ruling class lived in great luxury. Almost 400 conquered towns paid tribute, or protection money, to them.

The Aztecs believed in many gods who controlled every part of their lives. To make their gods happy, the Aztec people **sacrificed** humans to the gods. The Aztecs kept an army just to capture people from neighboring tribes to use for sacrifice.

The government of the Aztecs was headed by an **elected** ruler. He was elected by a council from the old ruler's family. Like a god, the ruler had absolute, or total, control over the Aztec people.

In 1502, Montezuma was elected as ruler. As Montezuma studied to know the gods better, he became concerned. The books told of Quetzalcoatl, one of the Aztec gods. He had been beaten and then sent away by the war god. Quetzalcoatl said he would return in a One Reed year to rule the Aztecs again. Many One Reed years passed without Quetzalcoatl returning. The next One Reed year would be in 1519.

The books said Quetzalcoatl would have white skin and a black beard. White skin and beards were unknown to the Aztecs.

When the One Reed year arrived in 1519, the pale-skinned, black-bearded Spanish soldier Hernando Cortés came to Mexico.

Montezuma believed Cortés to be Quetzalcoatl. He knew that there would be a battle between Quetzalcoatl and the war god.

Montezuma was willing to pay anything to Cortés if he would not come to Tenochtitlan. Cortés, however, set up his camp along the coast and began to move inland.

Cortés arrived at Tenochtitlan on November 8, 1519. Montezuma greeted him and housed the Spanish troops in the palace. Eventually, the Spanish made Montezuma a prisoner. Though Montezuma believed Cortés was the god Quetzalcoatl, many of the people did not. When the Spanish took Montezuma prisoner, the people rebelled. They elected a new leader who would force Cortés to leave.

Cortés returned to the coast to make sure things were going well there. He left a large force in Tenochtitlan to keep control of the Aztecs. A battle broke out between the Spanish and the Aztecs. Cortés returned from the coast with a large fighting force. When Montezuma tried to calm his people, they threw stones and arrows at him. Montezuma was badly wounded. The Spanish took care of him, but he died on June 29, 1520. The city he loved so much was totally destroyed in August 1521.



sacrifice—the ceremony of offering something to a god, especially by killing a victim

elect—to choose by voting

suspension bridge—a bridge that uses cables to suspend its roadway over deep gaps, such as valleys

In South America, the Incas were also great builders. Their famous Inca Highway was 2,000 miles long. It went through high mountain country and used **suspension bridges** and tunnels. Runners carried messages from the ruler to his people along this great highway.

A central government tightly controlled the Inca empire. The emperor was a god-king and owned everything in the empire. Subject people owed labor to the state. All people within the empire had to speak the Incan language and practice the Incan religion.

In North America, people developed a variety of societies in the many very different regions where they lived. For example, the Anasazi people of the Southwest built villages called pueblos. Each one was a compound of linked, multistory buildings. People of the Ohio and Mississippi river valleys built giant burial mounds and created trading centers. People in the East lived in woodlands and farmed and hunted.

PUZZLE: EMPIRES AND CIVILIZATIONS

Read each of the following clues and think of a word to fit in the lines provided. Some lines have a number under them. At the end of the quiz, there are thirteen numbered lines. Place the letter from each numbered line above the same number in the line at the end of the exercise. The word you spell will tell you what this chapter is all about. We have given you one letter to get you started on that long word.

1. the name for the religion followed by Muslims _____
2
2. warlike people who controlled many native tribe _____
7
3. a great road-building South American civilization. _____
6 1
4. a Muslim group that lived in Spain _____
11 13
5. a new name for the Eastern Roman Empire _____
9 4
6. the Muslim name for God _____
5
7. the Muslim holy book _____
8
8. the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire
_____ 12 10

V
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13