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Mesopotamian Civilization Lesson Plan

Introduction: This lesson engages students in critical thinking about objects from the past as well as the meaning of “civilization”. Students will think like archeologists and examine their own biases as they explore objects from the ancient Middle East.

Time Required: 1 class period

Skills:

- Critical thinking
- Writing
- Using primary sources (artifacts)

Learning Objectives:

- Students will analyze artifacts found in Ur
- Students will determine whether or not Sumer qualifies as a civilization based on artifacts found at Ur.
- Students will argue whether or not a society must show a certain set of traits in order to be considered a “civilization”.

Preparation and Resources

- The teacher should be familiar with the basics of ancient Mesopotamian history. (An overview of Sumer specifically can be found here: <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/sumer>)
- The teacher prepares a short presentation or handout that describes Sumer and Ur (where were they located, when were they first settled/founded). This presentation also includes an brief explanation of the “5 Traits of Civilization”. (Note: Some teachers include a sixth or even seventh trait, and it’s fine if you’d like to include that as well. Your textbook might list its own “traits of civilization”, so feel free to use those instead of the ones I’ve included in this lesson plan. The difficulty of picking only 5/6/7 traits can add to the discussion at the end of the lesson.)
- Provide a printout of the chart for each student and a few copies of each artifact image to place around the room.

Lesson Activities

1. Introduce the basics of Sumer to the class: What was it? Where was it located? When did it exist? Explain that Ur was a large city in Sumer.
2. Ask students what they think is necessary in order for a society to be classified as a “civilization”. You can have them raise their hands or write their answers on poster paper around the room. Ask students to explain why they think the traits they listed make a society a civilization.
3. Show students the “five traits of a civilization”:
 - advanced cities
 - specialized workers
 - complex institutions
 - record keeping

- advanced technology

*Note: I found these specific traits listed in McDougal Littell's *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, which is a textbook targeted at high school students. Your textbook may list different traits.

4. Depending on the time you have in class, you can either ask students what they think these descriptions mean or simply provide them with an explanation. They will probably need clarification on the meaning of most of these terms, especially “specialized workers” and “complex institutions”.

5. Ask students to give examples of artifacts that would show evidence of these traits (e.g., a scroll with writing on it might demonstrate record keeping).
6. Pass out the chart. Explain the activity to students. Remind them to consider not just the object, but also how it was probably made and what it could have been used for.
7. Alone or in small groups, students view each of the five artifacts found in Ur. They discuss the object's possible use and fill out the chart.
8. After students have had sufficient time to examine each object, the class comes back together. Ask students what they thought the objects were and what their use was. Did they see evidence of a civilization in Ur?
9. If no one correctly figured out what an object was, tell the class what it actually is and what it was used for (see teachers' guide).
10. Closing question: Should we use these traits to determine whether or not a society qualifies as a civilization? Are these traits biased in any way? What traits would you add or remove from the list? ****Leave plenty of time for this portion of the lesson!****
 - Students probably struggled to identify each object and its use--that's good! Ask them to consider how archeologists face similar difficulties and how they might determine the meaning of the objects they find.
 - Students could answer these question as part of a writing assignment or, if you would like to add another day to the lesson, in a structured class debate.
 - If you teach younger grades or if you would like an artistic option, ask students to design their own civilization that includes the traits of their choice. They can describe or draw the artifacts an archeologist might find in their civilization.

Assessments

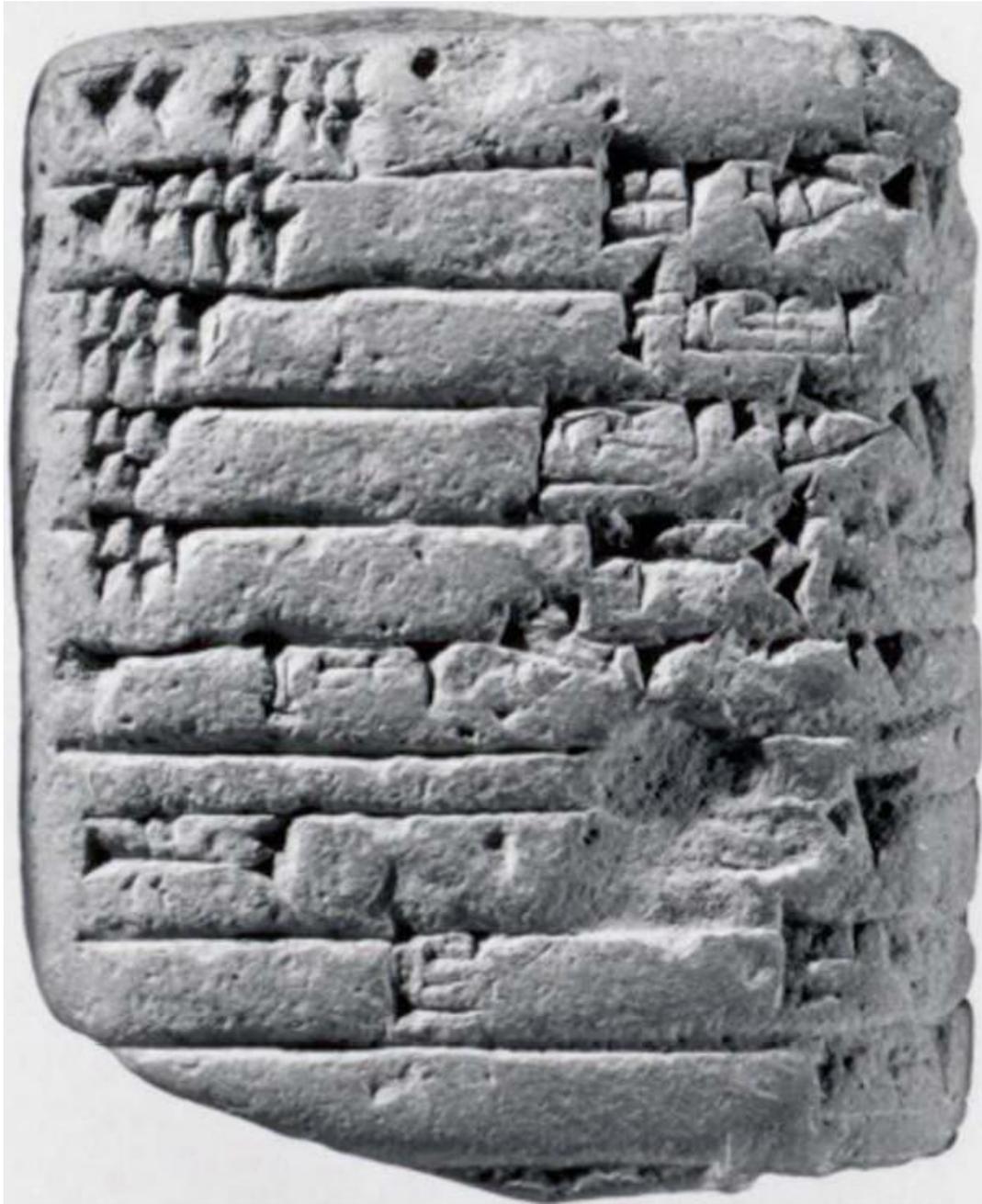
- Writing assignment or in-class debate

Note: I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with each of the artifacts used in the lesson so you can provide context for students if asked. Links to further sources are included in the teachers' guide.

Artifact Analysis Chart

Artifact Number	Basic Description (What does it look like? What might it have been used for?)	Does it demonstrate a trait of civilization? Which one? Why or why not?	Notes from Class Discussion
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

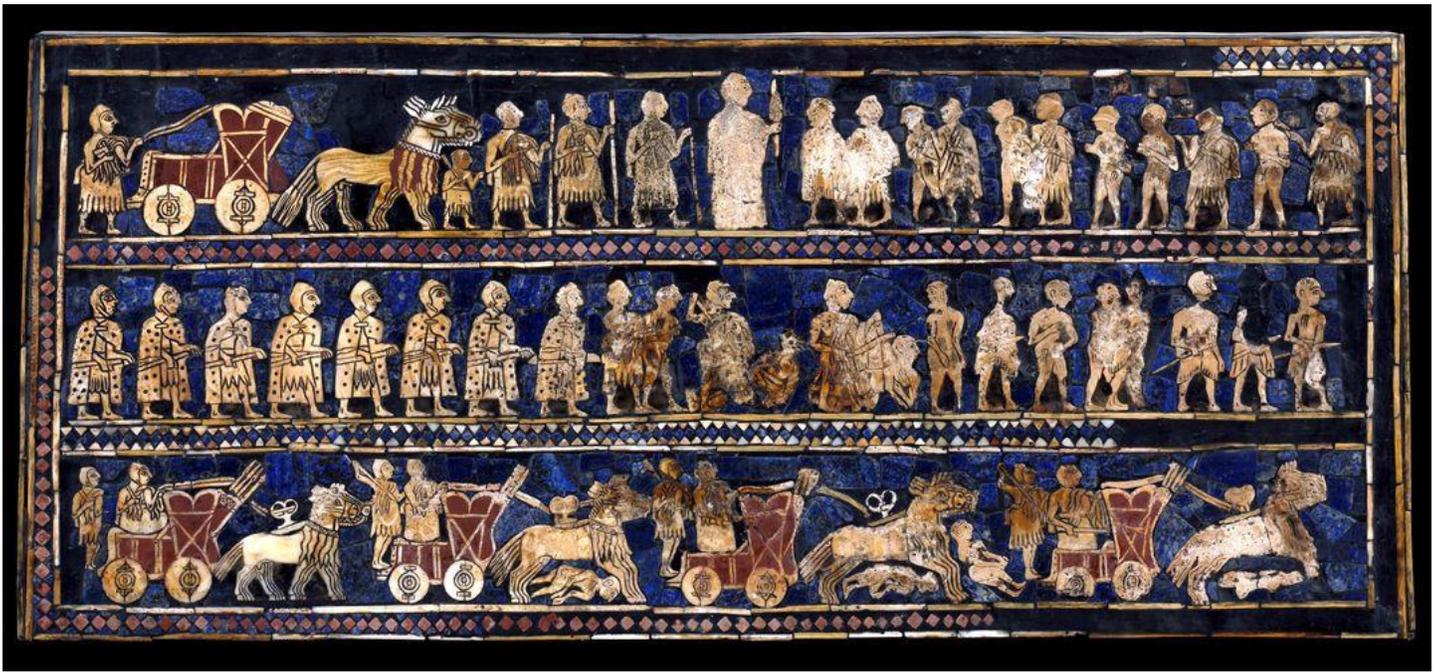
Actifact #1



Artifact #2



Artifact #3



Artifact #4



Artifact #5



Teachers' Guide to the Artifacts

Artifact #1: Cuneiform tablet, c. 2045 BCE (source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322464>)

Artifact #2: Headdress, c. 2600-2500 BCE (source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/322903>)

Artifact #3: The Standard of Ur, c. 2600 BCE (source: https://www.penn.museum/sites/iraq/?page_id=48)

Artifact #4: Queen's lyre, c. 2600 BCE (source: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=368339&partId=1)

Artifact #5: Ram in the Thicket, 2600 BCE (source: <https://www.penn.museum/collections/highlights/neareast/ram.php>)

Further Information:

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/departments/middle-east/facilities-and-services/study-room/studying-cuneiform-tablets.aspx>

<http://www.teachinghistory100.org/objects/about-the-object/ur-standard>

<https://www.world-archaeology.com/great-discoveries/royal-tombs-of-ur/>

http://britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=368265&partId=1

<https://www.world-archaeology.com/issues/object-lesson-ram-in-the-thicket/>