

Ancient Summer

Life in the City State



LO: Life in the City State

Success Criteria

- I can tell you some **interesting facts** about Ancient Sumerian city states and what it was like to live in one.

Remember to make your own notes of the key facts.



What were City States?

- The land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers often flooded and left **rich, fertile land** for planting.
- The Sumerian people **took advantage** of this and established their cities on these areas.
- Large dry, desert type areas between the fertile ground separated cities from one another and made **communication and transportation between cities very difficult**.
- This led to the **development of City States**, with each city being the centre of its own self governed unit of civilisation.
- City States frequently **warred** with each other to gain glory, reputation and more land, so large walls were built all around the outskirts of the City States, and guards were employed to protect the people inside from attack.

Sumerian Social Hierarchy

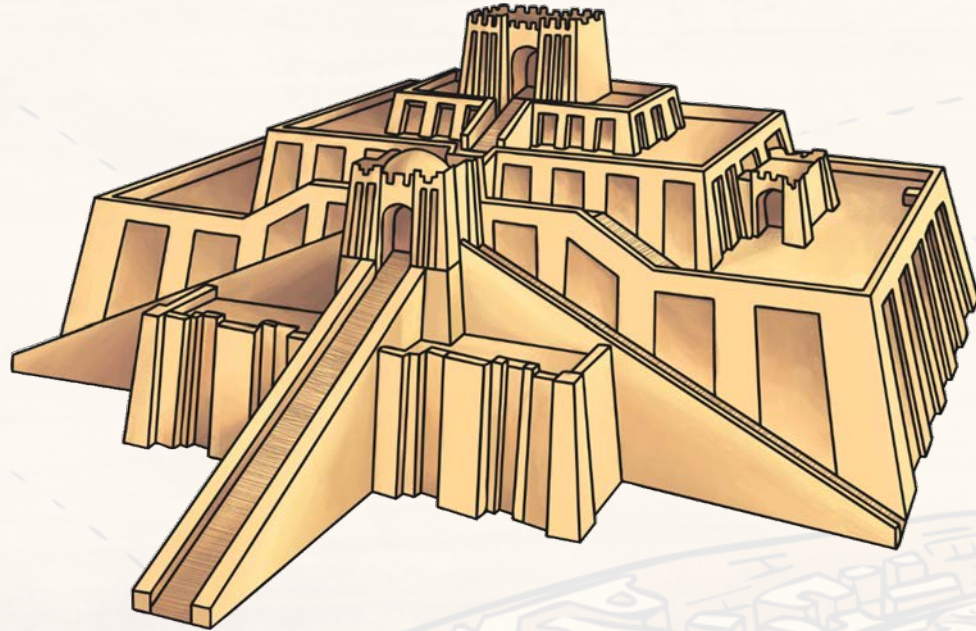
- People in Ancient Sumer were roughly divided into **two classes**: the free and the enslaved.
- The **free classes** consisted of rulers, kings and priests and also skilled workers, such as farmers, merchants and writers.
- The **enslaved people** were forced to work serving the higher classes. Slaves were often criminals but sometimes people became slaves in order to pay off debts.



Which class of people would you have preferred to belong to?

Why?

Ziggurats



- Each City State was centred around a **temple**, built to honour the gods.
- By 2100 BC these temples had become **huge monuments**, known as Ziggurats
- **Ziggurats** had three platforms, steep steps up the front and a temple at the top.

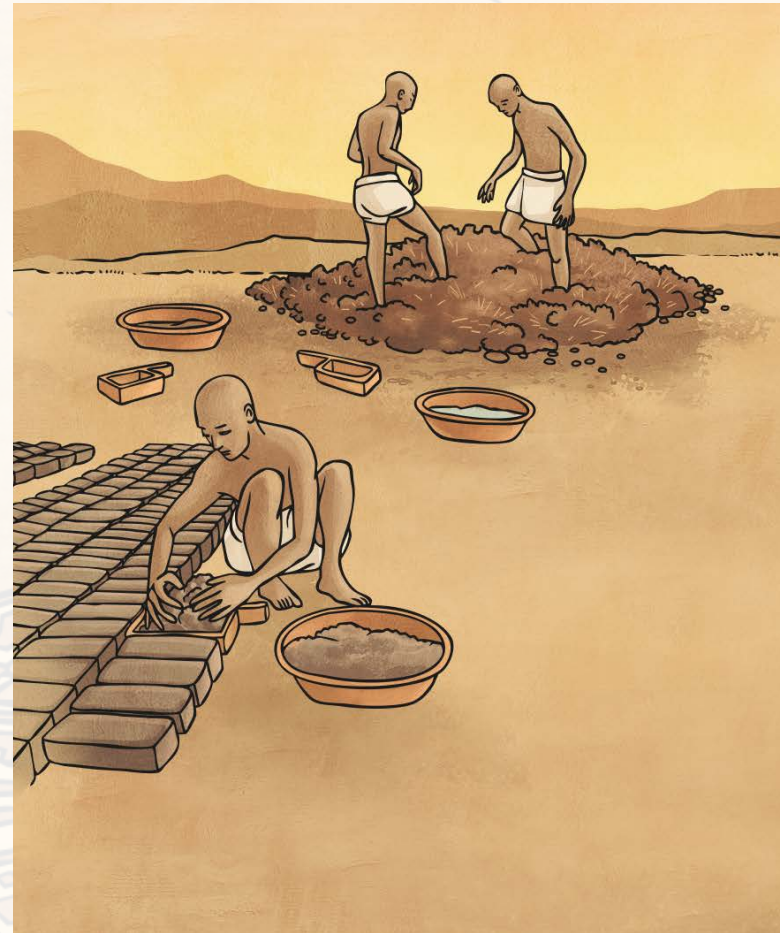
Living in a City State

- Rich Sumerians lived in **huge palaces** while the poor lived in cramped **mud-brick houses** which were tightly packed in along the narrow streets.
- Houses in the cities were built **very close** together and most had **no windows**. They usually had an enclosed downstairs area and an upstairs room without a roof, which provided a cooler place to sleep and prepare food.
- Richer people had more rooms in their houses, sometimes including servant quarters or a chapel. Some of these houses were also built in a **U-shape** which created a garden area in the middle.
- Fishermen and farmers who lived outside the cities, often built houses out of reeds, which were tightly bound together then covered in clay.



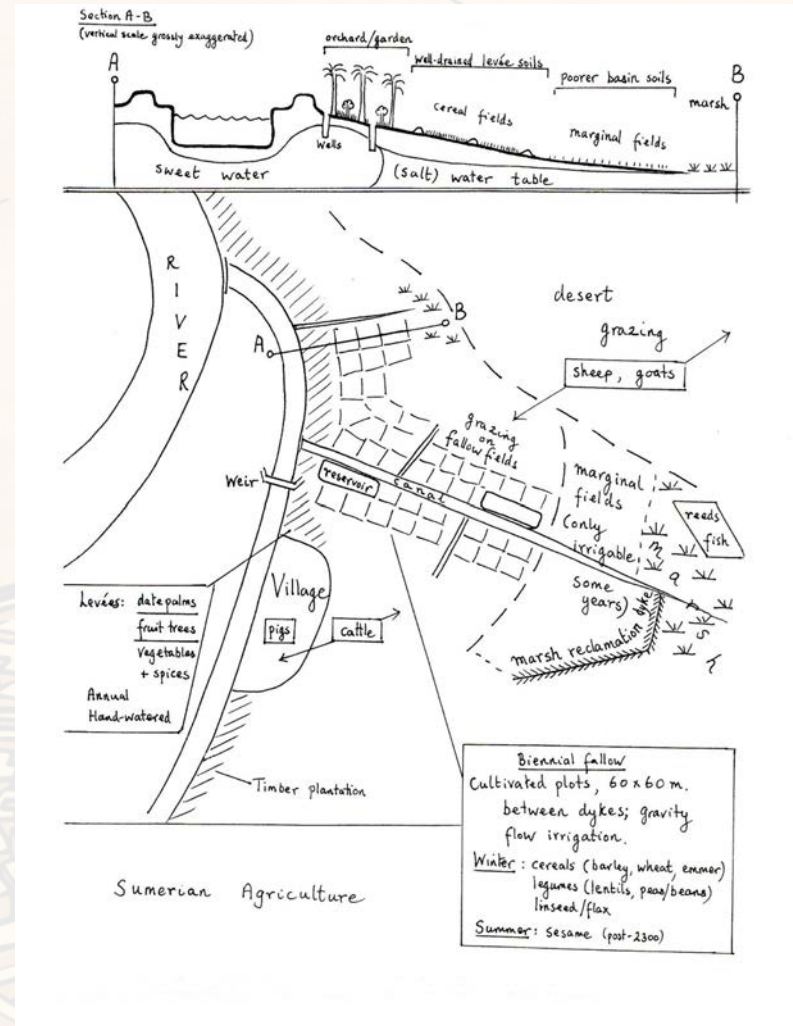
What Were Houses Made of?

- As stone was scarce, buildings were mostly made out of **sun-baked mud bricks**.
- Over time the Sumerians developed **wooden moulds** to ensure these bricks were of a uniform shape and size.
- Eventually they developed the process of **firing the bricks** in a kiln to make them harder and stronger.
- They used a substance called **bitumen** - a semi-solid, black, petrol based material, to waterproof the bricks and to fill in any gaps in the buildings.



Food and farming

- The first Sumerian farmers learnt how to irrigate (water) their land, which enabled them to grow crops successfully each year, despite the low and irregular rainfall.
- They managed to drain marshy areas, which produced even more fertile land for use in farms.
- The canals that were built as part of the irrigation scheme were also used to store floodwaters, because the floods did not usually occur at the time of the year when the farmers wanted their land covered in water!



Food and farming

- *Farmers lived in small villages and produced enough food to trade with cities and towns. They still led a semi-nomadic life, moving herds seasonally: in the winter they lived in the valleys and in the summer in the mountains.*
- *Farmers kept goats, sheep and cattle for milk, meat, wool and leather; ducks and geese for eggs and meat; they caught fish in the rivers and wild deer were hunted, so their diet was varied.*
- *They grew chickpeas, lentils, cucumbers, beans, onions, garlic, leek, apples, pomegranates, plums, figs, grapes and dates.*



Sumerian farming scene
(image from cylinder seal)

Food and farming

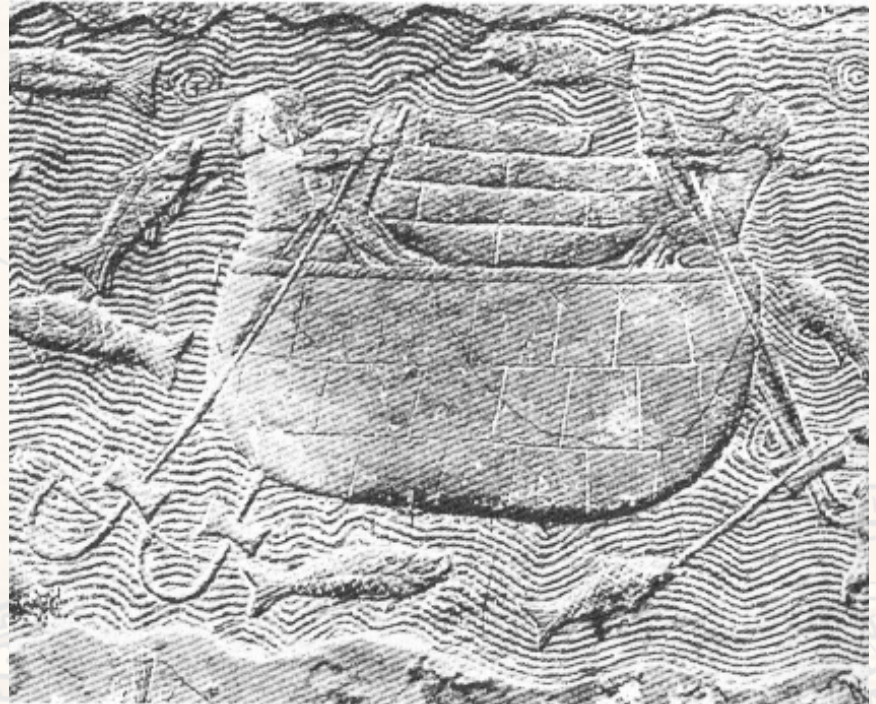
- *The Sumerians invented farming tools, including a seeder plough, rake, sickle and shovel. Some were made of wood, but by 3000 BCE bronze was being used. They used oxen and donkeys to pull farm equipment.*
- *They also sowed and ploughed wild varieties of cereals called 'einkorn' and 'emmer', which developed into wheat and barley. These were made into bread, beer and a kind of porridge.*



Sumerian
plough

Trade

- The early Ancient Sumerians did not use money; they bartered (exchanged) goods of equal value.
- *Many Ancient Sumer cities were by the river. How do you think that helped?*
- It was easier to transport heavy goods by water rather than by land.
- *Sailing boats, which were invented about 4000-3500 BCE, were used on the rivers and across the sea to places like India and the eastern Mediterranean.*
- *On the canals, small, round boats called 'quffas' were used. They were made of woven reeds coated with tar. Quffas are still used in Iraq today.*



Trade and money

- *Between 3500 & 3200 BCE, the wheel was invented, and carts and chariots were used. Roads were built from about 2100 BCE.*



[Have a go at the Tale of Three Merchants](#)

Clothing and jewellery

- *Ancient Sumerians wore clothes made out of leather and wool. They also grew **flax**, which was used to make linen.*
- Men wore **sheepskin kilts** and had bare chests. They grew beards and wore a their long hair in a '**fillet**' (**headband**).
- Women wore long, loose dresses and shawls, fastened over the left shoulder by decorated pins.
- Both went barefoot or wore leather sandals (reed, if they were poor).
- Wealthier people wore clothing coloured with bright dyes.



Clothing and jewellery

- *Sumerian men, women and children wore jewellery: earrings, bracelets, rings and necklaces (men mostly wore necklaces).*
- *Some jewellery was quite simple, but some was much more elaborate.*
- *Only wealthy people wore gold and silver because it had to be imported from other countries.*
- *Lots of semi-precious stones were used, including lapis lazuli (blue) and carnelian (red).*
- *Around their eyes, both men and women wore 'kohl', which is a kind of black powder, often made into paste. They also wore colourful eye shadow.*



A golden shell for storing makeup



A gold headdress



A makeup tray



A simple necklace



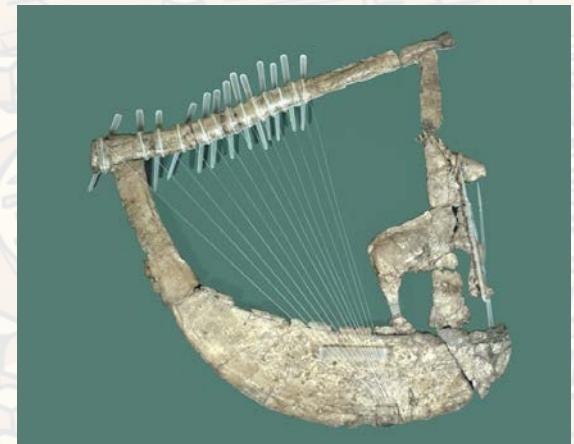
Assorted gold jewellery

Leisure activities: music

- *The Ancient Sumerians enjoyed playing and listening to [music](#).*
- *Music must have been very important in the lives of the Ancient Sumerians as these instruments were buried in a royal grave for the afterlife.*
- *We also know that hymns were sung to the gods in the temples, which indicates that the Ancient Sumer people enjoyed singing too.*
- *What do you think of the music?*



Queen's
lyre



Silver lyre

Leisure activities: sport

- *We also know the Sumerians enjoyed sports, especially hunting, wrestling, boxing and swimming.*



A boxing match with a drummer playing



Leisure activities: games

- *The Royal Game of Ur, also known as the Game of Twenty Squares, is a two-player strategy race board game that was first played in ancient Mesopotamia.*
- *The rules of the game were preserved on a Babylonian clay tablet so we know how it was played.*
- *The board and pieces were made of expensive materials and show excellent workmanship, so they were probably used by adults.*
- *Children may have played with simpler, cheaper boards.*



Similar games, with boards made up of twenty squares, have been found in other ancient civilisations including India and Egypt.

Let's have a go at playing [The Royal Game of Ur](#).

Ancient Sumerian Games

Activity

This similar game board was found at another ancient site, but the game pieces were square. No-one is sure of the rules for this game. Perhaps it was based on hunting, which was another leisure activity.

What do you think?

Can you create a game using this board?

