**Introduction:**

Students will be exploring Mesopotamia through an eight-day unit. During the unit, students will be engaged in a variety of hands-on, exploratory lessons. Each lesson will engage students in a different aspect of Mesopotamian civilization. All of the lessons are connected with the sixth grade history standard number four. This standard has students explore the location, government, religion, agriculture, and cultural and scientific contributions of different river civilizations. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers will be the focus of this unit. Also integrated into the lessons are the five themes of geography. While not all the themes are covered by all the lesson, several themes can be found in the different lessons. Each lesson will have a standard listed with it, as well as the themes present in that lesson.

**Rationale:**

While planning the unit, I used the backwards design method for developing my unit. This allowed me to develop lessons around tasks I wanted to use to assess students’ learning outcomes. I first decided on what I wanted the students to achieve from the unit; this was one of my essential questions I wanted the students to answer. I then had to look at what evidence was needed to determine if the learning goals were being met. After evaluating the evidence I needed, I developed my key assessment and lessons accordingly.

The lessons I developed involved a series of hands-on, student-centered activities. I incorporated collaborative, inquiry based, critical and authentic learning styles. Students will work with others to answer questions and find solutions. They will then draw conclusions and present their findings to others in the class. This is how I used project based learning in my unit. Students are engaged in multiple activities that seek to develop student knowledge of the Mesopotamian civilization and how it affects us today.

**Standards:**

History: *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C. including:*

1. *Location;*
2. *Government;*
3. *Religion;*
4. *Agriculture;*
5. *Cultural and scientific contributions*

**Essential Question:**

1. Why did people begin to settle in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys?
2. What were some economic and social characteristics of Mesopotamia?
3. How has Mesopotamian society/culture affected our society today?

**Key Concepts:**

* Location
* Government
* Religion
* Agriculture
* Cultural and Scientific Contributions

**Key Assessments:**

* Research PowerPoint presentation

**Unit Block Plan:**

Unit: Mesopotamia—Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys

Duration of Unit: 8 days

Day 1:

Topic: Introduction: Where is Mesopotamia?

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Location, Place, Movement, and Region

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will locate Mesopotamia on a map.
2. Students will explore why people settled there.

Summary:

* I will begin the lesson by having students look at two maps of the United States. One map will show the major cities and the other will show population displacemet. The task will be to find where most of the cities/people in the United States are located. They will work in pairs to brainstorm why a city would form in that area or why many people would settle there. Students will share their ideas with the class. Hopefully, at least one group will come up with water as an important factor in where cities are placed. Show students on the map cities that are located by water. Some important examples would be New Orleans, New York, Boston, coastal cities and other cities located along rivers and lakes. (The population map should show that most people are located along the coastal areas). As a class, brainstorm why people would settle around water. Present another map to the students. This map will be of Mesopotamia and its cities. Ask students what they notice about where these cities are located. They should say something like they are located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. After examining the two maps, watch a short video introducing Mesopotamia.
* <http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/player/kids/people-places-kids/iraq-mesopotamia-kids.html>
* After watching the video, we will talk about what they saw that was interesting and would like to learn more about. This is also when you will tell students the Mesopotamia is considered the land of firsts. Challenge them throughout the lesson to identify different “firsts” we talk about.
* Once students have watched the video, they will create two maps. One will be of ancient Mesopotamia and the other will be of present day Mesopotamia (Iraq). This is something students will keep in their folders to reference during the duration of the unit. I will provide the outline of the map with rivers and the students will color the rivers and label different cities/ countries. This will be taken for a grade.

Day 2:

Topic: Agriculture: How did agriculture affect Mesopotamian civilization?

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Place, Movement, Human/Environment Interaction

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will explain the implications of agriculture on the Mesopotamian civilization.

Summary:

* During this lesson, students will explore the reasons why people settled in Mesopotamia. Cities developed because people used farming as their main source of food rather than getting food from hunting and gathering. In order to show students the difference between the farming and hunting/gathering lifestyles, students will participate in a scavenger hunt. For this activity, I will hide cards around the room (if it is nice weather it would be a good lesson for outside). Some cards will have crops such as barley, wheat, corn, etc. While others will have animals used for food such as deer, rabbit, snakes and foods that are gathered such as berries, nuts, etc. I will place the crops cards in places that are easier to see. The hunting and gathering cards will be more hidden. Also, there will be more crop cards than hunting and gathering cards (I will make more barley cards because barley was the main crop of Mesopotamia). This will show students that it was easier to get food from growing crops than hunting and gathering. Students will have three minutes to find as many cards as they can. They will then separate their cards into three different piles; one for farming, one for hunting, and one for gathering. We will tally the totals on the board. Students will see from the totals that farming will produce more food. We will then brainstorm as a class why it would be easier to farm rather than hunting/gathering. Ask students if they had to move around more when “farming” or when “hunting/gathering”. They will say they moved around more when “hunting/gathering”. Connect this with why people began to settle into cities in Mesopotamia. It was easier for them to grow crops, so they began to settle in one area to tend to the crops. There was so much food available this led to people having different jobs. Have students watch video about different Mesopotamian jobs. <http://elementsofcivilization.wikispaces.com/Ancient+Mesopotamian+Job+Specialization>
* After watching the video, students will pick a job they saw from the video and write a few sentences explaining why they would want that job. They will also complete the cloze activity for Mesopotamian Settlement. If it is not finished in class, it will be homework.
* Extension: If there is extra time, have students visit the British museum website and pretend they are Mesopotamian farmers. <http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/geography/challenge/cha_set.html>

Day 3:

Topic: Cuneiform and the Epic of Gilgamesh

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Movement, Place, and Region

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will discuss why cuneiform was an important first step for civilization.

Summary:

* During this lesson, students will explore the first form of written language, cuneiform. Begin by asking students if they have ever heard of hieroglyphics. Most students have and will be willing to explain what hieroglyphics are and might be able to tell you what they look like (pictures) and who used them (Egyptians). Tell students the Mesopotamians also had a form of writing but it was called cuneiform. Show them pictures of cuneiform. Have a picture of hieroglyphics next to the pictures of cuneiform. As a class, brainstorm how the two are different. Students, with help if needed, will see that hieroglyphics are pictures while cuneiform is made of symbols. Mesopotamian culture was the first civilization to have a written language that used symbols rather than pictures. Ask students if we use pictures or symbols for our writing. They will come to the conclusion that we use symbols, which shows them that Mesopotamians helped to begin the usage of symbols for written language. However, their language did not start off this way. Show students the progression of the Mesopotamian language from pictures to symbols. Have students think-pair-share about why they shifted from pictures to symbols. The answer is it was easier and faster when writing. Then challenge students to use picture to write the sentence “The dog ran quickly through the school yard to the hospital.” This will show them it is faster to use words (symbols) rather than drawing pictures. Also, compare two different students’ picture interpretation of the sentence. They should see that the two interpretations look different. By having symbols, you eliminate different pictures for different words, which allows for less misinterpretation. They used this writing to keep track of farm records, such as how much a crop is worth, or how much was sold or traded. It was also used to write down stories and laws.
* As an activity, students will each be given a small chunk of play dough. They will roll the play dough out so it looks like a clay tablet, which is what the Mesopotamians used to write on. I will give them a guide of the different words in cuneiform and they will replicate the symbols to make whatever sentence they want. They will use a toothpick to “crave out” the symbols and then trade their tablets to have others interpret them.
* While craving out their tablets, I will read an except from the Epic of Gilgamesh. Explain to students that the Epic of Gilgamesh is about a Mesopotamian king who goes on different adventures The reason why this epic is important is because it was the first written book. This is the link to a simplified, kid friendly portion of the Epic of Gilgamesh: <http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/geography/story/sto_set.html>
* Extension: If there is extra time, or if students would like to for extra credit, they may write an alternative ending to the story that was read.

Day 4:

Topic: People and Government: Why is the Code of Hammurabi important?

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Human/Environment Interaction

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will create their own “code” of conduct for the classroom.
2. Students will discuss the importance of the Code of Hammurabi.

Summary:

* To start the lesson, students will discuss different examples of laws, why laws are important to our society and what would happen if we didn’t have laws. They will be grouped in small groups for this discussion. They will then share their ideas with the class. The teacher will prompt questions to help the discussion when needed. After the discussion, introduce the Code of Hammurabi. Explain to students that these were the laws the Mesopotamians had to follow. These were the first written set of laws. Explain that these laws applied to every one; rich and poor, young and old. Discuss why writing the laws down for everyone to see would be important. After the discussion, give students a copy of some of the laws and read a few of them aloud for the students. Then discuss whether they think these laws are fair. Point out that many of the punishments are harsh for the crime. Have students get back into their groups. They will be making their own “code” for the classroom. Each group will come up with 3-4 classroom laws. These laws must be written in the form of Hammurabi. For example, students could write “ If a student damages a textbook, then \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”. After the groups have created their list. They will share their rules with the class. I will write the laws on a brown piece of paper that looks like the Code of Hammurabi. Once all the students have shared their ideas, the class will have the Code of Mrs. X’s Classroom.

Day 5:

Topic: Religion: Polytheism and Ziggurats

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Human/ environmental interactions

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will produce a story explaining elements in nature using a Mesopotamian god.

Summary:

* Mesopotamians used many different gods to explain forces in nature. Pass out the copies of Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses. Introduce students to the Seven Great Gods. Talk about what “phenomena” those gods helped to explain. Then talk about the Second Rank gods. After reviewing the gods, compare their religion with what people believe today—they had many gods while most religions only believe in one god. (The major religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism all believe in one god so all students should have an equal opportunity to answer the question.) After discussing the difference, then talk about where they worshiped these gods. Just like people today go to a church or a mosque, Mesopotamians also had a place of worship. This place was called a ziggurat. Show pictures of a ziggurat and explain what it was used for.
* After students have examined the pictures, then they will begin writing a story using one or more gods/goddesses found on the paper I handed out. They must choose one or more gods and write a story using this gods to explain an event a Mesopotamian might have encountered such as a flood, lunar eclipse, or sickness. Before students start their stories, first read them an example of a god story from Mesopotamian society. The following link is the story that is shared with the class: <http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/gods/story/sto_set.html>
* Extension: If time allows, you could make the connection between Mesopotamia and the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel found in the Bible.

Day 6-7:

Topic: Cultural and Scientific Contributions

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Location, Place, Human/Environment Interactions, Movement, and Region

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will interpret and research the effects of Mesopotamian “firsts” on our society.
2. Students will produce a poster to show the importance of the “first” they chose.

Summary:

* Students will begin to work on their ending project for the lesson by investigating an important scientific invention or contribution from Mesopotamian society. Before picking an invention/contribution, I will have students brainstorm with their groups the “firsts” we have already learned about from Mesopotamia (first epic, first written language, first set of written laws). We will discuss why those “firsts” evolved in Mesopotamia and how they affect out society today. In this ending project, students will be divided into groups of 3-4. Each group will choose an invention to research (if students cannot choose they can draw them randomly). The inventions, or firsts, they can choose from are the plow, the Pythagorean theorem, the concept of zero, glass, the wheel, the concept of time (60 seconds/60 minutes), chariots, scribes for writing, the arch, and irrigation. Each group will research why their “first” began in Mesopotamia. Share the example of cuneiform writing. It evolved because people wanted a more efficient way to keep track crop trading/prices. They will then talk about how that “first” has affected our society today. Symbol writing is one way we communicate with others in our society. Have them imagine if we wouldn’t have symbol writing what our society would be like. They will research these questions and present their findings and ideas in a Power point presentation for the class. I will go over the rubric to see if the students have any question about the project.
* See rubric for project. They will present their findings for the class.

Day 8:

Topic: Presentations

Standard:

* *Early Civilizations: 4. Compare the geographic, economic and social characteristic of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C.*

Geography Themes:

* Location, Place, Human/Environment Interactions, Movement, and Region

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will interpret and research the effects of Mesopotamian “firsts” on our society.
2. Students will produce a poster to show the importance of the “first” they chose.
3. Students will orally present their presentations.

Summary:

* Students will present their invention/contribution presentations today. Each group will be given five minutes to talk about the invention and explain why it was important to the society then and why it is important to societies today. There should be plenty of pictures present on the power point. We will talk as a class about the invention and how it may effect students in their own lives.