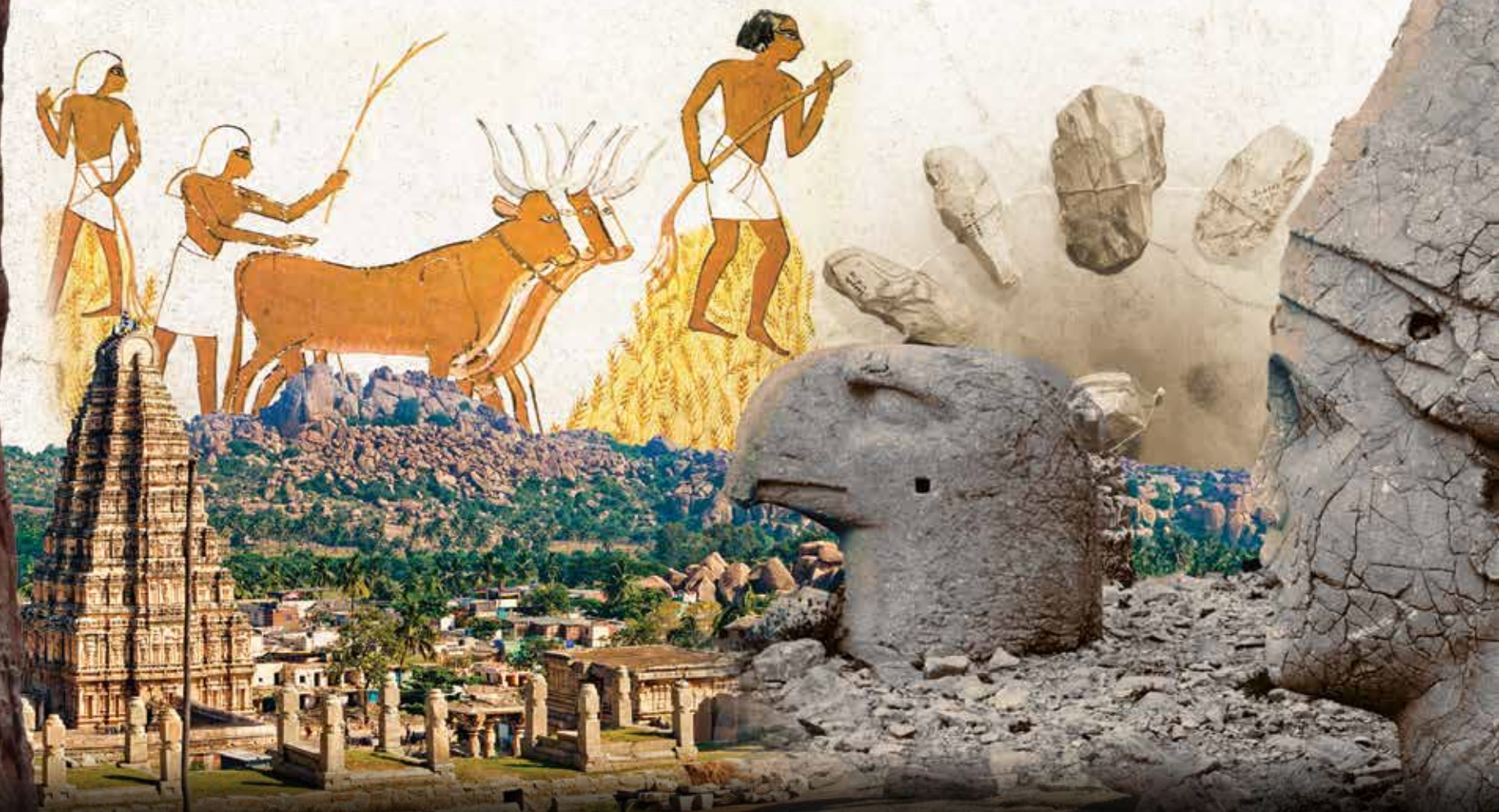




What Is a Civilization?

When early humans learned to farm and grow their own food, their lives changed completely. As more groups settled in the same area, they helped each other farm. This meant some of them had time to focus on tasks other than growing food.

People began to make tools and other useful items. As more people joined the community, they organized themselves, shared ways of living, and created systems to protect everyone. Some people became **artisans**. This meant they used special skills to make things with their hands. Others became leaders and created rules for everyone to follow. These ancient communities grew and prospered. Over time, small villages became cities. Then, with the right conditions, they grew into large civilizations.



What Do Civilizations Have in Common?

What are the right conditions that allow a community to develop into a large civilization? Civilizations are complicated. They have many layers and factors that influence their successes and failures. Scholars and historians do not all agree on an exact definition of “civilization.” Most scholars do agree there are characteristics that civilizations share. Some of these characteristics are a stable food supply, specialization,

government, infrastructure, technology, social structure, and a system of communication.

Culture is also an important characteristic. Most ancient civilizations were shaped by shared beliefs, common activities, and forms of art. In different places civilizations have grown, changed over time, and eventually disappeared. Even though they are gone, what ancient civilizations learned, built, and accomplished has become an important part of our history.



FRAMING QUESTION

What conditions are necessary for a civilization to begin to develop?

Stable Food Supply

Civilizations need a **stable food supply**. When there is enough food, a community can thrive. The people of Mesopotamia planted grains, such as wheat and barley, that could feed many people. They built irrigation systems to get water to their crops. They also invented the plow. All this made planting and harvesting easier. Farmers also domesticated pigs, goats, geese, and cattle. **Domesticate** means to tame animals and raise them for eggs, dairy, and meat.

As tools improved, farmers were able to consistently produce enough food for all the people in the valley. As a result of this stable supply of food, there was an increase in population. Larger and more complex societies began to form. People began to organize themselves and work together to find new ways to improve their settlements.

Crops near the Euphrates River

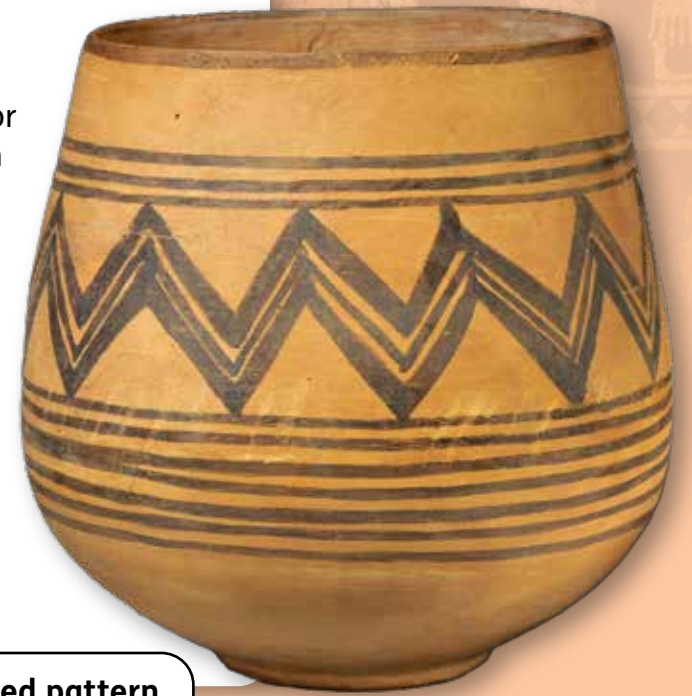


Specialization and Trade

Because communities had plenty of food, people had time to do tasks outside of farming. People made baskets for gathering grains and tools for farming. They made clothing, crafts, and works of art. Soon people began to focus on doing one specific task that they were good at. This is called **specialization**. One person in town might make tools. Then others in the town could use those tools to weave cloth. The cloth was then used to make clothing.

An example of job specialization from the Indus Valley was making pottery. The potter dug the clay from the nearby rivers and then shaped it into containers for storing food and water. Clay pots were much better than stone pots because they were thin and lightweight. Before long, potters began to make extra containers so they could trade or sell them. Specialization is an important characteristic of a civilization. It added more variety to communities. It allowed them to be more efficient, so they could grow even larger.

Indus bowl with painted pattern

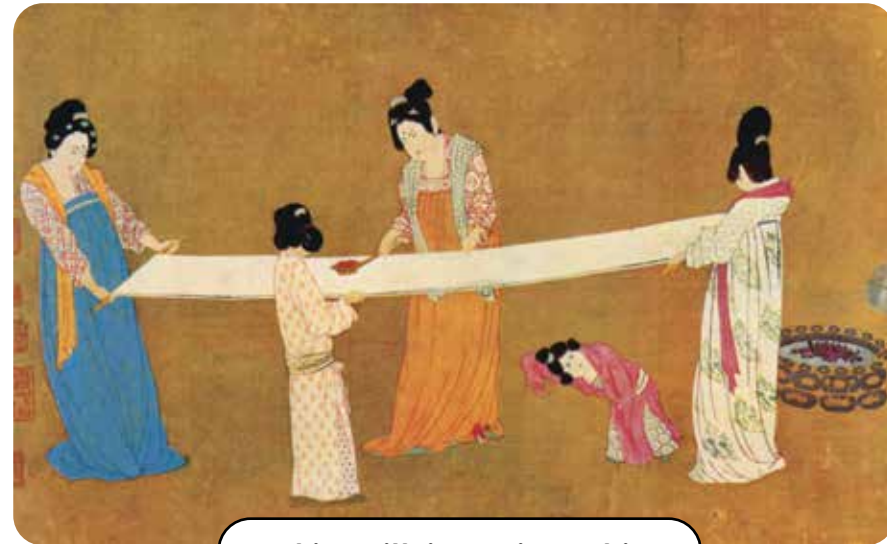


The Barter Economy

Imagine living in a society with no money system. If you needed a new pair of sandals, a pitcher for water, or someone to help you dig a channel, what would you do? In early communities, there was no money. People began to use extra goods, like food or handmade items, and barter for other things they needed.

Bartering is when people trade goods or services instead of using money. For example, a farmer in Ancient China could give rice to a carpenter in exchange for a carved table. When bartering, both people needed to agree that the trade was fair and that the goods or services had an equal value.

The trade and bartering system began with small exchanges between social groups. Eventually it expanded into complex trade routes. The Silk Road was a trade route where people could get materials from different parts of the world. Merchants would travel in caravans or on ships laden with goods. They bartered for items that could then be taken back to their lands and used there.



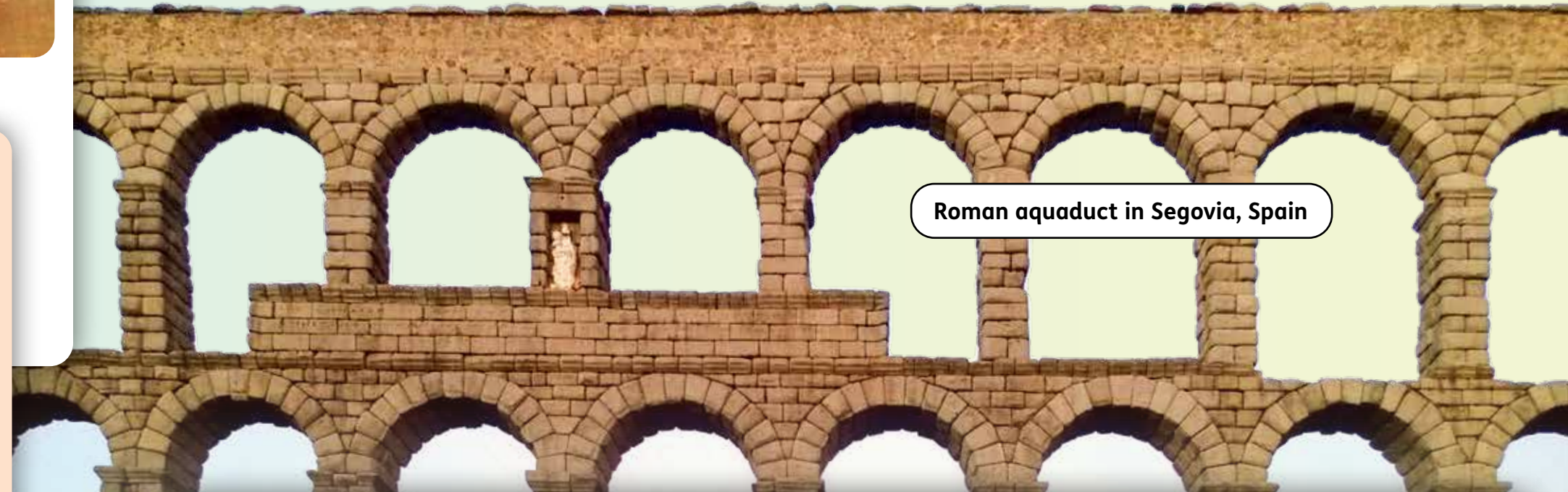
Making silk in ancient China

Infrastructure and Technology

Infrastructure refers to the basic structures that people create in an area so they can live and work and meet their needs. Aqueducts are an example of infrastructure in Ancient Rome. An aqueduct is a series of pipes, canals, and bridges that transports fresh water into the city.

In ancient times one of the most important structures was a road. Making roads was not an easy task. It often meant building bridges across rivers, cutting through forests, or digging tunnels through mountains. But roads made it much easier for people to travel and transport

goods. Another benefit of roads was innovation and technology. In ancient terms, the word **technology** refers to the thoughtful designing or making of techniques or tools for people to use. As people thought of new ways to build roads, they created new technology to make the work easier.

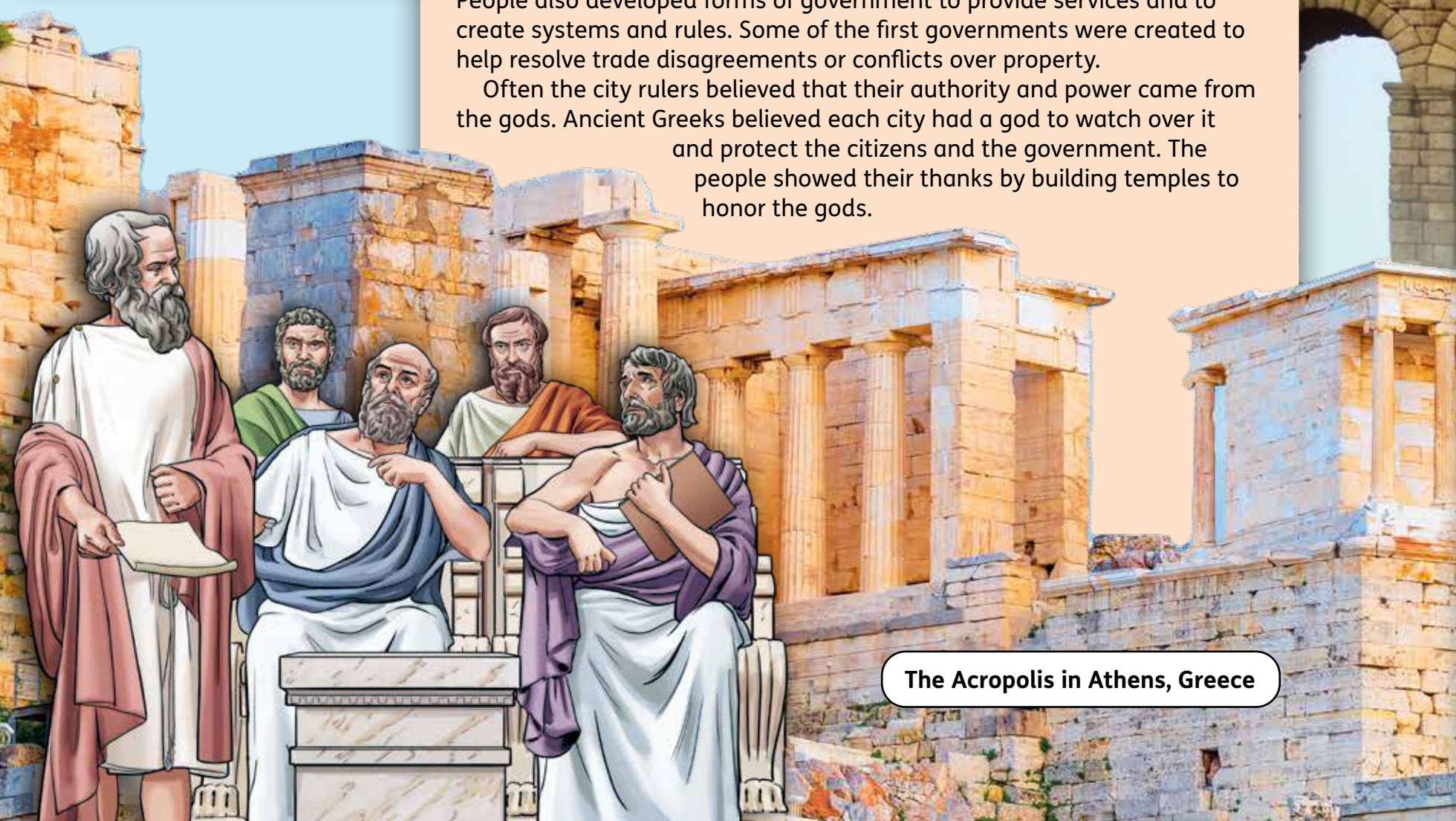


Roman aquaduct in Segovia, Spain

Cities and Government

As specialization and trading became more common, more people started to gather in one place to make it easier. This was the beginning of cities. Cities were an important characteristic of civilizations. As cities grew, people built larger structures. They made buildings to store the extra grain from the farms. They made marketplaces for people to sell and buy. People also developed forms of government to provide services and to create systems and rules. Some of the first governments were created to help resolve trade disagreements or conflicts over property.

Often the city rulers believed that their authority and power came from the gods. Ancient Greeks believed each city had a god to watch over it and protect the citizens and the government. The people showed their thanks by building temples to honor the gods.



The Acropolis in Athens, Greece

Social Structure

Another characteristic of a civilization is the division of people into **classes**. Classes can mean groups of people divided by the kind of work they did. Classes can also mean groups of people divided by how much money they made.

Details of each level vary from civilization to civilization. Although, they do follow similar patterns. Those in the highest classes were usually the rulers and leaders. They made decisions that affected the entire society. Middle classes included people with specialized skills, artisans who made goods, or merchants who traded the goods. The lower classes included people who worked common jobs. These were often weavers, sailors, bricklayers, farmers, or shepherds. People were treated differently at each level. Those at the top had more opportunities and power. In some societies, the lowest classes of people were treated unfairly.

Some scholars who study ancient Egypt believe that it lasted so long because everyone understood their place and did what was needed to keep the balance. During most of Egypt's history, this system worked and the civilization prospered. When those at the top neglected the members of the lower class, the system began to break down.



Artwork from the wall of a tomb in Thebes, Egypt

Name _____

Communication and Writing

When people in an ancient society spoke the same or similar language, it made communication and leadership easier. Yet spoken language had limitations. It could only be used between people who were next to each other and once the words were said, they had to be remembered or they were gone.

As societies became more complex and cities grew larger, people needed a way to record events and remember trade deals. This is how the first forms of writing came to exist. Different ways of writing were developed in different parts of the world. Some of the first systems used

drawings to represent objects or phrases. Other writing systems used symbols to represent sounds or letters.

The development of writing systems caused many changes. Written language was used for spreading news and information. It was used to count populations and track food storage. Rules were written down so that people could remember them. Much of what we know about ancient civilizations today comes from different forms of written communication. Writing has given us a better picture of the people that came before us.



Images courtesy of Getty Images, photo of crops near the Euphrates River by By Jayel Aheram

Cause and Effect

People, places, ideas, cultures, and technology change over time. To understand patterns of change in history, historians often ask the following questions:

1	What events or changes happened?
2	What caused those changes?
3	What were the results?
4	How did people benefit or suffer from the changes?

Historians try to understand what started a change or led to an event in history. This is called a **cause**. They also want to understand the outcome or what happened because of an event or a change. This is called an **effect**. In a text, the words “because,” “since,” “so,” and “then” often signal a cause and effect relationship. You have already read about many cause and effect relationships. Here’s one example. Because Africa’s climate got warmer, humans and animals then migrated to cooler places. Can you think of more?

As you read about the characteristics of ancient civilizations, look for causes and effects that help explain how and why things changed. Remember, history is not always a clear timeline of events that lead from one thing to the next. Sometimes, looking at the things that stay the same throughout history is as important as looking at how things change.