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Exploring Primary Sources— Ancient Mesopotamia

This sample includes the following:

Teacher's Guide Cover (1 page)
Teacher's Guide Table of Contents (1 page)
How to Use This Resource (5 pages)
Card Lesson Plan (4 pages)
Card (2 pages)
Document Lesson Plan (6 pages)
Document (1 page)

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Ancient Mesopotamia

Teacher's Guide



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How to Use This Resource

Lesson Plans

The learning outcomes are the focus throughout each lesson.

Digital-only reproducibles are clearly labeled.

Page references and digital filenames make lesson preparation easy.

The guiding questions help support development of inquiry by focusing on the primary source being studied.

Essential questions provide inquiry anchors for students as they investigate enduring understandings.

Engraving of King Darius

Darius the Great

Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to explain how the reign of King Darius established a large regional empire with lasting influence.
- Students will identify the accomplishments of King Darius.

Materials

- Engraving of King Darius reproduction (darius.pdf)
- Copies of *The King of Kings* (page 107)
- Copies of *King Darius* (page 108), optional
- Copies of *Darius and Xerxes* (digital only), optional
- Copies of *The Royal Me* (page 109)
- Copies of the *Alexander the Great* document-based assessment (page 110)
- Art supplies, including markers and colored pencils

Essential Question

- What effects does a great leader have on a civilization?

Guiding Questions

- What does this engraving show you about the kind of leader King Darius was?
- Was this engraving made at the time of King Darius or later? How can you tell?
- Why was King Darius able to be such a successful leader?
- What were some of his most significant accomplishments?

Introducing the Primary Source

- Ask students to talk with a partner near them about the leader they most admire. Remind them that leaders can be presidents or royalty, or they can be parents, teachers, and even coaches. What is it about that person that makes them such a great leader? How does that leader define success? As a class, discuss what makes a good leader and why some people are better able to lead than others.
- Share the Engraving of King Darius reproduction, and ask students to analyze it closely. You may choose to distribute copies of *King Darius* to students and have them annotate the image with at least five observations or questions they have about the engraving.
- Introduce the essential question, and use the first two guiding questions to discuss King Darius and the type of leader he likely was.

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Students collaborate to interact with the primary source through inquiry, textual analysis, and engaging activities.

These assessments provide opportunities for students to independently practice primary source analysis.

Key content vocabulary from the historical background information is bolded in student texts and defined here for reference.

Engraving of King Darius

Darius the Great

Analyzing the Primary Source

- Have small groups of students read the background information, *The King's Achievements*. (A copy of this text at a lower reading level is provided in the Digital Resources.) Review the key words with students as necessary. As students read, encourage them to annotate the text by underlining King Darius's achievements. When they have finished, have them put check marks next to the one that they feel is the most significant.
- Use the last two guiding questions to analyze the engraving more thoroughly and discuss the influences of King Darius. You may choose to share *Darius and Xerxes* with students so they can see the entire engraving. A copy is provided in the Digital Resources.
- Distribute copies of *Time Traveler* to students. Provide time for students to complete their narratives.
- Have students share about their narratives with partners or small groups.
- To learn more about King Darius and his influence, see page 119 for a technology-based extension activity.

Document-Based Assessment

- Distribute copies of *Alexander the Great*. A digital copy of the primary source is provided in the Digital Resources (alexander.jpg).
- Have students think about what they've learned throughout this lesson, carefully analyze the primary source, and respond thoughtfully to the prompts.

Key Words

These key content words are included in both levels of the background information.

- admirable**—deserving respect and approval
- lances**—long weapons with wooden shafts and pointed steel heads used by horsemen in charging
- succession**—the action of inheriting a title

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How to Use This Resource *(cont.)*

Background Information

The historical background information provides students with key information about both the time period and the primary source. It is provided at two different reading levels to support differentiation. When preparing for a lesson, decide which level best meets the needs of your students. Use one level for all students, or differentiate the reading levels by student need.

- Encourage students to write strong questions they have as they read these texts. The *Creating Strong Questions* lesson on pages 28–30 will prepare students for this important aspect of the inquiry arc.
- Suggestions for annotations students could make while reading are provided in each lesson plan.

Within the Teacher's Guide, the texts are leveled at a seventh- to eighth-grade reading level and are denoted by a triangle in the top right of each page.

Texts leveled at a fifth- to sixth-grade reading level are denoted by a square and are only provided in the Digital Resources.

Glossary terms are bolded to highlight their importance to the content. All glossary words are included in both levels of the information.

A Student Glossary is provided in the Digital Resources. This document includes the vocabulary words and definitions from all 16 lessons.

How to Use This Resource *(cont.)*

Student Activity Pages

Dagger and Sheath

About the Artifact
This ancient dagger and sheath are more than 5,000 years old. A goldsmith made them during the Sumerian era. This set was found in the Royal Tombs of Ur. The ancient tombs are in present-day Iraq. Ancient people made weapons such as these from metals. They typically used bronze, gold, and silver. They also used metal to make jewelry, hunting equipment, and farming tools.

Analyzing History

- What materials are typically used to create weapons?
- Why were certain materials used more often at certain periods of time?
- Other than warfare, how else might this weapon have been used?
- Describe two or three uses—aside from weapons—that ancient Mesopotamian people had for different metals.

Historical Writing

Fiction
Use your imagination to tell the story of how an archaeologist found this dagger. Explain how the dagger came to be in a museum.

Nonfiction
Research and describe one of the major metals: iron, bronze, gold, silver, or steel. Tell how the metal is made, and describe some ancient and present-day uses for the metal.

Writing Challenge
Research, describe, and illustrate a weapon used during the Mesopotamian period of history.

Background information provides a concise description of the primary source image students will study.

Activities for students increase in complexity, providing scaffolded opportunities for student engagement.

Fiction and nonfiction writing prompts promote deeper connections to the primary source.

An inquiry-driven writing task challenges students to take their learning to the next level.

Key information about the primary source reproduction prepares students for the activity.

Engaging activities encourage students to use higher-order thinking skills as they analyze the primary source.

Extension challenges are provided to engage students in more complex tasks.

Name _____ Date _____

Heads Up

About the Sculpture
Sargon of Akkad ruled around 2334 to 2279 B.C. He built one of the world's greatest early empires. This bronze sculpture of Sargon's head was created between 2300 and 2215 B.C. Many other statues of Sargon were also made during this time period. This sculpture can now be found at the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad.

Directions: Choose one important person in your life that you want to remember. Complete a drawing of that person's head as a tribute. Try to make the drawing as detailed as possible. Then, write a biography of the person you selected. Be sure to include many of the reasons that you chose to honor this person.

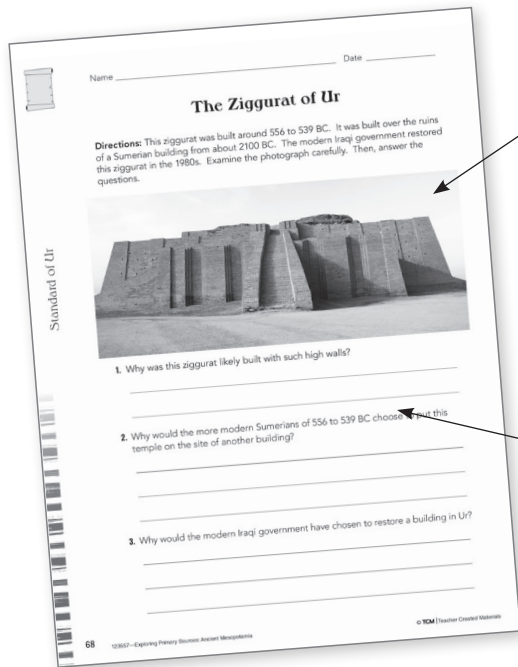
Challenge
Research Sargon I and Sargon II. Find out how they were similar to and different from Sargon the Great.

- **Hint:** Find and use the photograph button on your copier when copying student reproducibles, including document-based assessments. This will produce clearer images that will be easier to analyze.

How to Use This Resource *(cont.)*

Document-Based Assessments

A document-based assessment (DBA) connected to the content of each lesson gives students an opportunity to practice primary source analysis. These DBAs practice key skills needed for many social studies assessments in middle school and high school.



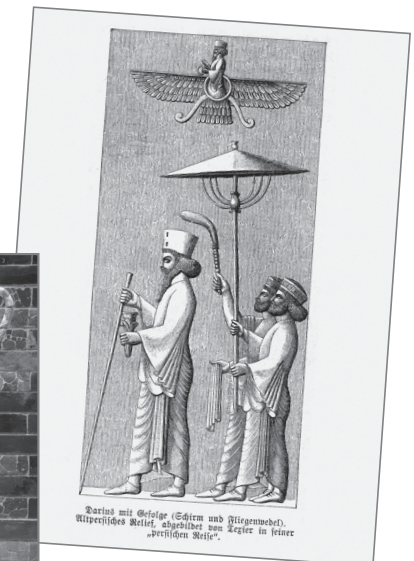
Each DBA includes a visual or textual primary source.

Students use general knowledge of the time period, what they learned in the lesson, and details in the primary source to respond to the constructed-response questions.

Digital Resources

Projecting primary sources while students are analyzing them allows for whole-class discussions.

At times, projecting full-color versions of a primary source may be more beneficial than copying them on black-and-white copiers.



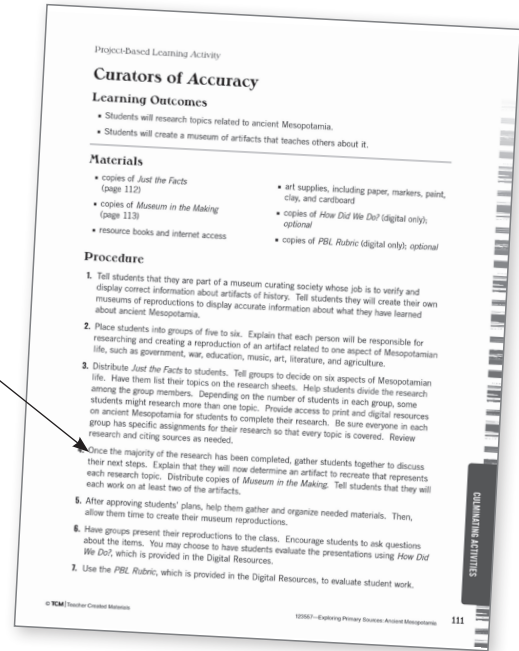
How to Use This Resource *(cont.)*

Culminating Activities

Project-Based Learning Activity

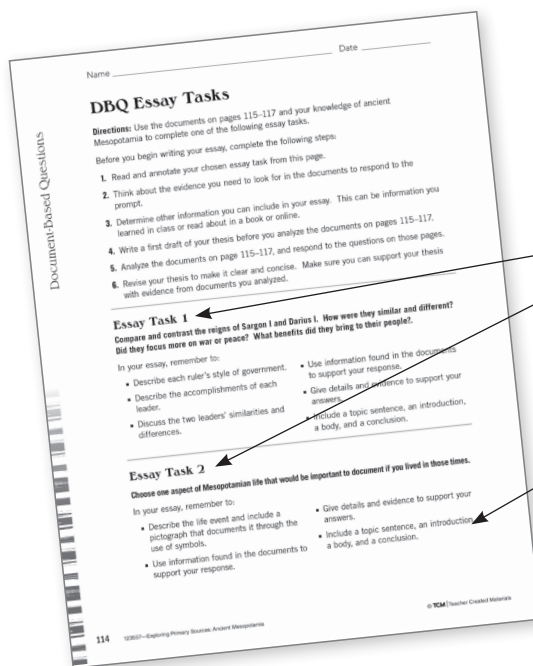
Engaging project-based learning (PBL) activities provide opportunities for students to work collaboratively and share what they've learned about the content.

Student presentations of PBL work are excellent for inviting guests to visit and see what students are doing.



Document-Based Questions

Document-based questions (DBQs) require students to analyze multiple DBAs and then respond to essay tasks in cohesive, well-supported essays.



Two essay tasks allow students to choose which DBQ they'd like to answer.

Each has a specific question and indicators to guide student responses.



Write with Stylus



Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to explain how the creation of writing shaped life in ancient Mesopotamia and influenced future cultures.
- Students will understand the characteristics and history of writing in ancient Mesopotamia.

Materials

- copies of the *Clay Tablet with Cuneiform* primary source card (cuneiform.pdf)
- copies of *The Elements of Cuneiform* (page 37)
- copies of the *Forming Writing* document-based assessment (page 38)



Essential Question

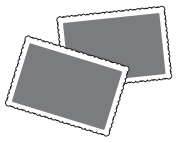
- What impact has writing had on societies throughout history?

Guiding Questions

- How would someone's life change if they were suddenly unable to read or write?
- Why would mathematics have been needed in ancient Mesopotamia?
- How did people in Mesopotamia learn to write and do math? Who was taught and who wasn't?
- How have ancient tablets helped modern people learn about the ancient world?

Introducing the Primary Source

1. Ask students to share with someone near them about a time they didn't understand what they were reading. Was it written in another language? Was it in their native language but very complicated? How did they go about deciphering the text? As a class, discuss strategies people use to figure out foreign or complicated writing.
2. Share the photograph of the cuneiform tablet on the primary source card. Give students a few minutes to make lists of two or three possible topics that may be written about on the tablet.
3. Introduce the essential question, and use the first two guiding questions to discuss how the Mesopotamians read, taught, and learned.



Write with Stylus *(cont.)*

Analyzing the Primary Source

1. Have small groups of students read the background information, *The Elements of Cuneiform*. (A copy of this text at a lower reading level is provided in the Digital Resources.) Review the key words with students as necessary. As students read, encourage them to annotate the text by underlining all the ways writing benefited the Sumerians and highlighting or circling the ways in which it was taught.
2. After students have read the background information, revisit the essential question and discuss the last two guiding questions.
3. Provide time for students to complete at least one activity from the back of the primary source card.
4. Have students work in pairs to create advertisements for a school that teaches scribes. Tell students to include what students will do in the school and why it is an important craft. Have students share their completed advertisements in small groups.
5. To learn more about cuneiform tablets, see page 119 for a technology-based extension activity.

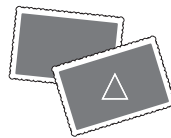
Document-Based Assessment

- Distribute copies of *Forming Writing*. A digital copy of the primary source is provided in the Digital Resources (forming.jpg).
- Have students think about what they've learned throughout this lesson, carefully analyze the primary source, and respond thoughtfully to the questions.

Key Words

These key content words are included in both levels of the background information.

- **elite**—a select group that is superior in terms of ability, rank, or qualities to the rest of a group or society
- **ideograms**—written characters or pictures that symbolize ideas of things without indicating the sounds used to say them
- **prestigious**—having high status
- **scribes**—people who copied documents, especially before printing was invented
- **syllabic**—relating to or based on syllables



The Elements of Cuneiform

Early writing in Mesopotamia was called *cuneiform*. It was developed by the Sumerians as early as 3200 BC (over 5,000 years ago). They used a reed or sharp instrument called a *stylus* to create wedge-shaped pictures on soft clay tablets. Later, the tablets were hardened by baking them in the sun or in a kiln. Since cuneiform was written on wet clay, writers could correct mistakes by rolling the clay up and starting over.

Written language changed Mesopotamia. It affected people's day-to-day lives and greatly advanced civilization. It allowed people to create laws. It also helped leaders enforce them. People were able to communicate with one another more easily. They were able to record their own history. Original Mesopotamian writings were pictures of objects. But it was really hard to write on wet clay. So, the writing evolved into wedges and hooks. It became cuneiform.

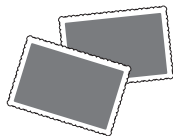
Modern historians learned about ancient Mesopotamia because of their writing tablets. The tablets were preserved better than paper or other writing materials would have been. People who can read cuneiform today need to understand how to read **ideograms**. They also need to understand a large **syllabic** alphabet.

Ancient Sumerian **scribes** were important people. They came from very wealthy families. They had to go through years of schooling. They worked hard from early morning to late in the evening to learn how to read and write cuneiform. They also studied arithmetic.

Once they finished school, they were ready to be scribes. This **prestigious** job was worth all the hard work in school. Most people at that time did not know how to read or write, so scribes were in an **elite** class. Scribes worked to keep and improve records or to create cylinder seals. A cylinder seal was carved from stone and was rolled over wet clay tablets. This left imprints that would be permanent after baking in the sun.

The Sumerian civilization introduced the concept of writing to the world. They created one of the earliest writing systems. As groups conquered Mesopotamia, they continued to use their writing. The ideas behind cuneiform influenced many other future writing systems. The Syrians and Assyrians eventually developed cuneiform into a syllabic alphabet. In this way, Sumerian contributions to society continue to have an effect on the modern world.





Forming Writing

Directions: Use the image to answer the questions.

Clay Tablet with Cuneiform



large stone carved with cuneiform lettering in Niavaran, Iran

1. Imagine writing on a clay tablet such as this one. Compare that to writing on a sheet of paper.

2. How does cuneiform differ from how you write? Discuss writing materials, utensils, and language.

3. Trade was a big part of many people's lives in ancient Mesopotamia. How might traders have benefited from writing?



Clay Tablet with Cuneiform

About the Artifact

The earliest writing was called *cuneiform*. This writing is made up of pictures and was created by the Sumerians. They wrote it on clay tablets such as this one. Written language changed Mesopotamia's civilization. It allowed them to write laws. It helped people to communicate in different ways. It was how they recorded history. People learned much of what is known about ancient Mesopotamia through writing found on clay tablets.

Analyzing History



- What materials did the Sumerians use to create cuneiform?
- Identify three reasons writing could help an ancient civilization.
- What types of words may have been among the first words that the Sumerians wrote? Why would they have chosen these types of words?
- After thousands of years, alphabetic script eventually replaced cuneiform. Explain why this makes sense.

Historical Writing



Fiction

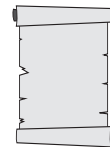
Pretend you are a scribe in ancient Mesopotamia. Describe your life growing up and your life as an adult scribe.

Nonfiction

Research mathematics in Babylon. Compare and contrast mathematics of that historical period to modern math.

Writing Challenge

You are a scribe in ancient Mesopotamia. You have been asked to describe a transaction between two Sumerians who are trading two sheep for some grain. Use only pictorial writing.



Say a Little Prayer



Learning Outcomes

- Students will be able to explain the cultural and religious beliefs of the Sumerian people and their influence on future civilizations.
- Students will understand how environmental and cultural factors shaped religious developments in Sumer.

Materials

- *Sumerian Praying Statuette* reproduction (statuette.pdf)
- copies of *Religion Sums It Up* (page 71)
- copies of *Statuette* (page 72); *optional*
- copies of *Dear Gods* (page 73)
- copies of the *Mesopotamian Religion* document-based assessment (page 74)

Essential Question

- What draws people to believe in something bigger than themselves?

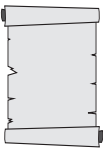
Guiding Questions

- What is the figure doing? How can you tell?
- What does the figure tell you about what was most important to the ancient Sumerians?
- What was the prominent religion of the Sumerians?
- How did prayer and meditation fit into the daily life of a Sumerian?



Introducing the Primary Source

1. As a class, discuss what meditation is and why some people choose to meditate daily. Further discuss why religion is important to so many people.
2. Share the *Sumerian Praying Statuette* reproduction, and ask students to analyze it closely. You may choose to distribute copies of *Statuette* to students and have them annotate it with observations or questions they have about the statuette.
3. Introduce the essential question, and use the first two guiding questions to discuss the statuette. Discuss what the statuette demonstrates about Sumerian culture and values.



Say a Little Prayer *(cont.)*

Analyzing the Primary Source

1. Have small groups of students read the background information, *Religion Sums It Up*. (A copy of this text at a lower reading level is provided in the Digital Resources.) Review the key words with students as necessary. As students read, encourage them to annotate the text by underlining ways in which religion was important to the ancient Sumerians.
2. After students have read the background information, revisit the essential question and discuss the last two guiding questions to analyze the statuette more thoroughly in the context of ancient religion.
3. Distribute copies of *Dear Gods* to students and give them time to complete the activities. Bring students back together to discuss the possible effects of differing beliefs.

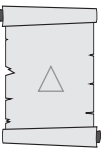
Document-Based Assessment

- Distribute copies of *Mesopotamian Religion*. Digital copies of the primary sources are provided in the Digital Resources (religion1.jpg and religion2.jpg).
- Have students think about what they've learned throughout this lesson, carefully analyze the primary source, and respond thoughtfully to the questions.

Key Words

These key content words are included in both levels of the background information.

- **astronomy**—the study of stars and other objects in space
- **fruitful**—producing good or helpful results; productive
- **incantations**—series of words said as magic spells or charms
- **polytheistic**—worshipping more than one god



Religion Sums It Up

Ancient Sumerian religion influenced the entire Middle East. Ruins from its temples and religious structures are still all over the region. Its hymns and myths are still part of popular culture. There are even influences of Sumerian religion in modern faiths. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were all influenced by ancient Sumer.

The Sumerians believed in an afterlife. They wanted their dead to be prepared. Sumerians sometimes buried people with tools, horses, or food placed on a golden platter. A golden helmet that was made for a soldier to wear in war might be buried with him. This would have been a sign of power and prestige.

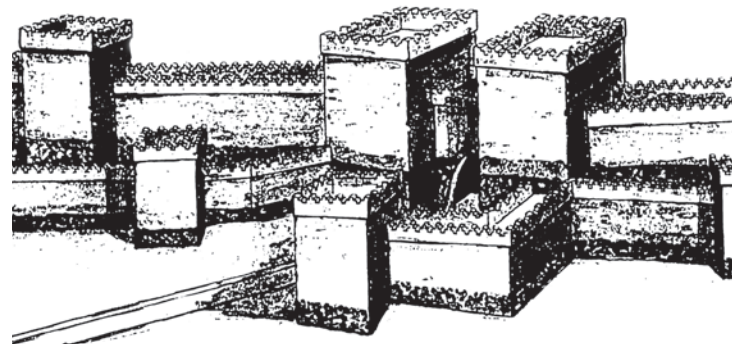
Sumerians built pyramids called *ziggurats* as their religious temples. The construction was difficult. But the Sumerians thought temples were worth the effort. Religious rituals and sacrifices took place at ziggurats every day. There were monthly feasts and annual celebrations. All the activities there honored the gods. Sumerians also celebrated many holy days. All of them included ceremonies and processions. Tribute and prayer to the gods were an important part of life for every Sumerian.

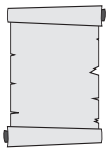
Like most ancient people, the Sumerians were **polytheistic**. They believed their gods controlled every aspect of their lives. Each city-state had its own special god or goddess. Sumerians thought that the gods were like ordinary people but with extraordinary powers. They believed their gods ate, drank, and raised families like most people. However, they thought

the gods were responsible for the good and bad in their lives. Sumerians thought it was their duty to please the gods and to keep them happy by their deeds. The Sumerians had specific religious rituals that they believed would make their lives more **fruitful**.

Sculptures were often symbolic of Sumerians' religious beliefs. Many of their statues showed men with long beards, open arms, and open eyes. The long beards represented power. The Sumerians prayed with open eyes. Statues were often placed in temples by worshippers who believed the statues would pray for them.

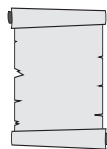
The Sumerians are responsible for the first ideas of religion. They also developed a form of **astronomy**. The Sumerians are often remembered as people who believed in and practiced magical **incantations**. The rites and rituals of their religion changed as the needs of their civilization changed. Modern religion may not have looked the same today without the Sumerians of thousands of years ago.





Statuette





Dear Gods

About the Statuette

Like most ancient people, Sumerians were *polytheistic*. This means they worshipped more than one god. Most Hebrews at this same period in history were *monotheistic*. They believed in a single god. People were often intolerant of different beliefs. This resulted in war and persecution. This statuette is a Sumerian clay figure. It was created in about 2400 BC in what is now Iraq. It is made of alabaster and shell.

Directions: Brainstorm words that begin with the prefixes *mono* and *poly*, and write them in the correct columns. Write what each word means. An example has been done for you. Then, answer the questions.

Mono	Poly	Meaning
monotone	--	having only one key or pitch

1. Imagine that half of your class is polytheists while the remaining students are monotheists. What could the results of a difference of religious opinion be?

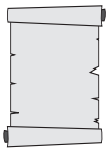
2. How did this same difference in opinions affect the Sumerians' lives?

3. What are the effects of different religious opinions in the modern world?



Challenge

Mythology, or stories that involve gods and heroes of ancient times, are often read today. Read a myth from an ancient culture. Then, write your own original myth based on one or more of the gods from the culture you chose.



Mesopotamian Religion

Sumerian Praying Statuette

Directions: Use the images to answer the questions.



1. What do these two statues have in common? How are they different?

2. What might you learn about Sumerians and their religion just by examining these statues?

3. How did religions from Mesopotamia affect religions today?

