Middle School - History

Ancient Civilisations – What is an Ancient Civilisation?

Term 2 2026

National curriculum:	• the achievements of the earliest civilisations • an overview of where and when the first civilisations appeared.
Prior learning:	• answer questions by using a specific source • use phrases and words like: 'before', 'after', 'past', 'present', 'then' and 'now'.
Future learning:	• in-depth study of Egyptian society (T6).
Key Vocabulary:	Civilisation, society, beliefs, customs, irrigation, trade, technology, script, necessity, cuneiform, oracle script, hieroglyphs, inventions

Learning Sequence

What is an ancient civilisation?

Substantive Knowledge:

- Know a civilisation is a society with its own social organisation.
- Know there are 4 civilisations which are believed to be the earliest: Ancient Egypt, Indus Valley, Sumer and Shang dynasty China.
- Know all civilisations are in a similar position on the globe and located near to at least one river.

Disciplinary Knowledge:



Chronology

- Chronology in history refers to the arrangement of events in the order in which they occurred.
- It is the study of how time is organised and divided in relation to historical events.
- The goal of chronology in history is to place events in their proper order, so that they can be studied and understood in their historical context.

	 **Similarities and differences** • To find similarities and differences between different time periods.
What would be the advantages of building an early city along a river?	
Substantive Knowledge: • Know the advantages of building an early city along a river: water for irrigating farmland to grow crops, for fishing for food, for washing, for hygienic ways of dealing with sewage/waste disposal, for an easier form of transport, for trade, for religious reasons.	**Disciplinary Knowledge:**  **Historical Enquiry** • Asking questions or hypothesising about the past. • Using evidence to help answer our questions.
What would an ancient civilisation need in order to function as a city?	
Substantive Knowledge: • Know what ancient civilisations would need to have to function as a city. • Know ancient civilisations would need to develop a uniform accepted writing script. • Know about the first writing systems including cuneiform (developed by the Sumerians) and its significance. • Know about the Shang Dynasty Oracle Bone Script. • Know about mathematical understanding in early civilisations and why/when the first number systems developed. • Know how early civilisations developed various units of measurement.	**Disciplinary Knowledge:**  **Sources and evidence** • Our knowledge of the past is gained through sources. • The evidence is what we get from the sources to enable us to build the knowledge base we need. • By using evidence from an increasing range of sources with more precision and confidence we can combine them to develop a deep understanding.
How would an ancient civilisation trade?	
Substantive Knowledge: • Know what is meant by trade. • Know how people started trading once they had settled in permanent settlements. • Know how people traded before written records.	**Disciplinary Knowledge:**  **Similarities and differences** • To find similarities and differences between different time periods.

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<u>Continuity and Change</u>

• To understand how change occurs.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">What were the technologies and inventions of early civilisations?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Substantive Knowledge:
• Know the term ‘technology’ means using what you know about science and how the world works for practical purposes.
• Know some of the key technological inventions and technological advances that have impacted our lives today from ancient civilisations (the wheel – Ancient Sumer; town planning – Indus Valley; irrigation/the sail – Ancient Egypt; paper – Shang Dynasty).</td><td>Disciplinary Knowledge:


<u>Sources and evidence</u>

• Our knowledge of the past is gained through sources.
• The evidence is what we get from the sources to enable us to build the knowledge base we need.
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