

# If I Were a Sumerian...



## ACTIVITY PACK

**DIRECTIONS:** Complete each of the enclosed activities and then use what you learn along with prior knowledge to fill in the outline below:

### I. Geography of Sumer

A. Located in modern-day \_\_\_\_\_

B. Between two rivers

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

C. Made up of city-states

### II. \_\_\_\_\_

A. Cuneiform

B. Written laws

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Outlined taxes, laws, fair trade practices, and penalties

C. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Used to keep records of trade

2. \_\_\_\_\_

### III. Contributions and possible “firsts”

A. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Alloy of copper and tin

2. Used to make tools, weapons, and works of art

B. Calendar

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Used with axles for carts and chariots

2. \_\_\_\_\_

### IV. Culture

A. Religion

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

B. Built ziggurats and other structures of mud bricks

# If I Were a Sumerian...



## Living by the Laws of the Land

The Ur-Nammu law code was written by the Ancient Sumerians around 2095 BC according to precedents set by their first king, Gilgamesh. This cylinder shown at right is the first copy found that had the whole text of the code which could be the world's oldest written laws. Three hundred years later King Hammurabi of Babylon devised laws, long thought to be the oldest, based on the idea of "an eye for an eye." Though many would think the earlier laws might have been harsher, the opposite was actually true. The Ur-Nammu code said, "If a man knocks out the eye of another man, he shall weigh out  $\frac{1}{2}$  a mina of silver".



The Ur-Nammu code listed tax codes, ceremonial laws, courtroom procedures, rules for fair trading practices, and penalties for breaking laws. Under this code, slaves were treated well and had legal rights to business dealings. Women, though not equal to men under the law, did have many rights. Contracts were made by having a scribe stamp a legal form onto a clay tablet and put a seal on it. The scribe would fill in details such as the names of the parties or the properties involved in the dealings.

**BRAINSTORM** at least THREE laws you think might have been important to keeping the peace in Ancient Sumer.

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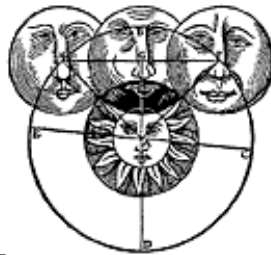
# If I Were a Sumerian...



## Keeping Time

The Sumerians developed what may be the world's most ancient calendar. Theirs was a lunar calendar consisting of twelve months of 29 or 30 days which measured years in terms of a king's reign. For example an event might have been described as having occurred "in the fourth month of the third year of the reign of Lugal." There were no weeks in the Sumerian calendar and days began at sunset and lasted for two periods of double six or twelve hours each.

Sumerians were quite interested in the heavens. They identified and named the brightest stars, outlined many of the constellations, and kept track of the movements of the five planets that are visible with the naked eye: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, as well as the sun and moon. They knew by the positions of these heavenly bodies when seasonal rains would come, when floods were due, when fields should be planted, and so forth.



### **PROBLEM & SOLUTION:**

The Sumerian's lunar calendar recorded a year that was 355 days long based on the phases of the moon. The solar calendar used by most countries today is 365  $\frac{1}{4}$  days long, 365 with an extra day added every fourth year.

1. How might this difference have caused problems for the Sumerians? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How could the Sumerians have corrected this difference? \_\_\_\_\_

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# If I Were a Sumerian...



## Counting Sheaves

Numbers in Sumer were probably first used to keep records of trade. Originally, different trade goods were shown by different symbols repeated to show quantity. For example three sheaves of grain were illustrated by three “grain marks.” Though there had to be as many different symbols as there were products, this system worked well enough for small quantities. As trade grew, though, there was a need for a simpler counting system.

Gradually the Sumerians devised a better means of recording trades. They used the same symbol to represent “three” whether it was three bundles of grain, three chickens, or three jars of oil, followed by a symbol for the product. While their system was still somewhat difficult to use, it was far better than their earlier method and allowed for writing much larger numbers.

$$1 \quad \text{D} = 1$$

$$10 \quad \text{D} = 1 \quad \bullet = 10$$

$$6 \quad \bullet = 1 \quad \text{D} = 60$$

Complete the chart:  $10 \quad \text{D} = 1 \quad \text{D} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

$$6 \quad \text{D} = 1 \quad \bullet = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

$$10 \quad \bullet = 1 \quad \text{D} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$$

What is the value of  $\bullet \text{ D D D}$  ?  $\underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

What is the value of  $\text{D} \bullet$  ?  $\underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

What is the value of  $\text{D D D}$  ?  $\underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

**CHALLENGE QUESTION:** How do you think Sumerians might have written 3,610 sheaves of wheat?

# If I Were a Sumerian...



## Free Wheeling

Archaeologists cannot be certain of who invented the wheel. It most likely developed over time from rolling logs under heavy loads to wheels on axles under chariots and carts. Still the Sumerians are credited with being the first civilization to make wide use of the invention. People of Sumer rode in chariots and carts and they also adapted the wheel for use in making pottery.



Sumerian carts, like the one shown at left, had two wheels fixed on an axle and were pulled by oxen or other animals. The idea for such a vehicle is believed to have come about as an offshoot of the Sumerians' use of animals to pull plows for farming.

The pottery wheels used in Sumer were simple, rough, circular tables from one to three feet across. They were supported a few inches from the ground, pivoting on a kind of small axle in the center and spun by hand. The pottery wheel allowed the potter to create fine, balanced bowls, plates, and jugs in less time than hand building and with far less effort.



**DIRECTIONS:** Write a paragraph explaining how the Sumerians may have developed the use the wheel. (The drawings above should be of help.)

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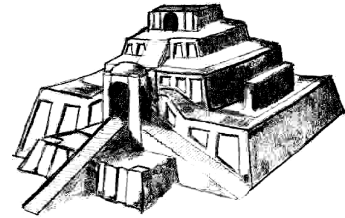


## Pleasing the Gods

The religion of Sumer was polytheistic, meaning people worshipped many gods. The Sumerian gods were thought to be very powerful; able to control natural events such as life, death, weather, floods, and other important aspects of life. Each city-state was believed to have belonged to a different deity, which its people prayed to for protection and good fortune.

The Sumerians believed their gods were much like humans with human needs for food, drink, and love. They also believed their gods could become jealous, angry, or happy, and so spent much time trying to please them. Sumerians gave offerings to the gods and built great temples in their honor.

High, stepped structures called ziggurats were built in city-states throughout Sumer to please their local deities and other gods. The ziggurats, like most other Sumerian buildings, were constructed of mud bricks. Temples built atop these great stone “mountains” allowed humans to climb the many stairways to be in the presence of the god for whom it was built, though in many cases only priests were allowed to do so.



**DIRECTIONS:** Compare and contrast the religion of Ancient Sumer with another religion with which you are familiar.

