

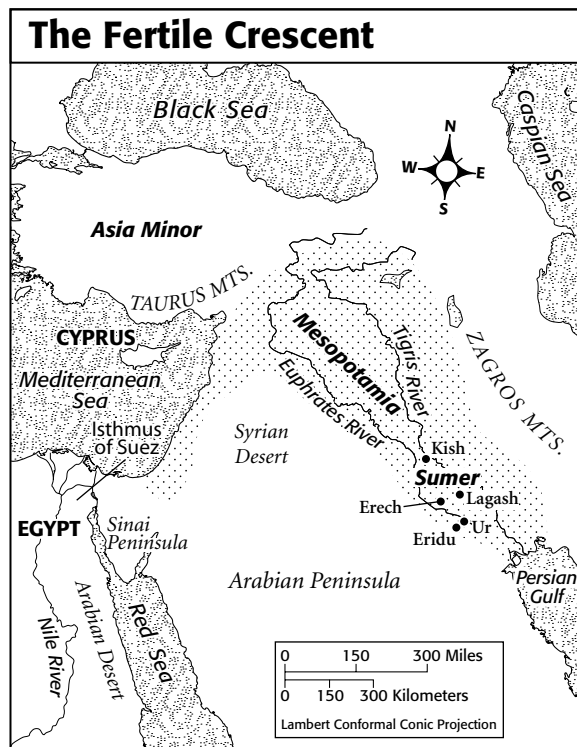
**CHAPTER 19**

**Critical Thinking Activity**  
**The Persian Gulf and Interior**

**The Fertile Crescent—The Cradle of Civilization**

*What was the first great civilization? What criteria should be applied when labeling a culture a civilization? Read the text and study the map below. Then answer the questions that follow.*

A number of civilizations rose and fell in an area of western Asia called the Fertile Crescent. The Fertile Crescent got its name from its function and shape as can be seen in the map below. Because of its shape it is called a crescent—a word that describes the first-quarter moon. Parts of this crescent of land were fertile.



The Fertile Crescent is surrounded by deserts and mountains. The deserts and hills around the Fertile Crescent, however, had enough grass and other plant life there to feed tribes of wandering herders. These people were fierce and toughened by their way of life. They envied the richer, easier life of the people who lived in the valley. They came into the region from outside, conquered it and extended their empires, and then in turn were overthrown by new invaders.

The lowest part of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley contained the rich soil carried by the rivers as they pour into the Persian Gulf. This area, called

**Chapter 19, Critical Thinking Activity, continued**

Sumer, was especially fertile. The rivers provided an abundant supply of water. The soil was used for both growing crops and making bricks and pottery. There was also a natural supply of food that included fish, wildfowl, and dates from the date palm tree.

Two groups of people moved into Sumer from the east and mingled with the original inhabitants. They created a culture known as Sumerian, around 3500 B.C. After reading many Sumerian records, archaeologists and historians have decided that the Sumerians were probably the founders of the first civilization. The Sumerians created a civilization based upon three key ingredients.

One key ingredient of a civilization is specialization of labor. The most important and first labor skill the Sumerians developed was the ability to farm. The Sumerians became so skilled at growing crops that their food supply increased, which allowed other people to do different kinds of work

Another key ingredient of a civilization is a system of writing. The Sumerians developed the first system of writing that was more than just pictures. The writing was made on clay tablets, about one-half million of which have lasted for thousands of years and can be read today.

The third ingredient of a civilization is government with an organized set of laws. This government rules from a central place, such as a city, a palace, or a temple. The Sumerian civilization was organized into 12 separate units called city-states. Each city-state ruled the city and its surrounding farmland.

**1.** Into what body of water do the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers flow?

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**2.** What landforms of the region made it an especially desirable place for human habitation?

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**3.** Name three natural resources of the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

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**4.** Why would it be difficult to have an organized society without a system of writing?

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