



Paleobotanist: Significance of the Fertile Crescent

Adventure Description:

In this adventure, you will build models of civilizations in the Fertile Crescent to back up claims about how and why people were able to build successful civilizations.

Activity

Step 1: Background Information on Fertile Crescent (5 minutes)

- Show [Video: Fertile Crescent](#).
- Discuss how professionals make claims about the past. A claim is a statement or argument that is backed up by evidence. For example, professionals have claimed that the Fertile Crescent is an area where the first documented civilizations existed. Many civilizations were built in the Fertile Crescent, including the ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and Phoenicians. These civilizations shared a similar geographic area, but had their own cultures and ways of living, writing, and making laws. Professionals, like paleobotanist, have argued that the Fertile Crescent's location near major water sources allowed people to easily grow food. As a result, people were able to survive because their basic needs of food and water were met. Show [Handout: Location of Fertile Crescent](#).
- Next, explain that professionals have also claimed that people who lived in the Fertile Crescent were able to build successful civilizations because of a division of labor. This means a certain group of people was in charge of growing food while other people began building other parts of the civilization. Show [Handout: Building a Civilization](#). Discuss reasons that a division of labor can allow a civilization to grow.
- Next, explain that professionals also investigate reasons that civilization ultimately failed in the Fertile Crescent. Show [Handout: Reasons Civilization Failed in the Fertile Crescent](#). Discuss how environmental factors and human factors can make or break a society.

Step 2: Activity Set Up (10 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will get to be paleobotanists and other professionals who study the downfall of civilizations in the Fertile Crescent. They will play a game and divide into groups to build their own civilizations that are either similar or different to civilizations that were built in the Fertile Crescent. Then, students will evaluate each others' civilizations to determine which civilization has the highest likelihood of surviving.
- Show [Handout: Steps to Play the Game](#).
- As a class, read through Step 1. Explain that the goal of the game is to build a new civilization that will be the most likely to survive. Students will be divided into groups of 4-6. Each group will receive a card with requirements about how to build their civilization. Then, groups will switch civilizations and will evaluate whether the civilization will be able to survive. Groups will give each other a rating on a scale of 1-5. A rating of "1" means the society will fall apart any day. A rating of "5" means that the society will most likely never fall apart. The group with the highest rating will win the game!
- Next, read through Step 2. Each group will get a card. Your group's card will have information about what type of land is available where your civilization will be built, order of tasks you have to follow to build your civilization, and explanation about whether there can be a division of labor or whether everyone has to work on the same task.

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- Next, read through Step 3. Explain that students will use art supplies and building materials that are provided by the teacher to build their civilization.
- Next, read through Step 4. Explain that groups will evaluate each others' civilizations. When students are ready for this step, they will receive [Handout: Evaluating Civilizations](#). The goal of this step is to assign a group a rating on a scale of 1-5. The group with the highest rating has the civilization that is most likely to survive.
- Now, divide students into groups of 4-6 students. Have each group sit in a separate area so they have room to spread out. Provide each group with one card from [Handout: Cards for Groups](#). Give groups a few moments to read through their cards so they are ready to begin building their civilizations in the next step.
- Provide the following materials to each group:
 - Assortment of building materials and art supplies (e.g., cardboard pieces, popsicle sticks, tape, construction paper)
 - Pieces of tinfoil
 - Water-proof materials, like plastic cups or styrofoam bowls

Step 3: Building a Civilization (20 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will have 20 minutes to build their civilizations. Remind students to fill out the handout about their civilization!

Step 4: Evaluate Whether Civilizations Will Function (15+ minutes)

- After 20 minutes are up, groups will stop building their civilizations. Provide each group with [Handout: Evaluating Civilizations](#). As a class, walk through how groups will evaluate each others' civilizations.
- Teacher note: Tell groups which civilizations they will be evaluating. Have students leave their civilizations and handouts in the part of the classroom where they were working and move to another part of the room to evaluate the other groups' civilizations. That way, civilizations won't be moving around the room and falling apart.

Step 6: Class Discussion (10+ minutes)

- Have a class discussion about groups' ratings and determine the winner (group with the highest rating).
- Discuss the following: Did the winning group have a division of labor? Did the winning group have fertile land? What was the most difficult part about building a civilization? How were groups' experiences similar or different? What natural things made a civilization successful or not? What man-made things, like walls and communication systems?
- Have a concluding discussion about how the location of the Fertile Crescent allowed people to create a food supply and create a division of labor to build other parts of the civilization. Discuss how professionals have backed up this claim with different types of evidence. However, if new evidence is found about the Fertile Crescent, professionals' claims could change!

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Materials List

Provided online:

- Video: Fertile Crescent
- Handout: Location of Fertile Crescent
- Handout: Building a Civilization
- Handout :Reasons Civilization Failed in the Fertile Crescent
- Handout: Steps to Play the Game
- Handout: Evaluating Civilizations
- Handout: Cards for Groups

Not provided:

- Assortment of building materials and art supplies (e.g., cardboard pieces, popsicle sticks, tape, construction paper)
- Pieces of tinfoil
- Water-proof materials, like plastic cups or styrofoam bowls

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