

## The Rise of Civilization

### I. Background

A “civilization” is an advanced and complex society in which large numbers of people share a number of common elements. About 5,000 years ago, the first civilizations began to develop along river valleys. The rich, fertile farmlands of river valleys helped these civilizations to thrive. Most early civilizations were characterized by several basic features.

### II. Characteristics of Early Civilizations

#### 1. Cities -

Cities emerged as farmers cultivated land along river valleys and produced surplus food. Surplus food led to increased population.

#### 2. Central Government

More systematic leadership than just a headman or council of elders was needed. Governments developed to make sure that enough food was produced and that the city was protected. Rulers also ordered that public works such as roads, bridges and defensive walls be built.

#### 3. Traditional Economy

Traditional economies, based primarily on farming, grew up in early civilizations. Skilled crafts workers made pottery, cloth, and other goods.

#### 4. Organized Religion

Religions developed as a means to explain the working of the forces of nature. Ancient people were “polytheistic”, believing in many gods. Priests and worshippers tried to gain the favor of these gods through complex rituals. They hoped that the gods would ensure plentiful crops and protect their cities. Rulers often claimed that their power was based on divine approval.

#### 5. Job Specialization

People began to specialize in certain jobs because no one person could master all the necessary skills to provide for him or herself.

#### 6. Social Classes

People became ranked in classes according to their jobs. Priests and nobles were usually at the top of these societies, followed by warriors and merchants, with peasant farmers and slaves at the bottom.

#### 7. Architecture

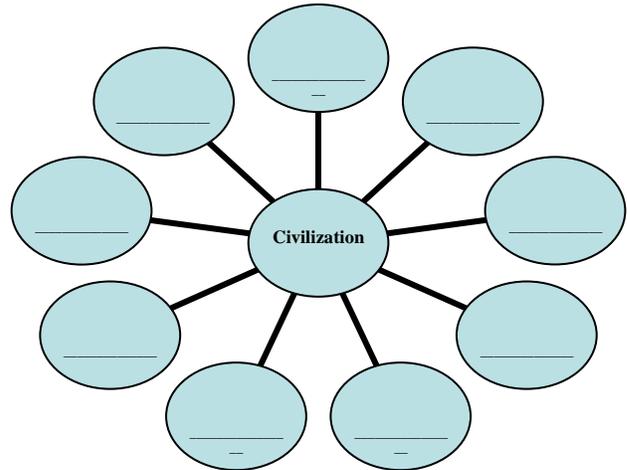
Much early art and architecture consisted of temples, pyramids and palaces. Temples and pyramids were built as places for worship, sacrifice, and burial. Palaces were symbols of the power of rulers.

#### 8. Art

Painting and sculpture were developed as a means of portraying gods and goddesses.

#### 9. System of Writing

Writing may have first developed in temples, where many types of records were kept. Early writing was picture writing, consisting of simple drawings. Over time, the writing became more symbolic. Rulers, priests, merchant and artisans used writing to keep accurate records. Writing was also used as a means of creative expression as well as record-keeping.



### Questions to Answer

1. Why did early civilizations develop along river valleys?
2. Why were central governments needed?
3. Why did organized religion develop?
4. Why did writing develop?