Student Objectives

- Discuss how the story of the Garden of Eden may be a metaphor for early civilizations in ancient Mesopotamia.
- Research and present facts about the Sumerians, one of the world’s first civilizations.
- Support or reject the statement that the Sumerians were the “first great civilization in the world.”

Materials

- Video on unitedstreaming: The Roots of Religion
  Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

  Selected clips that support this lesson plan:
  - In Search of Eden
    - Two Separate Stories of Creation
    - Following a Sumerian Poem to Errata
    - Entering the Garden of Eden Today
  - Ancient Middle East

- Computer with Internet access
- Resources about the Sumerians

Procedures

1. After watching the video, discuss how the story of the “Garden of Eden” may be a metaphor for historical events. How could this story relate to the Neolithic Revolution? (The story could be a metaphor for the beginnings of civilization. About 7000 years ago – the same time that the Bible gives for the Garden of Eden – early Stone Age hunter-gatherers began to settle in farming communities. This turning point is known as the Neolithic Revolution.)

2. Ask students what they think makes a civilization. (The stage of cultural development marked by urbanization, advanced techniques of agriculture and technology, material, scientific, and artistic...
progress, expanded population, and complex social organization.) Explain that the world’s first civilizations began in Mesopotamia, a region in the Middle East between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Show students this area on a world map. Point out the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, believed to be two of the four rivers described in Genesis as running through the Garden of Eden. (You may also want to point out the larger area known as the Fertile Crescent, the area of fertile land that lies within the modern countries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.)

3. Tell students that towards the end of the Neolithic Revolution, in 5000 B.C., what would become the Sumerian civilization began to develop along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Nomadic peoples settled on the wide, flat plain to farm the rich soil. A group known as Sumerians began to build the earliest cities on Earth. In the video, the Sumerians are described as “the first great civilization in the world.” Ask students what they think this tells us about the Sumerians. What makes a group of people a “civilization”? Write their ideas on the board.

4. Next, tell students they are going to learn more about the ancient Sumerians. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the following aspects of Sumerian culture:
   - farming
   - architecture and buildings
   - transportation
   - religion and temples
   - trade
   - science, learning, inventions
   - materials and tools
   - writing
   - occupations
   - politics and social classes

5. Have students work in their groups to develop a short presentation about Sumerian life or accomplishments related to their assigned topic. The following Web sites provide a good starting point:
   - World History: The Sumerians
     http://www.fsmitha.com/h1/ch01.htm
   - World Cultures: The Sumerians
     http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/MESO/SUMER.HTM
   - An Introduction to Sumer
     http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa030700a.htm
   - Social Studies for Kids: Sumeria: First in Many Things
     http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/articles/worldhistory/sumerianfirsts1.htm
- History for Kids: The Sumerians
  http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/westasia/history/sumerians.htm

6. Bring students together and have one member from each group share their findings.

7. Ask students to write their own description of the Sumerians, answering the following questions: What were the Sumerians’ greatest accomplishments? Did they meet the requirements of a civilization discussed in the beginning of this lesson? Do you agree that the Sumerians were the “first great civilization”? Why or why not?

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were active in class discussions; showed strong research skills; gave a concise, engaging presentation; descriptions reflected a clear understanding of the Sumerian civilization.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; showed strong on-grade skills; gave a competent presentation; descriptions reflected a satisfactory understanding of the Sumerian civilization.
- 1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions; showed weak research skills; presented their information with difficulty; descriptions reflected a vague or inaccurate understanding of the Sumerian civilization.

**Vocabulary**

- **civilization**
  *Definition:* The stage of cultural development marked by urbanization, advanced techniques of agriculture and technology, material, scientific, and artistic progress, expanded population, and complex social organization.
  *Context:* In the archaeological record, the first signs of human civilization appear in Mesopotamia.

- **Genesis**
  *Definition:* The first book of the Old Testament; its stories, which explain the beginning of the world, shaped Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. (The term "genesis" means beginning.)
  *Context:* The historian believed that the Genesis story held clues to show that the Garden of Eden was a real physical place on Earth.

- **Mesopotamia**
  *Definition:* Ancient region located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in modern Iraq and Syria
  *Context:* Human civilization first took root in Mesopotamia.
**Neolithic Revolution**

*Definition:* The last part of the Stone Age, beginning around 10,000 BCE, a period hunter-gatherers began to settle in farming communities and use polished stone tools and weapons.

*Context:* With the Neolithic Revolution, people started to domesticate animals, put them in fields around their homesteads, and grow crops.

**Sumerians**

*Definition:* A group of ancient people who built a civilization in the land of Sumer in Mesopotamia.

*Context:* The Sumerians were the first great civilization in the world, even pre-dating the pharaohs of Egypt.

**Academic Standards**

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**
McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit [http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp](http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp).

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History: Era 2—Understands the major characteristics of civilization and the development of civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley.
- Geography: Places and Regions—Understands the physical and human characteristics of place

**The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to [http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/](http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/).

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments

**Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit [http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html](http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html)