Unlocking the Secrets of Mohenjo-Daro

Assignments to hand in: Notes About Ancient Artifacts and Ruins & Comprehension Questions

Step 1: Introduction - read the following:

Mohenjo-Daro, which scholars believe means "hill of the dead," was an ancient Indian city located on the west bank of the Indus River in the Indus-Sarasvati region. The ruins of Mohenjo-Daro were discovered in 1922. The other Indus-Sarasvati city that was known of at that time was Harappa, discovered in 1826. Over time, thousands of ancient settlements have been discovered along the banks of the Indus River and the now-dried-up Sarasvati River. Most of these settlements are clustered around the Sarasvati River and include cities as large as Mohenjo-Daro, such as Ganweriwala, Kalibangan, and Rakhigarhi.

The people of Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus-Sarasvati region belonged to what many scholars refer to as the Harappan civilization. This civilization was the late stage of a cultural tradition that dates back to at least 6500 B.C.E. The Harappan civilization included a variety of ethnic groups and flourished for 800 years, from approximately 2700 B.C.E. until 1900 B.C.E. Many archeologists and scholars focus on Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa when studying Harappan - or Indus-Sarasvati - civilization because they were the earliest discovered and thus most thoroughly excavated sites.

Mohenjo-Daro was an extremely well-planned city that was similar in design to Harappa in the north. Both cities were approximately 3 miles in diameter, laid out in a gridlike formation, and were built primarily of burnt and unfired mud bricks. Like Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro was divided roughly into two areas: a fortress-type area, or citadel, to the west and a lower city to the east. The citadel was approximately 400 yards long and 200 yards wide, and it was built on a mud and brick platform that raised it 50 feet above the lower city. A wall surrounded the citadel and contained notches from which people could look out and defend the area. The lower city primarily consisted of houses. Archeologists have also discovered what they believe to be craft workshops in both parts of the city. Today, archeologists continue to excavate various areas of Mohenjo-Daro, and their finding help build our understanding of this great Indian civilization.

Step 2: Examine the map of the Archeological Site of Mohenjo-Daro

Step 3: For each geographic area of the archeological site (A-H) on the map, look at the placard and picture of each artifact(s) and answer the question printed on the placard by filling out the "My Ideas" section of the handout: Notes About Ancient Artifacts and Ruins.

Area A: Stone Weights

Color Picture of Artifacts
Area B: Water Filled Area

Area C: Statue of Female Figure

Area D: Seals

Area E: Water Channel

Area F: Structures

Area G: Multiple Objects

Area H: Clay Model

Step 4: Use the Guide to the Artifacts to fill out the "Archeologists' Ideas" on the handout: Notes About Ancient Artifacts and Ruins.
Step 5: answer the following Comprehension Questions on a separate piece of paper:

A. What have you learned about daily life in Mohenjo-Daro from this activity?

B. Which aspects of daily life do you see represented in the picture that the artist drew?

C. In what ways do you think Mohenjo-Daro was like a modern city?

D. Why do you think it is difficult for us to know exactly what life was like in ancient civilizations like those in the Indus-Sarasvati region?

E. What do you think might have contributed to the decline of Mohenjo-Daro?

Step 6: read the following:

After flourishing for nearly a thousand years, the Indus-Sarasvati civilization began to decline around 1900 B.C.E. The most popular explanation for this decline used to be that groups of warriors from central Asia, called Aryans, entered India from the northwest through the mountain passes of modern Afghanistan and conquered the Indus-Sarasvati people. However, the lack of archeological evidence to support this theory has encouraged many scholars to seriously question it.

Current research seems to suggest that sometime around 1900 B.C.E., a series of major tectonic shifts occurred - possibly accompanied by volcanic eruptions - and drastically altered the flow of life-supporting rivers such as the Sarasvati and the Indus. While there is no clear-cut evidence that the Indus-Sarasvati sites were destroyed by earthquakes, there is evidence that the number of sites were destroyed or damaged by floods. Many other sites appear to have been abandoned by people because of changing river courses.

Some scholars believe that following these geological events, the people of the Indus-Sarasvati region migrated eastward into the fertile valley of the Ganga River and its tributaries. However, the Indus-Sarasvati region was not entirely abandoned, and people continued to live there in smaller communities.