Name: _____ Date: _____

Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

Circle group

About five thousand years ago, people in Sumer began to write. Sumer was in Mesopotamia, between two rivers. There was no paper there. But there was a lot of soft clay by the rivers.

A scribe, a person who writes for a job, shaped wet clay into a small flat tablet. He cut the end of a reed, a tall grass with a hollow stem, so it was sharp and slanted. He pressed it into the clay again and again. Each press made a small wedge. Wedges together made signs. We call this writing cuneiform. That word means wedge-shaped.

At first, scribes used tablets to count things, like bags of grain or sheep. Later, people wrote letters, laws and stories on clay.

Tablets dried hard in the sun. Many lasted for thousands of years. We can still read them today.

Questions

1. Where was Sumer?

_____

_____

2. What did Sumerian scribes write on?

_____

_____

3. What tool did a scribe press into the clay?

_____

_____

4. What does cuneiform mean?

_____

_____

5. What did scribes first use tablets for?

_____

_____

6. Why do we still have so many clay tablets?

_____

_____

Words to know

scribe: a person whose job was to write and keep records
tablet: a small flat piece of clay used for writing
reed: a tall grass with a hollow stem that grows near water
wedge: a shape that is thick at one end and thin at the other

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

Triangle group

About five thousand years ago, people in the land of Sumer began to write. Sumer was in Mesopotamia, between two rivers. There was no paper there, but there was plenty of soft clay along the riverbanks.

A scribe, or professional writer, shaped a piece of wet clay into a small flat tablet. Then he took a reed, which is a tall grass with a hollow stem, and cut the end so it was sharp and slanted. He pressed it into the clay again and again. Each press left a small mark shaped like a wedge. Put together, the wedges made signs. Today we call this kind of writing cuneiform, a word that means wedge-shaped.

At first, scribes used tablets to keep track of things, such as bags of grain or flocks of sheep. Later, people also wrote letters, laws and stories on clay.

Clay tablets dried hard in the sun. Because of that, many of them survived for thousands of years, and people today can still read what the scribes wrote.

Questions

1. Where was Sumer?

_____

_____

2. What material did Sumerian scribes write on?

_____

_____

3. What tool did a scribe press into the clay?

_____

_____

4. What does the word cuneiform mean?

_____

_____

5. What did scribes first use tablets for?

_____

_____

6. Why do we still have so many clay tablets today?

_____

_____

Words to know

scribe: a person whose job was to write and keep records
tablet: a small flat piece of clay used for writing
reed: a tall grass with a hollow stem that grows near water
wedge: a shape that is thick at one end and thin at the other

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

Square group

Roughly five thousand years ago, the people of Sumer developed a system of writing. Sumer lay in Mesopotamia, the region between two great rivers. Paper did not exist there, but the riverbanks offered an abundant supply of soft clay.

A scribe, meaning a professional writer, molded a lump of wet clay into a small, flat tablet. He then trimmed the end of a reed, a tall grass with a hollow stem, until it was sharp and slanted. By pressing the reed into the clay repeatedly, he left behind small wedge-shaped marks, and combinations of these wedges formed signs. Today this style of writing is called cuneiform, a word meaning wedge-shaped.

Initially, scribes used tablets to keep track of goods, such as sacks of grain or flocks of sheep. As time passed, people also recorded letters, laws and stories on clay.

Because the tablets hardened in the sun, a great many of them survived for thousands of years, and modern scholars can still read what the scribes wrote.

Questions

1. Where was Sumer located?

_____

_____

2. What material did Sumerian scribes write on?

_____

_____

3. Which tool did a scribe press into the clay?

_____

_____

4. What does the word cuneiform mean?

_____

_____

5. What were tablets used for in the beginning?

_____

_____

6. Why have so many clay tablets survived to the present day?

_____

_____

Words to know

scribe: a person whose job was to write and keep records
tablet: a small flat piece of clay used for writing
reed: a tall grass with a hollow stem that grows near water
wedge: a shape that is thick at one end and thin at the other

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

Easier · 141 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.1

1. In Mesopotamia, between two rivers.
2. Wet clay shaped into small tablets.
3. A reed with a sharp, slanted end.
4. Wedge-shaped.
5. Counting things like grain and sheep.
6. They dried hard in the sun and lasted for thousands of years.

Triangle: Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

This passage · 172 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.9

1. In Mesopotamia, between two rivers.
2. Wet clay shaped into small tablets.
3. A reed with a sharp, slanted end.
4. Wedge-shaped.
5. Keeping track of things like grain and sheep.
6. They dried hard in the sun, so they lasted for thousands of years.

Square: Wedge Writing on Sumerian Clay Tablets

Harder · 169 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8

1. In Mesopotamia, the region between two great rivers.
2. Wet clay molded into small, flat tablets.
3. A reed trimmed so it was sharp and slanted.
4. Wedge-shaped.
5. Keeping track of goods such as grain and sheep.
6. They hardened in the sun, which helped them last for thousands of years.