Name: _____ Date: _____

Scribe School on Clay Tablets

Circle group

Long ago, people in Mesopotamia wrote on clay. This land lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A student shaped wet clay into a small, smooth tablet. Then the student pressed the end of a cut reed into the clay. The reed made marks shaped like wedges. This writing is called cuneiform. The word means shaped like a wedge.

Some children went to a school called a tablet house to become scribes. A scribe was a trained writer. Scribes kept records for temples, palaces, and merchants. At school, the teacher wrote lines on a tablet. The students copied them again and again until every sign was right. They also practiced counting and learned long lists of words.

If a tablet was not needed, the clay could be wet and used again. But clay dries hard, so many tablets were saved. Some have lasted for thousands of years. Diggers have found practice tablets with mistakes. Long ago, students had to try again too.

Questions

1. What did people in Mesopotamia write on?

_____

_____

2. What did students press into the clay?

_____

_____

3. What does cuneiform mean?

_____

_____

4. What was a scribe?

_____

_____

5. How did students get better at writing?

_____

_____

6. What does a practice tablet with mistakes tell us?

_____

_____

Words to know

tablet: a flat piece of clay used for writing
reed: a tall, thin plant that grows near water
cuneiform: an ancient kind of writing made of wedge-shaped marks
scribes: trained people who wrote and kept records
merchants: people who buy and sell goods

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: _____

Scribe School on Clay Tablets

Triangle group

Between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in the land called Mesopotamia, people wrote on clay. A student shaped wet clay into a smooth tablet small enough to hold in one hand. Then the student pressed the end of a cut reed into the clay to make wedge-shaped marks. This kind of writing is called cuneiform, a word that means shaped like a wedge.

Children who wanted to become scribes went to a school known as a tablet house. Scribes were trained writers who kept records for temples, palaces, and merchants. At school, a teacher wrote lines on a tablet. The students copied them onto their own tablets again and again until every sign was right. They also practiced counting and learned long lists of words.

If a tablet was no longer needed, the clay could be wet and used again. Clay dries hard, though, so many tablets were saved. Some have lasted for thousands of years. Diggers have found practice tablets with mistakes in them, which shows that even long ago, students had to try, fail, and try again.

Questions

1. What did people in Mesopotamia write on?

_____

_____

2. What tool did students press into the clay?

_____

_____

3. What does the word cuneiform mean?

_____

_____

4. What was the job of a scribe?

_____

_____

5. How did students get better at writing at a tablet house?

_____

_____

6. What does a practice tablet with mistakes tell us?

_____

_____

Words to know

tablet: a flat piece of clay used for writing
reed: a tall, thin plant that grows near water
cuneiform: an ancient kind of writing made of wedge-shaped marks
scribes: trained people who wrote and kept records
merchants: people who buy and sell goods

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: _____

Scribe School on Clay Tablets

Square group

In the ancient land of Mesopotamia, which lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, people recorded their words on clay. A student would shape wet clay into a smooth tablet small enough to hold in one hand, and then press the end of a cut reed into its surface to produce wedge-shaped marks. This style of writing is known as cuneiform, a word that means shaped like a wedge.

Children who hoped to become scribes attended a school called a tablet house. Scribes were trained writers who maintained records for temples, palaces, and merchants. In class, a teacher inscribed lines on a tablet, and the students copied them onto their own tablets repeatedly until every sign was correct. They also practiced counting and memorized long lists of words.

When a tablet was no longer needed, the clay could be moistened and used again. However, clay dries hard, and so many tablets were kept, and some have survived for thousands of years. Archaeologists have found practice tablets that contain mistakes, which shows that even in ancient times, students had to try, fail, and try again.

Questions

1. What material did the people of Mesopotamia write on?

_____

_____

2. What did students press into the surface of the clay?

_____

_____

3. What does the word cuneiform mean?

_____

_____

4. What work did scribes do?

_____

_____

5. How did students improve their writing at a tablet house?

_____

_____

6. What do practice tablets that contain mistakes reveal?

_____

_____

Words to know

tablet: a flat piece of clay used for writing
reed: a tall, thin plant that grows near water
cuneiform: an ancient kind of writing made of wedge-shaped marks
scribes: trained people who wrote and kept records
merchants: people who buy and sell goods

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: Scribe School on Clay Tablets

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

Circle: Scribe School on Clay Tablets

Easier · 162 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.7

1. Tablets made of clay.
2. The end of a cut reed.
3. Shaped like a wedge.
4. A trained writer who kept records for temples, palaces, and merchants.
5. They copied the teacher's lines again and again.
6. Students long ago had to try again until they got it right.

Triangle: Scribe School on Clay Tablets

This passage · 180 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 5.5

1. Tablets made of clay.
2. The end of a cut reed.
3. Shaped like a wedge.
4. Scribes were trained writers who kept records for temples, palaces, and merchants.
5. They copied their teacher's lines again and again until every sign was right.
6. Students long ago had to try and fail before they got it right.

Square: Scribe School on Clay Tablets

Harder · 185 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8.5

1. Tablets made of clay.
2. The end of a cut reed.
3. Shaped like a wedge.
4. They were trained writers who maintained records for temples, palaces, and merchants.
5. They copied their teacher's lines repeatedly until every sign was correct.
6. That students in ancient times had to try, fail, and try again.