

Ancient History and Civilizations

Brief #1

Focus

Ancient history began with the written record.



Ancient History and PreHistory

In the next several units, you are going to learn about ancient history. **Ancient history is the study of the history of the first civilizations that wrote and kept records.**

Of course, people had been living in communities on Earth long before they began to write things down. That period of history is called prehistory. This is the main difference between prehistory and ancient history. There is a written record of the ancient period, but not of the prehistoric period.



Communities and Civilizations

Before you begin to study ancient civilizations you first have to know what a civilization is! There are differences between people living together in communities and groups, and people living together in civilizations.

Prehistoric people lived together in communities, but those groups are not considered civilizations. A civilization is a large group of people who live in a society that is complex. **A civilization has a written language, a social hierarchy, and a political system. There is a division of labor, an organized religion, and a food supply.** This is another important difference between the ancient world and the prehistoric world. Prehistoric people did not live in civilizations, but ancient people did.

Vocabulary

1. ancient history
2. prehistory
3. civilization
4. B.C.
5. A.D.



Population of the Ancient World

The ancient world was full of many different civilizations. You will hear about the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. You will learn about places like Persia, Babylon, and Judea. Some of these civilizations coexisted, or were around at the same time as one another. But there are other ancient civilizations that existed at different times. Scholars consider the ancient world to be anything between 3500 B.C. and 476 A.D.

While the ancient world was not as populated as the world is today, there were still millions and millions of people on the planet then. People lived on all of the continents with the exception of Antarctica. So when you read about the ancient Egyptians, or any other ancient civilization, it's important to remember that they were not the only civilization in existence at that time, or the only people alive on the planet.

Ancient History and Civilizations

Brief #1 (cont.)



Difference Between Civilizations

But what makes one civilization different from another? Sometimes you will learn that there were two or more civilizations that not only existed at the same time and in the same area, but that they also had similar cultures and religions.

If you look at a map of the Italian peninsula in ancient times, you will see that Romans, Etruscans, Greeks and other people populated the area. But these groups were considered to be members of different civilizations, even though their cultures had things in common. That's because they spoke different languages. This is one of the main features that distinguishes one civilization from another. In order for a civilization to arise in the first place, it would be important for the people to be able to communicate with one another.



Dates in the Ancient World

When you learn about ancient history, you will often see the abbreviations B.C. and A.D. For example, you may read that in 490 B.C. the Persian Empire attacked Greece, or that the Roman Empire fell in 476 A.D.

The abbreviation B.C. means before Christ, or before the birth of Jesus Christ. The abbreviation A.D. means *Anno Domini*, which is Latin for *in the year of our Lord*. The year 1 B.C. means one year before the birth of Jesus. The year 1 A.D. is the year in which scholars say Jesus was born. If the current year is 2009 A.D., it means that it has been two thousand and nine years since the birth of Jesus. So in order to figure out how long ago 490 B.C. or any other date in the B.C. time period really is, you must do the following: Add the current year to the number of years B.C.

For example: 2009 A.D. + 490 B.C. = 2,499 years ago.



B.C. and A.D.

The fact that we use a dating system that uses the birth of Jesus to divide history has been debated over the years. That's because the birth of Jesus is very important to some people, like Christians, and not as important to other people who practice different faiths.

This dating system was developed by a Christian monk who lived in the Middle Ages. It was adopted by Europe and has become the traditional way most western societies reckon time.