



Early Civilizations of the Americas

Early cultures of North, South, and Central America

First Peoples – Paleo-Indians

- 12,000 – 8,000 years ago
 - Archeological Evidence (spear points) give evidence of inhabitants
 - Came as the Wisconsin Age ended and the Glaciers retreated
 - Landscape was completely untouched and raw



Paleo-Indians Critical Thinking

In terms of development what major disadvantages would the civilizations of the Americas have versus the civilizations of Asia, Europe, and Africa?

Archaic Period

- 8,000 – 2,500 years ago
- Hunters and foragers
- Characterized by use of copper and notched or stemmed projectiles
- More sedentary of a lifestyle
- Regionalization of family groups



Woodland

2,500 – 300 years ago

- Characterized by complexes of burial mounds
- Technological advances
 - Bows and Arrows
 - Pottery
- Development of villages and social structure



Archaic & Woodland Indians Critical Thinking

What advantage would sedentary civilizations have over nomadic?

Mississippian 1000 - 300 years ago

- Technological
 - Globular Pottery
 - Smaller projectile points
 - Gardening implements
- Permanent Village sites
- Intensive farming
 - Corn, squash, beans
- Social Stratification



Mississippian Indians Critical Thinking

Why would the development of cities coincide with the development of armies and the building of walls?

Early Civilizations of Mesoamerica

- Civilizations built foundations for Mega-Civilizations to come later
 - Developed religions, writing, Government, Agriculture
- Civilizations began developing around year 8000 B.C.E.
 - With help of Beans, squash, avocados, corn (4000 B.C.E)

Case Study: Olmecs

- “Mother Culture” of Mexico
 - Developed high culture
 - Jade
 - Ball Games
 - Calendar
 - Temple like pyramids



Olmec Critical Thinking Question

What would be the great importance of a calendar? What types of knowledge/technology would you need to develop one?

Case Study: Maya

- Collection of City-States in central Mesoamerica
 - Similar to Greeks
 - Ruled through system of kings
 - Connected by common culture
 - Still went to war with one another



Case Study: Mayan Priests

- Responsible for Mayan advancements in Math, Writing, and Astronomy
 - Developed ideographic writing system
 - Similar to Chinese
 - Calculated length of year to within 17 seconds
 - Developed concept of 0



Maya Critical Thinking Question

Why would so many ancient cultures have such high respect for priests, historians, and writers, while today they are not respected as much?

Early Civilizations of South America

- Organized civilizations had existed in South America since at least 2nd century B.C.E.
- Relied on agriculture of corn, potatoes, squash and beans
 - All plants native to the Americas
- Had to adapt to environment or collapse



Case Study: Moche

- Developed Irrigation canals from the Trujillo River to grow crops
- Developed large temples to worship the moon and sun
- Established trade routes across South America
- Fell due to climate shifts resulting from El Nino



Moche Critical Thinking Question

Why would climate shifts be so damaging to a civilization's way of life?

Case Study: Nazca

- Famous for developing “Nazca Lines” in the desert
- Required a high degree of planning and construction
 - Shapes can only be seen from the air
 - Purpose unknown



Nazca Critical Thinking Questions

Why would archeologist be so important to the study of cultures that did not have written languages? How might things like the Nazca lines help up understand civilizations?