What You Will Learn…

1. The geography of India includes high mountains, great rivers, and heavy seasonal rain.
2. Harappan civilization developed along the Indus River.
3. The Aryan migration to India changed the region’s civilization.

**Main Ideas**

- If YOU were there...

Your people are nomadic herders in southern Asia about 1200 BC. You live in a river valley with plenty of water and grass for your cattle. Besides looking after cattle, you spend time learning songs and myths from the village elders. They say these words hold your people’s history. One day, it will be your duty to teach them to your own children.

Why is it important to pass on these words?

**Building Background** Like Mesopotamia and Egypt, India was home to one of the world’s first civilizations. Like other early civilizations, the one in India grew up in a river valley. But the society that eventually developed in India was very different from the ones that developed elsewhere.

**Geography of India**

Look at a map of Asia in the atlas of this book. Do you see the large, roughly triangular landmass that juts out from the center of the southern part of the continent? That is India. It was the location of one of the world’s earliest civilizations.

**Landforms and Rivers**

India is huge. In fact, it is so big that many geographers call it a subcontinent. A subcontinent is a large landmass that is smaller than a continent. Subcontinents are usually separated from the rest of their continents by physical features. If you look at the map on the next page, for example, you can see that mountains largely separate India from the rest of Asia.

Among the mountains of northern India are the Himalayas, the highest mountains in the world. To the west are the Hindu Kush. Though these mountains made it hard to enter India, invaders have historically found a few paths through them.
To the west of the Himalayas is a vast desert. Much of the rest of India is covered by fertile plains and rugged plateaus.

Several major rivers flow out of the Himalayas. The valley of one of them, the Indus, was the location of India’s first civilization. The Indus is located in present-day Pakistan, west of India. When heavy snows in the Himalayas melted, the Indus flooded. As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the flooding left behind a layer of fertile silt. The silt created ideal farmland for early settlers.

**Climate**

Most of India has a hot and humid climate. This climate is heavily influenced by India’s **monsoons**, seasonal wind patterns that cause wet and dry seasons.
In the summer, monsoon winds blow into India from the Indian Ocean, bringing heavy rains that can cause terrible floods. Some parts of India receive as much as 100 or even 200 inches of rain during this time. In the winter, winds blow down from the mountains. This forces moisture out of India and creates warm, dry winters.

**READING CHECK**

**Drawing Conclusions**

How do you think monsoons affected settlement in India?

**Harappan Civilization**

Historians call the civilization that grew up in the Indus River Valley the Harappan (huh-RA-puhn) civilization. In addition, many Harappan settlements were found along the Sarasvati River, located southeast of the Indus.

Like other ancient societies you have studied, the Harappan civilization grew as irrigation and agriculture improved. As farmers began to produce surpluses of food, towns and cities appeared in India.

**History Close-up**

**Life in Mohenjo Daro**

Mohenjo Daro was one of the two major cities of the Harappan civilization. Located next to the Indus River in what is now Pakistan, the city probably covered one square mile. The people who lived in the city enjoyed some of the most advanced comforts of their time, including indoor plumbing.

Harappan merchants used a standard set of weights to measure goods such as precious stones.
India’s First Cities

The Harappan civilization was named after the modern city of Harappa (huh-RA-puh), Pakistan. It was near this city that ruins of the civilization were first discovered. From studying these ruins, archaeologists think that the civilization thrived between 2300 and 1700 BC.

The greatest sources of information we have about Harappan civilization are the ruins of two large cities, Harappa and Mohenjo Daro (mo-HEN-joh DAR-oh). The two cities lay on the Indus more than 300 miles apart but were remarkably similar.

Both Harappa and Mohenjo Daro were well planned. Each stood near a towering fortress. From these fortresses, defenders could look down on the cities’ brick streets, which crossed at right angles and were lined with storehouses, workshops, market stalls, and houses. In addition, both cities had many public wells.

The houses of Mohenjo Daro had flat roofs. Many had staircases that allowed people to climb to the roof from the street.

The city’s streets were paved and well drained. They met at right angles, creating a grid pattern.

Next to the city was a huge citadel, or fortress, to guard against invasions.

Harappan Civilization

What in this picture suggests that Mohenjo Daro was a well-planned city?
Harappan Achievements
Harappan civilization was very advanced. Most houses had bathrooms with indoor plumbing. Artisans made excellent pottery, jewelry, ivory objects, and cotton clothing. They used high-quality tools and developed a system of weights and measures.

Harappans also developed India’s first writing system. However, scholars have not yet learned to read this language, so we know very little about Harappan society. Historians think that the Harappans had kings and strong central governments, but they aren’t sure. As in Egypt, the people may have worshipped the king as a god.

Harappan civilization ended by the early 1700s BC, but no one is sure why. Perhaps invaders destroyed the cities or natural disasters, like floods or earthquakes, caused the civilization to collapse.

Aryan Migration
Not long after the Harappan civilization crumbled, a new group arrived in the Indus Valley. They were called the Aryans (AIR-ee-uhnz). They were originally from the area around the Caspian Sea in Central Asia. Over time, however, they became the dominant group in India.

Arrival and Spread
The Aryans first arrived in India in the 2000s BC. Historians and archaeologists believe that the Aryans crossed into India through mountain passes in the northwest. Over many centuries, they spread east and south into central India. From there they moved even farther east into the Ganges River Valley.

Much of what we know about Aryan society comes from religious writings known as the Vedas (VAY-duhs). These are collections of poems, hymns, myths, and rituals that were written by Aryan priests. You will read more about the Vedas later in this chapter.

Government and Society
As nomads, the Aryans took along their herds of animals as they moved. But over time, they settled in villages and began to farm. Unlike the Harappans, they did not build big cities.

The Aryan political system was also different from the Harappan system. The Aryans lived in small communities, based mostly on family ties. No single ruling authority existed. Instead, each group had its own leader, often a skilled warrior.

Aryan villages were governed by rajas (RAH-juhz). A raja was a leader who ruled a village and the land around it. Villagers farmed some of this land for the raja. They used other sections as pastures for their cows, horses, sheep, and goats.

READING CHECK  Analyzing Why don’t we know much about Harappan civilization?

Harappan Art
Like other ancient peoples, the Harappans made small seals like the one below that were used to stamp goods. They also used clay pots like the one at right as burial urns.
Although many rajas were related, they didn’t always get along. Sometimes rajas joined forces before fighting a common enemy. Other times, however, rajas went to war against each other. In fact, Aryan groups fought each other nearly as often as they fought outsiders.

**Language**

The first Aryan settlers did not read or write. Because of this, they had to memorize the poems and hymns that were important in their culture, such as the Vedas. If people forgot these poems and hymns, the works would be lost forever.

The language in which these Aryan poems and hymns were composed was **Sanskrit**, the most important language of ancient India. At first, Sanskrit was only a spoken language. Eventually, however, people figured out how to write it down so they could keep records. These Sanskrit records are a major source of information about Aryan society. Sanskrit is no longer spoken today, but it is the root of many modern South Asian languages.

**READING CHECK**

**Identifying** What source provides much of the information we have about the Aryans?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW**

The earliest civilizations in India were centered in the Indus Valley. First the Harappans and then the Aryans lived in this fertile valley. In the next section, you will learn about a new religion that developed in the Indus Valley after the Aryans settled there—Hinduism.

**Section 1 Assessment**

**Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People**

1. **a. Define** What are monsoons?
   **b. Contrast** How does northern India differ from the rest of the region?
   **c. Elaborate** Why is India called a subcontinent?
2. **a. Recall** Where did Harappan civilization develop?
   **b. Analyze** What is one reason that scholars do not completely understand some important parts of Harappan society?
3. **a. Identify** Who were the Aryans?
   **b. Contrast** How was Aryan society different from Harappan society?

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Drawing Conclusions**
   Using your notes, draw conclusions about the effect of geography on Indian society. Record your conclusions in a diagram like this one.

**Focus on Writing**

5. **Illustrating Geography and Early Civilizations**
   This section described two possible topics for your poster: geography and early civilizations. Which of them is more interesting to you? Write down some ideas for a poster about your chosen topic.