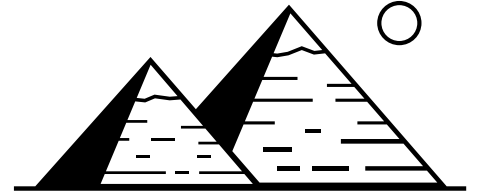


Name: _____

Ziggurats in Mesopotamia

An architect designs structures, such as buildings, bridges, or tunnels. Architects are in charge of creating sketches, which are plans that show what a structure will look like. They also oversee the construction of structures.

Architecture has always been an important aspect of history. Throughout history, people have used different styles and materials to create structures. They have also created structures for different purposes. For example, Ancient Egyptians built large pyramids that were tombs for their leaders. In Ancient Greece, people used marble and stone to build impressive temples, such as the Parthenon in Athens.



Today, you will be an architect and learn about a structure from Ancient Mesopotamia called a ziggurat. Then, you will design a new building inspired by a ziggurat. Follow the steps below.

Step 1: Learn About Ziggurats

Read the passage below. Then, answer the questions.

Mesopotamia is known as the oldest civilization in the world. It was made up of many kingdoms, including Sumer, Assyria and Babylonia. One of the most famous types of ancient architecture from Mesopotamia is the ziggurat. The word ziggurat means “raised area.” Ziggurats were large structures that were built between 2200 and 500 BCE.



This illustration shows what an ancient ziggurat looked like.

Role of Religion

Mesopotamian religion was polytheistic. This means that the people worshiped more than one god. They also believed that the gods lived in the mountains. The Mesopotamians saw ziggurats as man-made mountains. Building the ziggurats was a way to re-create the mountain homes of the gods. The higher the ziggurat, the closer the people would be to their gods.

Mesopotamians believed that the gods could take on human forms to visit people. As a result, Mesopotamians designed the ziggurat with the gods in mind. For example, the gods needed to eat and sleep. When designing the ziggurat, Mesopotamians placed a temple on the top level, which had a place for the gods to eat and sleep. An outdoor kitchen was built on one of the lower levels’ terraces so food could be prepared and taken up to the temple.

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Ziggurats in Mesopotamia

Design

Every ziggurat followed a similar design. The base of the structure, which is the lowest level, was either a square or rectangular shape. It was typically 50 to 100 feet long on each side. The height of the ziggurats varied from two to seven levels high. The “stepped” look of the structure was achieved by making each level smaller than the one before it. Stairs or ramps were built to access the top of the structure. At the very top level was a temple. There were also rooms on the lower levels that were used for storage or for the priests, who were in charge of caring for the gods.

Construction

Ziggurats were often the first building to be constructed in a town. Other buildings would be built around the ziggurat so that it was at the center of the city. By having the ziggurat at the center of the city, people would be constantly reminded of their gods.

Ziggurats were built using different kinds of bricks. The inside of the ziggurat was created by stacking mud bricks. The outside of the ziggurat was built with fired bricks, which were sturdier than the baked bricks. The fired bricks could also be glazed or covered with different colors. In some ziggurats, each tier was built using a different color. In other ziggurats, the temple was built using different colored bricks from the rest of the structure so that it would stand out.



It took many years to build a Ziggurat. Thousands of people and millions of bricks were needed to complete the structure.

Ziggurats also had internal drain pipes to drain water. The drains were built on the sides of the structure to catch water. The water then drained to the ground. To further protect the structure from water damage, Mesopotamians added a mixture of reeds, grasses, and bitumen, a black, waterproof tar, to the bricks before firing. This added mixture made them more durable.

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Ziggurats in Mesopotamia

Answer the questions below.

1. What was the purpose of the ziggurats?

2. Why did ziggurats include kitchens and bedrooms?

3. Why did the Mesopotamians use different types of bricks to build the ziggurats?

4. Some historians consider the Mesopotamians to be the most innovative of early societies. They claim this because the Mesopotamians were problem solvers and came up with new ideas. Do you agree or disagree with this claim? Use at least two pieces of evidence from the passage to back up your claim.

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Ziggurats in Mesopotamia

Step 2: Designing a Structure

Imagine that you have been hired to design a new structure that is inspired by a ziggurat. Design your structure on a separate piece of paper or on a computer. Your design must include the following:

- At least 3 levels (each level should be a different color)
- A ramp or staircase that connects each level to the one above it
- A special room at the top of the structure (similar to a temple on top of the ziggurat)
- A system for draining water when it rains (similar to the pipes ziggurats had)
- Labels for each area of the structure

Need help getting started? Choose a structure to design from the list below.

- Library
- School
- Restaurant
- Indoor Trampoline Park
- Movie Theater
- Store