

COMPETENCY 1.0 HISTORY**Skill 1.1 Understand traditional historical points of reference in the history of Texas, the United States, and the world.**

Ancient civilizations were those cultures that developed faster and were considered advanced for their time. The following is an overview of some such civilizations with their major accomplishments.

The land of **Mesopotamia** (what is now Iraq) is a good example of the various civilizations that criss-crossed the Fertile Crescent: it was an autocratic society, with a single ruler at the head of the government and, in many cases, the religion, as well. The people followed his strict instructions or faced the consequences, which were harsh and often deadly.

The civilizations of the Sumerians, Amorites, Hittites, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Persians controlled various areas of Mesopotamia. With few exceptions, tyrants and military leaders controlled most aspects of society, including trade, religion, and law. Each Sumerian city-state (and there were a few) had its own god, with the city-state's leader doubling as the high priest of worship of that local god. Subsequent cultures had a handful of gods as well, although they had more of a national worship structure, with high priests centered in the capital city as advisers to the tyrant.

Trade was vital to these civilizations, since they had access to some but not all of the things that they needed to survive. Some trading agreements led to occupation, as was the case with the Sumerians, who didn't bother to build walls to protect their wealth of knowledge. Egypt and the Phoenician cities were powerful and regular trading partners of the various Mesopotamian cultures.

Mesopotamian cultures gave us the following:

- The first written work, the wheel, and the first banking system (Sumeria);
- The first written set of laws (Code of Hammurabi);
- The first epic story (*Gilgamesh*);
- The first library dedicated to preserving knowledge (instituted by the Assyrian leader Ashurbanipal);
- The Hanging Gardens of Babylon (built by the Chaldean Nebuchadnezzar)

The ancient civilization of the Sumerians invented the wheel; developed irrigation through use of canals, dikes, and devices for raising water; devised the system of cuneiform writing; learned to divide time; and built large boats for trade. The Babylonians devised the famous Code of Hammurabi, the first known law code.

Egypt made many significant contributions, including the construction of the great pyramids; development of hieroglyphic writing; mummification; making paper from papyrus; advancing arithmetic and geometry; counting in groups of 1-10 (the decimal system); completing a solar calendar; and laying the foundation for science and astronomy.

The earliest historical record of **Kush** is in Egyptian sources. They describe a region upstream from the first cataract of the Nile as "wretched." This civilization was characterized by a settled way of life in fortified mud-brick villages. They subsisted on hunting and fishing, herding cattle, and gathering grain. Skeletal remains suggest that the people were a blend of Negroid and Mediterranean peoples. This civilization appears to be the second oldest in Africa (after Egypt).

In government, the king ruled through a law of custom that was interpreted by priests. The king was elected from the royal family. Descent was determined through the mother's line (as in Egypt). But in *an unparalleled innovation*, the Kushites were ruled by a series of female monarchs. The Kushite religion was polytheistic, including all of the primary Egyptian gods. There were, however, regional gods that, as their name suggests, were the principal gods of their regions. Derived from other African cultures, there was also a lion warrior god. This civilization remained vital through the last half of the first millennium BC, but it suffered about 300 years of gradual decline until they were conquered by the Nuba people.

The ancient **Assyrians** were warlike and aggressive due to a highly organized military and use of horse drawn chariots.

The **Hebrews**, also known as the ancient Israelites instituted "monotheism," which is the worship of one God, Yahweh, and combined the 66 books of the Hebrew and Christian Greek scriptures into the Hebrew Bible (for Christians, it is simply the Old Testament of the Bible).

The **Minoans** had a system of writing using symbols to represent syllables in words. They built palaces with multiple levels containing many rooms, water and sewage systems with flush toilets, bathtubs, hot and cold running water, and bright paintings on the walls.

The **Mycenaeans** changed the Minoan writing system to aid their own language and used symbols to represent syllables.

The **Phoenicians** were sea traders well known for their manufacturing skills in glass and metals and the development of their famous purple dye. They became so proficient in navigation that they were able to sail by the stars at night. They also devised an alphabet using symbols to represent single sounds, which was an improved extension of the Egyptian principle and writing system.

In **India**, the caste system was developed, the principle of zero in mathematics was discovered, and the major religion of Hinduism was begun.

China is considered by some historians to be the oldest contiguous civilization in the world. It existed around the same time as the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Indus Valley civilizations. The Chinese studied nature and weather; stressed the importance of education, family, and a strong central government; followed the religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism; and invented such things as gunpowder, paper, printing, and the magnetic compass.

China built the Great Wall; practiced crop rotation and terrace farming; increased the silk industry, and developed caravan routes across Central Asia for extensive trade. They advanced rice cultivation and developed a written language based on drawings or pictographs (no alphabet symbolizing sounds as each word or character had a form different from all others). China was also the birthplace of many of the world's most familiar inventions, including paper, printing, paper money, and gunpowder

Ancient China was a land in constant turmoil. Tribes warred with one another almost from the first, with the Great Wall of China being a consolidation of walls built to keep out invaders. The Great Wall was built at the direction of China's emperor, and the idea of an emperor or very strong "government of one" was the rule of law until the twentieth century. The Chinese became very proficient at producing beautiful art and silk, and exporting them via the Silk Road.

The ancient **Persians** developed an alphabet; contributed the religions and philosophies of Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, and Gnosticism; and allowed conquered peoples to retain their own customs, laws, and religions.

The classical civilization of **Greece** reached the pinnacle of the humanities, owing much to the ground work already laid by the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Minoans, and Mycenaeans. Among the more important Greek contributions were the Greek alphabet, which was derived from the Phoenician letters that form the basis for the Roman alphabet and our present-day alphabet. Extensive trading and colonization resulted in the spread of the Greek civilization. The love of sports, with emphasis on a sound body, led to the tradition of the Olympic Games. Greece was responsible for the rise of independent, strong city-states. Note the complete contrast between independent, freedom-loving Athens with its practice of pure democracy (i.e. direct, personal, active participation in government by qualified citizens) and the rigid, totalitarian, militaristic Sparta. Other Greek influences include drama, epic and lyric poetry, fables, myths centered on the many gods and goddesses, science, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, art, architecture, and the recording of historical events.

The conquests of Alexander the Great spread Greek ideas to the areas he conquered and brought to the Greek world many Asian influences. Above all, the value of ideas, wisdom, curiosity, and the desire to learn as much about the world as possible satisfied Alexander's thirst for knowledge.

The ancient civilization of **Rome** lasted approximately 1,000 years - including the periods of the republic and the empire - although its history and influence on Europe lasted much longer. There was a sharp contrast between the imaginative, inquisitive Greeks and the practical, no-nonsense Romans, who nonetheless spread and preserved ancient Greek ideas. The contributions and accomplishments of the Romans are numerous; but their greatest included language, engineering, building, law, government, roads, trade, and the **Pax Romana**. The Pax Romana was the long period of peace that enabled free travel and trade, which spread people, cultures, goods, and ideas all over the world.

In **India**, Hinduism and Buddhism grew in influence. Industry and commerce developed along with extensive trading with the Near East. Rapid developments in science and medicine were made, along with being one of the first civilizations to navigate and sail the oceans and seas.

Sub-Saharan African civilizations were learning how to shape and use iron, first as farm implements and later for weapons. Trading was conducted overland using camels and at important seaports. The Arab influence was extremely important, as was their later contact with Indians, Christian Nubians, and Persians. In fact, their trading activities were probably the most important factor in the spread and assimilation of foreign influences and stimulation of growth.

The people who lived in the Americas before Columbus arrived had a thriving, connected society. The civilizations in North America tended to spread out more and were in occasional conflict but largely maintained their sovereignty. The South American civilizations, however, tended to colonize each other, with the strongest city or tribe assuming control of the lives and resources of the rest of the nearby peoples.

Native Americans in North America had a spiritual and personal relationship with the various Spirits of Nature and a keen appreciation of the ways of woodworking and metalworking. Various tribes dotted the landscape of what is now the U.S. They struggled against one another for control of resources such as food and water but had no concept of ownership of land; they believed that they were living on the land with the permission of the Spirits. The North Americans mastered the art of growing many crops and, to their credit, were willing to share that knowledge with the various Europeans who eventually arrived. Artwork made of hides, beads, and jewels were popular at this time.

The most well known South American societies were the Aztec, Inca, and Maya. Each had a central capital in which lived the emperor, who controlled all aspects of the lives of his subjects. The societies traded with other peoples; and if the relations soured, the results were usually absorption of the trading partners into the society. These societies, especially the Aztecs, had access to large numbers of metals and jewels, and they created weapons and artwork that continue to impress historians today. The Inca Empire stretched across a vast period of territory down the western coast of South America and was connected by a series of roads. For their part, the Mayas are known for their pyramids and calendars, as well as their language, which still confounds archaeologists.

The ancient **Israelites** and **Christians** created a powerful legacy of political and philosophical traditions, much of which survives to this day. In law and religion, especially, we can draw a more or less straight line from then to now.

Israel was not the first ancient civilization to have a law code. However, due to the notoriety of the Ten Commandments, we think of the Israelites as creating the first code of law. This simple set of laws, some of which are not laws at all but societal instructions, maintains a central role in societies worldwide. Such commandments as the ones that prohibit stealing and killing were revolutionary in their day because they applied to everyone, not just the disadvantaged. In many ancient cultures, the rich and powerful were above the law because they could buy their way out of trouble. Also, it wasn't always clear what the laws were. Echoing the Code of Hammurabi and preceding Rome's Twelve Tables, the Ten Commandments provided a written record of laws, so all knew what was prohibited.

The civilization of Israel is also known as the first **Monotheistic** society (worshiping only one god). The Christian communities built on this tradition. Rather than a series of gods, each of which was in charge of a different aspect of nature or society, the ancient Israelites and Christians believed in just one god, called Yahweh or God, depending on which religion. This divine being was, they believed, the "one, true god," lord over all. Monotheism had more of a personal nature to it, as believers thought they were able to communicate directly to their god. Conversely, polytheistic gods of Mesopotamia and Egypt were thought to be distant and unapproachable.

The civilization in **Japan** appeared during this time having borrowed much of their culture from China. It was the last of these classical civilizations to develop. Although they accepted and copied Chinese art, law, architecture, dress, and writing, the Japanese put their own unique “spin” on them, including their acceptance of Buddhism. Early Japanese society focused on the emperor and the farm, in that order. However, the emperor’s power declined, as it was usurped by the era of the Daimyo and his loyal soldiers, the Samurai. Japan flourished economically and culturally during many of these years, although the policy of isolation the country developed kept the rest of the world from knowing such things. Buddhism and local religions were joined by Christianity in the sixteenth century, but it wasn’t until the mid-nineteenth century that Japan rejoined the world community.

During this time, African civilizations were few and far between. Most of northern Africa had been conquered by Moslem armies. The preponderance of deserts and other inhospitable lands restricted African settlements to a few select areas. The city of Zimbabwe became a trading center in south-central Africa in the 5th century but didn’t last long. Ghana was more successful: it was a Muslim-influenced kingdom that arose in the 9th century and lasted for nearly 300 years. Ghanaians had large farming areas, raised cattle and elephants, and traded with people from Europe and the Middle East. Ghana was eventually overrun by Mali, whose trade center Timbuktu survived its own empire’s demise and blossomed into one of the world’s caravan destinations.

Iron, tin, and leather came out of **Mali** with a vengeance. The succeeding civilization of the Songhai, for the most part, maintained the success of their predecessors. Religion in Ghana, Mali, and other north African lands was largely Muslim; and even after extended contact with other cultures, technological advancements were few and far between.

The **Scientific Revolution** and the **Enlightenment** were two of the most important movements in the history of civilization, which changed the way people viewed themselves and the world. The Scientific Revolution was, above all, a shift in focus from belief to evidence. Scientists and philosophers wanted to see the proof, not just believe what other people told them. It was an exciting time for progressive-thinkers.

A Polish astronomer, **Nicolaus Copernicus**, began the Scientific Revolution. He crystallized a lifetime of observations into a book that was published about the time of his death. In this book, Copernicus argued that the Sun, not the Earth, was the center of a solar system and that other planets revolved around it (and not the Earth). This contradicted established (read: Church-mandated) doctrine. The Church still wielded tremendous power at this time, including the power to banish people or sentence them to prison or even death.

The Danish astronomer **Tycho Brahe** was the first to catalog his observations of the night sky, of which he made thousands. Building on Brahe's data, German scientist Johannes Kepler instituted his theory of planetary movement, embodied in his famous Laws of Planetary Movement. Using Brahe's data, Kepler also confirmed Copernicus's observations and argument that the Earth revolved around the Sun.

The most famous defender of this idea was the Italian scientist, **Galileo Galilei**. He wrote a book comparing the two theories, but most readers could tell easily that he favored the heliocentric (sun-centered) theory. He had used the relatively new invention of the telescope to see four moons of Jupiter. When they did not revolve around the Earth, he naturally wondered why everything else should. His ideas were ill-received by the Church, which asserted its authority over science and placed Galileo under house arrest.

Galileo died under house arrest, but his theory was advanced by the English scientist, **Isaac Newton**. Newton went on to discover gravity, and was a pioneering voice in the study of optics (light), calculus, and physics.

More than any other scientist, Newton argued for (and proved) the idea of a mechanistic view of the world: You can see and prove how the world works through observation; if you can see these things with your own eyes, they must be so (**empiricism**). Up to this time, people believed what other people told them (**dogmatism**); this is how the Church was able to control people's lives for so long. Newton, following in the footsteps of Copernicus and Galileo, changed all that.

This subsequently led to the Enlightenment, a period of intense self-study that focused on ethics and logic. More than ever, scientists and philosophers questioned widely held beliefs in an attempt to discover why the world worked—from within. “I think, therefore I am” was one of the famous sayings of that or any day. It was uttered by **Rene Descartes**, a French scientist-philosopher whose dedication to logic and the rigid rules of observation were a blueprint for the thinkers who came after him.

One of the giants of the era was England’s **David Hume**. A pioneer of **empiricism** (believing something only when you’ve seen proof), Hume was also a prime believer in the value of skepticism; in other words, he was naturally suspicious of things that other people told him to be true and constantly set out to discover the truth for himself. These two related ideas influenced many thinkers after Hume, and his many writings continue to inspire philosophers today.

Perhaps the most famous philosopher of the Enlightenment was **Immanuel Kant** of Germany. He was both a philosopher and a scientist, and he took a definite scientific view of the world. He wrote the Age’s most renowned essay, “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” and he answered his famous question with the motto “Dare to Know.” For Kant, the human being was a rational being capable of very creative thought and intense self-evaluation. He encouraged all to examine themselves and the world around them. He believed that the source of morality lay not in nature, or in the grace of God - but in the soul, itself. He believed that man believed in God for practical, not religious or mystical, reasons.

Also prevalent during the Enlightenment was the notion of the “social contract.” Accordingly, the people agreed to submit to the government so long as it was wanted by the people, protected the people, and did not infringe upon their basic human rights. This idea was first heralded by France’s Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but was later adopted by England’s John Locke and America’s Thomas Jefferson. Locke was one of the most influential political writers of the seventeenth century who emphasized human rights and proposed that when governments violate those, rights people should rebel. Locke wrote the book “**Two Treatises of Government**” in 1690, which had significant influence on political thought in the American colonies and helped shaped the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence.

The word **Renaissance** literally means "rebirth", and signaled the rekindling of interest in ancient classical Greek and Roman civilizations. It marked the start of many ideas and innovations leading to our modern age. The Renaissance began in Italy with many of its ideas starting in Florence, controlled by the infamous Medici family. Education, especially for some of the merchants, required reading, writing, math, the study of law, and the writings of classical Greek and Roman writers.

Most famous are the Renaissance artists, first and foremost Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Other renowned artists include Titian, Donatello, and Rembrandt. All of these men pioneered a new method of painting and sculpture—that of portraying *real* events and *real* people as they *really* looked, not as the artists imagined them to be. One needs look no further than Michelangelo's David to illustrate this.

Literature was also a focus during the Renaissance. Humanists, such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Erasmus, and Sir Thomas More advanced the idea of being interested in life here on earth and the opportunities it can bring, rather than constantly focusing on heaven and its rewards. The works of Shakespeare, Dante, and Cervantes found their origins in these ideas, as well as the ones that drove the painters and sculptors. All of these works, of course, owe much of their existence to the invention of the printing press, which occurred during the Renaissance.

The Renaissance also changed music. No longer just a religious experience, music could be fun and composed for its own sake - to be enjoyed in fuller and more humanistic ways than in the Middle Ages. Musicians worked for themselves, unlike before when they worked for the churches. Thus, they could earn more money for their work, which increased their prestige.

Science also advanced considerably during the Renaissance, especially in the area of physics and astronomy. Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo led a Scientific Revolution in proving that the earth was round, an earth-shattering revelation to those who clung to medieval ideals of a geocentric, church-centered existence.

Until the early years of the twentieth century, **Russia** was ruled by a succession of Czars. They ruled as autocrats, and sometimes as despots. Society was essentially feudalistic and was structured in three levels. The Czar held the top level. The rich nobles who held government positions and owned vast tracts of land held the second level. Finally, those who lived in poverty as peasants or serfs were at the third level. There was discontent among the peasants. There were several unsuccessful attempts to revolt during the nineteenth century, but they were quickly suppressed. The revolutions of 1905 and 1917, however, were quite different.

The causes of the 1905 Revolution were:

- Discontent with the social structure
- Discontent with the living conditions of the peasants
- Discontent with working conditions, despite industrialization
- The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)

The war caused rapid inflation. As a result, peasants who had previously made “end’s meat” began to starve. This brewed further discontent. On the battle front, many Russian troops were killed because of poor leadership, lack of training, and inferior weaponry. But despite these setbacks, Czar Nicholas II refused to end the war. In January 1905, Port Arthur fell.

A trade union leader, Father Gapon, organized a protest to demand an end to the war, industrial reform, more civil liberties, and a constituent assembly. Over 150,000 peasants joined a demonstration outside the Czar’s Winter Palace. Before the demonstrators even spoke, the palace guard opened fire on the crowd, destroying any semblance of trust in the Czar. Illegal trade unions and political parties formed and organized strikes to gain power. The strikes eventually brought the Russian economy to a halt. This led Czar Nicholas II to sign the October Manifesto that created a constitutional monarchy, extended some civil rights, and gave the parliament limited legislative power. In a very short period of time, the Czar disbanded the parliament and violated the promised civil liberties. This violation contributed to foment of the 1917 Revolution.

The causes of the 1917 Revolution were:

- The violation of the October Manifesto
- Defeats on the battlefields during WWI, which caused discontent, loss of life, and a popular desire to withdraw from the war
- The Czar’s continued appointment of unqualified people to government posts, who handled the war and the economy incompetently
- The influence on the Czar by his wife Alexandra, who had been strongly influenced by Rasputin
- Further inflation and shortages of goods, as caused by WWI

The most significant differences between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions were, in 1917, political parties formed; they used propaganda; and they were supported by the military and some of the nobles.