

GILGAMESH: MAN'S FIRST STORY

By Bernarda Bryson

TEACHER'S GUIDE

6TH Grade Social Studies Unit: The Beginnings of Civilization (Mesopotamia and the Sumerians)

Understanding the Ancient View of the World

Have the students look at Bryson's drawing of *Gilgamesh's* world on page 8.

- Discuss why the ancient people would draw the world of Gilgamesh that particular way.
- Ask the students to draw the world as the Mesopotamians would see it.
- Discuss how we would see the world, if we didn't know what it looked like from space.

Geography of Region

Have each student create a map of ancient Mesopotamia, including the towns mentioned in *Gilgamesh*, i.e. Uruk, Ur, etc.

- Make a template of modern day Middle East that is now Iran and Iraq.
- Discuss how the Sumerians used the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to survive in the arid land.
- How are the rivers used today?

Structure of a Story

Have the students keep a journal as they read *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*.

- Have them explain how Gilgamesh and Enkidu's characters expand and How the plot develops over the course of the story.
- When the book is completed, discuss it as a class.

Mesopotamian Writing

The Legend of Gilgamesh is the oldest story in the world. The Sumerians used their own form of writing on clay tablets called *cuneiform script* to write the myth.

- Have the students discuss why the Sumerians developed cuneiform script.
- Have students research cuneiform writing and make their own clay tablets.
 - a. Roll out polymer clay (i.e. Sculpey) onto a piece of cardboard.
 - b. Use craft sticks to make the various shapes in the clay.
 - c. Bake the clay pieces in oven to harden and darken. Baking instructions are on the Sculpey package.

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Sumerians' Daily Life

After students read *Gilgamesh*

- Ask them to discuss and write about daily life in Mesopotamia.
- What was the standard dress of common people?
- What was the standard dress of the kings and queens (including jewelry)?
- What type of work did people do?
- What were the various social groups?
- How do they compare to the Middle East today?
- What has improved?
- What has stayed the same, and why?

Ask students to be on the lookout for things that we see and read, (i.e. pictures, artifacts, sculpture, other stories) that are derived from the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Relationship of Gilgamesh story to those from other ancient civilizations

- Discuss with the students the similarities and differences between Utnapishtim's flood and that of Noah's.
- Discuss how there are recurring themes in the various cultures that are studied during the sixth grade.
- What is the significance of the walls in *Gilgamesh*?
- Why were walls so important in ancient cultures?
- Explain how many of the cultures studied have walls as a major part of their History.

Mythology in Ancient Mesopotamia

Using *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*, ask students to identify all the gods mentioned in the book.

- What purpose did the gods serve in the story?
- What was their relationship to humans?
- Discuss with the students the importance of a myth.
- Why would this myth survive?
- What did this myth pass on to its audiences that were valuable?

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The Forces of Good and Evil and Friendship

Have students write about the issues of temptation.

- What were the forces of good and evil for Gilgamesh, Enkidu, Ishtar, and Humbaba?
- What do they represent in all of us?
- How were they resolved?

Have the students discuss the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

- Have them write about how the friendship changed throughout the book and why that is significant.
- Ask students to discuss the qualities that make a good friend.
- Continue this discussion throughout the reading of *Gilgamesh*.

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