

# Ancient India

Year 6 Term 4 Part 1  
Ancient India & China



# KWL Chart

- You will be given 2 pieces of paper to fill in.
- First will be K – What do you know? – Write two points on the paper one thing that you know about India and one thing about China.
- Second will be W – What do you want to find out?

# Ancient India and China

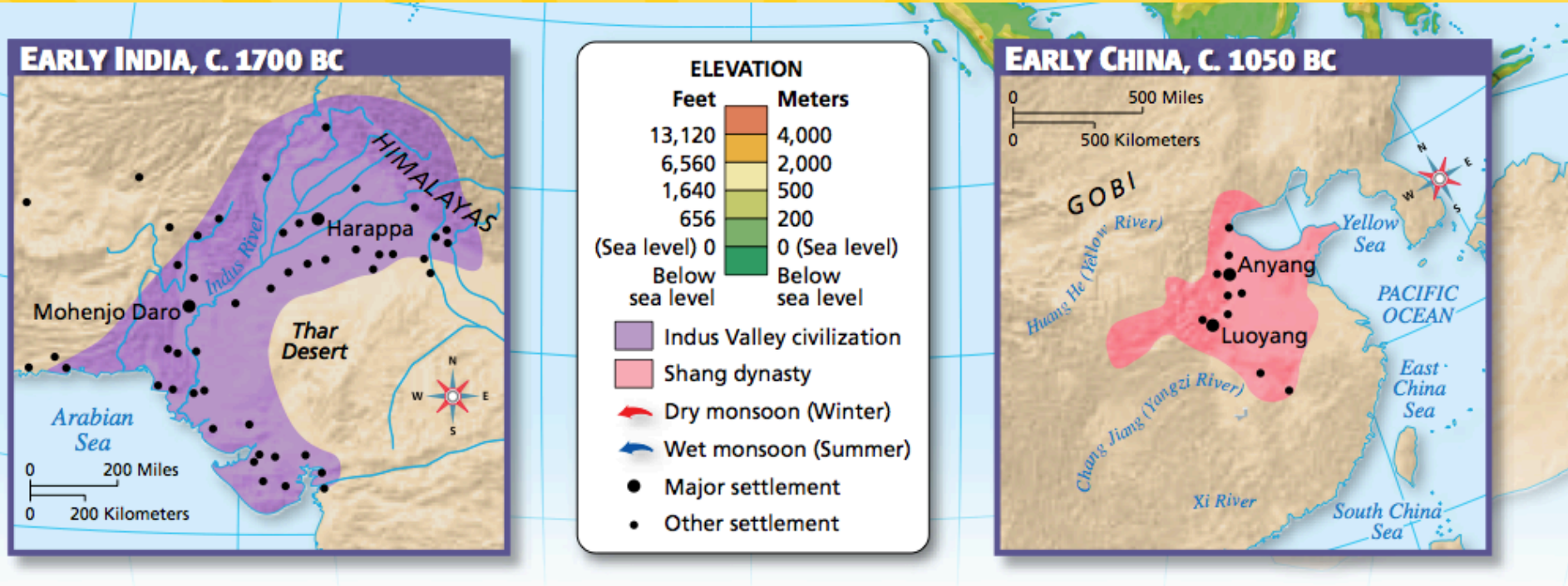
- Like Mesopotamia and Egypt, India and China were each home to an early river valley civilization.
- The people of India and China developed their own governments, languages, customs, and social structures as well as religions and philosophies that still shape life in Asia.



# Ancient India and China



# Ancient India and China





# Ancient India and China

- Like the valleys of Tigris, Euphrates and Nile rivers, the valleys of the Indus and the Huang He in eastern Asia supported the growth of complex civilization.
- These civilizations shared some characteristics that made the growth of civilizations possible, but their locations and other geographic features also led to unique developments.

# Early India



# Early India

- Main Idea of this section:
  - Early civilization arose in the Indus river Valley, flourished, and then mysteriously died out. Later India's Vedic civilization developed a culture based on old and new beliefs.
- Focus questions for this part of the unit:
  1. How did India's geography affect the development of civilization there?
  2. What were the defining features of the Indus Valley Civilization?
  3. What do we know about life in India's Vedic period?



# Early India

- Key terms:
  - subcontinent
  - monsoons
  - citadel
  - Vedas
  - rajas
  - *varnas*
  - Castes



# India's Geography

- The Indus River, home of one of the ancient world's great river valley civilizations, flows across the northwest edge of the Indian subcontinent.
- A **subcontinent** is a large landmass that is part of a continent. As its name implies, most of the Indian subcontinent is occupied by the country of India.

# India's Geography

- The Indian subcontinent includes three major geographic zones.
- In the far north are the Himalaya and Hindu Kush mountain systems, which separate India from the rest of Asia.
- In the south is the Deccan Plateau, a high plateau that receives less rain than other parts of the subcontinent.
- Between the mountains and the plateau are the Northern Plains, where society first developed in India.
- Flood deposits from three rivers—the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra—enrich the soil of the plains, making it very fertile.



# India's Geography

- Heavy rains also add to the fertility of the Northern Plains. Much of this rain is brought to India by seasonal winds called **monsoons**.
- During the summer months, monsoon winds from the southwest bring warm air and heavy rains from the Indian Ocean.
- Most of India's annual rainfall occurs at this time.
- In the winter, northeast monsoons blow cool, dry air from Central Asia, resulting in drier months.

# India's Geography

- The people of India's first civilizations depended upon the monsoons to bring the water that their crops needed.
- Monsoon rains flooded rivers, which then deposited fertile silt in which farmers could grow their crops.
- But with the abundance of rainfall came the threat of devastation.

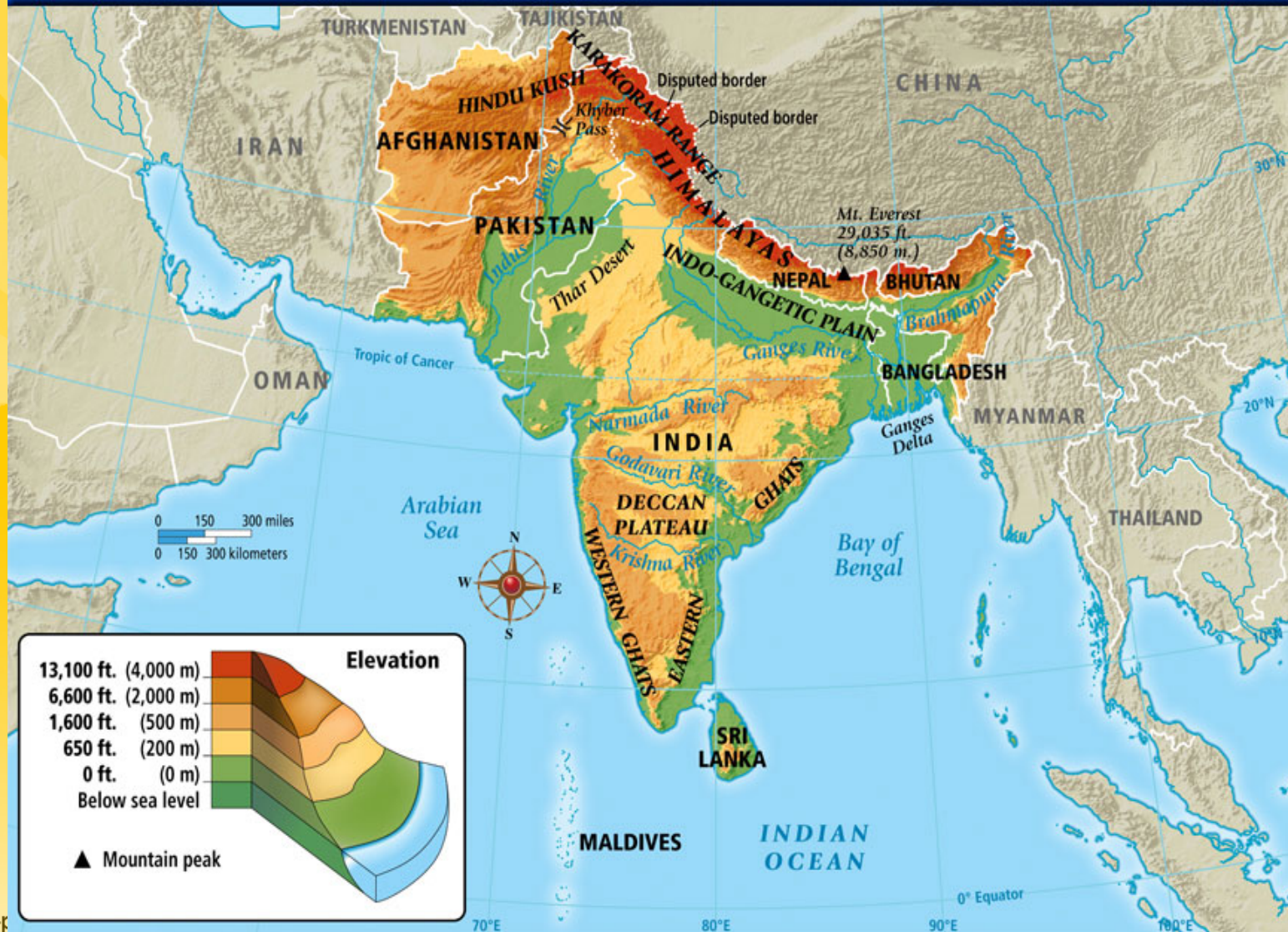
# India's Geography

- If the monsoon rains were too heavy, crops, homes, and lives could be lost.
- In contrast, if the rains came too late or did not last long enough, people could not grow crops and famine became a danger.



# India's Geography

## Physical Geography of South Asia



# Indus Valley Civilization

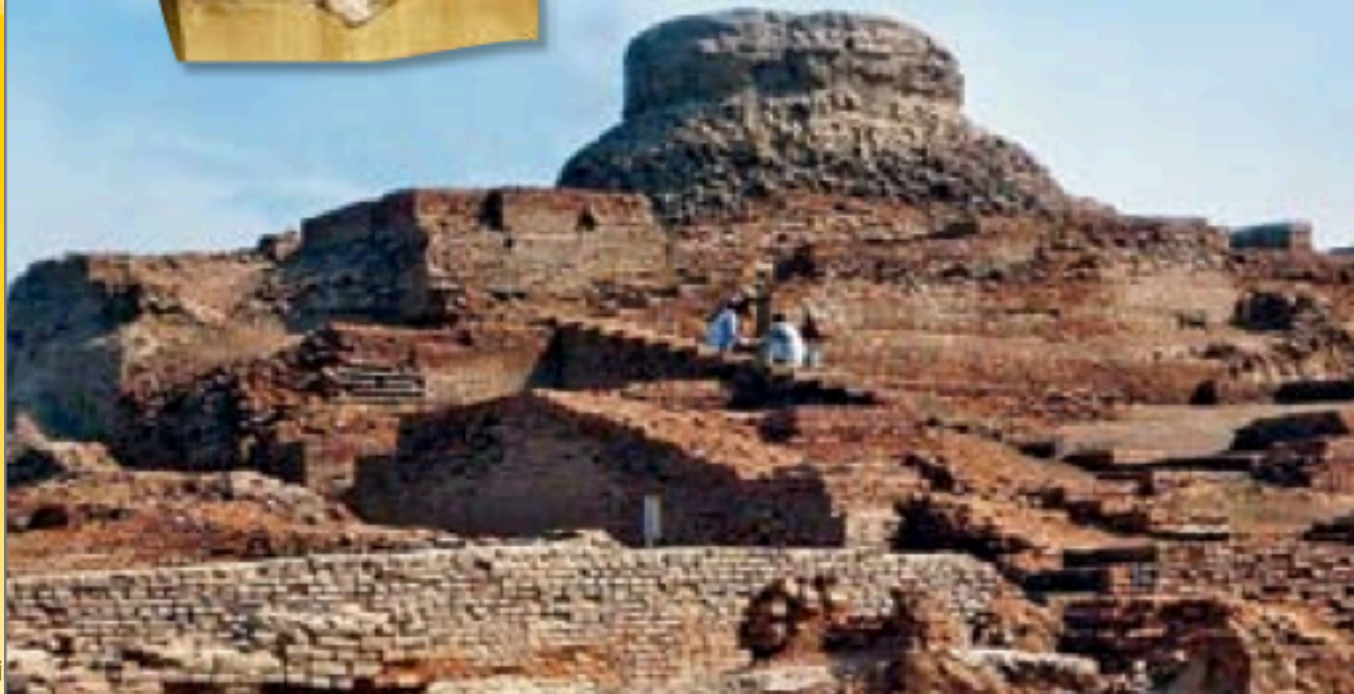
- People have lived in the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years.
- At first, people lived as hunter-gatherers, but slowly people began to settle down in farming communities.
- In time, these communities gave rise to India's first civilization, which developed in the valley of the Indus River.
- Historians generally date the beginnings of this civilization to about 2500 BC, when people there first developed a system of writing.





## Indus Valley Discoveries

The ruins of Mohenjo Daro were among the first remains archaeologists uncovered of the Indus Valley civilization. Within the ruins, they found hundreds of artifacts, including this statue, that can help us learn more about life in the ancient city.





# Indus Valley Civilization – Cities and Settlements

- The first ruins of the Indus Valley civilization found by archaeologists were the remains of two large cities.
- Harappa, named after a nearby modern city, and Mohenjo Daro, which means “mound of the dead,” were both discovered in the 1920s.
- In fact, the civilization is sometimes called Harappan after the first ruins found.
- Since then, several large cities have been uncovered, as have hundreds of smaller towns and villages.

# Indus Valley Civilization – Cities and Settlements

- Much of what we know about Indus society has come from studying their remains.
- Indus settlements were well planned and carefully laid out.
- Streets ran in a grid pattern, north-south and east-west, with major avenues that were twice as wide as minor streets.

# Indus Valley Civilization – Cities and Settlements

- People drew water from community wells or smaller wells dug in the courtyards of their homes, and public drainage systems carried away waste-water.
- In the largest cities, a walled, elevated **citadel**, or fortress, enclosed buildings such as granaries, warehouses, and meeting halls.
- Homes, workshops, and shrines were built out- side the citadel.
- Such planning and uniformity among cities suggests that a central authority held power over the civilization.



# Indus Valley Civilization – Economy

- Historians believe the economy of the Indus civilization focused on agriculture and trade.
- Most people probably farmed and herded livestock. In cities, however, many people specialized in crafts such as pottery, metalwork, and jewelry.
- Example of all these crafts have been found in Harappan cities.

# Indus Valley Civilization – Economy

- The Indus traded the goods they produced not only with people of nearby communities but with distant civilizations as well.
- Traders from the Indus Valley brought goods to locations as distant as Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and Mesopotamia.

# Indus Valley Civilization – Society

- Unfortunately, archaeologists and historians have not been able to learn many details about Indus society.
- Although the people of the Indus Valley had a writing system, historians are not yet able to read it.
- The inability to read what people wrote makes it difficult to learn about society and daily life.



# Indus Valley Civilization – Society

- Based on material evidence, some scholars believe that Indus civilization was a single society rather than a collection of independent city-states.
- As you have already read, cities and towns throughout the Indus Valley were remarkably similar.
- In addition, the people of the Indus Valley apparently shared common tool designs and a standard set of weights and measures.
- These factors all suggest a single authority in control, though it is not yet possible to know for sure.

# Indus Valley Civilization – Decline

- The Indus Valley civilization thrived from about 2500 BC to 2000 BC.
- After that time, the civilization began to decline.
- For example, the city of Mohenjo Daro was abandoned.
- No one knows what led to the decline of the Indus civilization, or even if there was a single cause.
- Evidence from Mohenjo Daro suggests that the city suffered repeated flooding, which may indicate environmental reasons.

# Indus Valley Civilization – Decline

- Ancient records mention a river, the Sarasvati, that once flowed through the Indus Valley but later disappeared.
- The disappearance of that river could have had devastating effects on agriculture and sped the decline.
- Some historians also argue that invasion and disease helped end the civilization, though others argue that the available evidence does not support either conclusion.
- In truth, we may never know just why the Indus civilization disappeared.



# The Vedic Period



# Background

- Sometime after 2000BC, a new people took control of India.
- Historians often refer to this group as the Aryans, from a Sanskrit word meaning “noble.”
- Eventually, the Aryans ruled over most of India, except for the far south.
- Historians are not sure exactly when the Aryans arrived in India or where they came from originally.

# Background

- Some historians assume they moved from the area between the Caspian and Black seas, based on perceived linguistic ties to Indo-European languages spoken in that area.
- Others disagree, arguing that the Aryans developed in northern India itself and did not move into the area.
- Little archaeological evidence remains to document the early Aryan period in India.



# Background

- Most of what we know comes from sacred writings call the **Vedas** (vay-duhs), which include many details about Aryan history and society.
- As a result, this period in Indian history is often called the Vedic period.

# Vedic Society

- According to the Vedas, people settled in villages much smaller than the cities of the Indus Valley.
- Later, groups of villages banded together under regional leaders known as **rajās** (rah-juhz).
- Vedas, the raja was primarily a war leader who was responsible for protecting the people.
- In return for this protection, he received payments of food or money.

# Vedic Social Structure

- According to the oldest of the Vedas, the Rigveda, Vedic society was divided into four social classes called **varnas**.
- Each varna played a particular role in society, as described in the chart on the next slide.



# Vedic Social Structure

## The Varnas

During the Vedic period, Indian society was divided into four varnas, or classes. Members of each varna played specific roles in society.

Brahmins

Were the highest ranking varna, and the smallest numerically. Brahmins were Vedic Society's priests and teachers.

Kshatriyas (ksh-tree-uhs)

Were warriors and rulers

Vaisyas (vysh-yuhs)

Were the common people of Vedic society – traders, farmers, herders, and so on.

Sudras

Were servants who waited upon members of the other varnas.

# Vedic Social Structure

- These roles are alluded to in a passage of the Rigveda that describes the creation of humans.
- According to this passage, people of the four varnas were created from the body of a single being.
- History Voices
  - “The Brahmin was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya (Kshatriya) made. His thighs became the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was produced” - Rigveda, 10.90

# Vedic Social Structure

- The part of the body from which each varna was created was tied to its duties.
- For example, brahmins came from the mouth, the source of speech and wisdom, and thus were priests.
- Over the centuries, the four varnas of the Vedic period were divided into hundreds of smaller divisions called **castes**.
- Membership in a caste determined what jobs one could hold and whom one could marry.



# Vedic Social Structure

- A social hierarchy developed in which some castes had more privileges than others, though the order of castes could and did change frequently.
- Not everyone in society belonged to a caste, though.
- A group commonly referred to as the untouchables had none of the protections of caste law and could perform only jobs that other castes did not, such as handling dead animals.

# Vedic Religion

- Because the vedas consist mostly of hymns in praise, we know a great deal about the religion of the Vedic Period.
- For example we know that people prayed to many aspects of a single eternal spirit, one such aspect being Indra, who ruled over heaven.
- The vedas described how people worshipped the gods through fire sacrifices and the chanting of sacred hymns.

# Vedic Religion

- Over time, the rituals surrounding Vedic religion grew more complex.
- Priests claimed that order in the universe could only be maintained through the religious rituals that they performed.
- As a result, the Brahmin varna gained more influence in society.