Social Studies Chapter 4: The Rise of Sumerian City-States

4.1 Introduction (page 33)

* Early people who lived in the Fertile Crescent began farming and living in small villages. Small Neolithic villages grew into large, **complex** cities.
* These villages were located in Mesopotamia, a land of hills and plains. Mesopotamia is a Greek word that means the “land between the rivers”. The two main rivers of the Fertile Crescent are the Tigris River and the Euphrates River.
* The earliest cities were like small countries, with their own ruler and farmland that supplied food. Walls and moats, or ditches filled with water, surrounded cities. These kept out enemies.

4.2 Mesopotamia: A Difficult Environment (page 34)

* It was not easy to live in Mesopotamia. The northern part was hilly and rainy. The southern part had flat land. The sun beat down on the plains between the Tigris River and the Euphrates River. There was little rain and since the Mesopotamians were farmers, their farms needed water.
* On the plains, building materials were difficult to find. There were plenty of reeds (weeds that grow near the river), but few trees and stones.
* Mesopotamia faced four major problems as they tried to survive:

1. Food shortages in the hills
2. An uncontrolled water supply on the plains
3. Difficulties in building and maintaining systems that provide water across village boundaries
4. Attacks by neighboring communities

4.3 Foot Shortages in the Hills (page 35)

* One of the areas that had good conditions for growing crops was he rolling foothills of the Zagros Mountains in northern Mesopotamia.
* Mild weather and plentiful hills made the foothills a good place to farm. The wooded hills gave timber (wood) for building shelters. There were plenty of stones in the hills for toolmaking. These good conditions allowed the number of people in Mesopotamia to grow.
* By 5,000 B.C.E., farmers in the Zagros foothills did not have enough land to grow food for the large population. Villages began to suffer from food shortages.
* Below the foothills, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers ran through the plains. The plains covered a large area of land and few people lived there. The land was hard and dry and did not have trees and stones for making shelter and tools.
* In the spring, both rivers flooded, which brought water to the land. People left the foothills and moved onto the plains. This region became known as Sumer and its people were called Sumerians.

4.4 An Uncontrolled Water Supply in the River Valley (page 36)

* Farmers who moved to Sumer faced many challenges, such as the uncontrolled water supply.
* During spring, rain, melted snow from the mountains, and water from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers flooded across the plains. If this happened when farmers planted new crops, they were washed away.
* During the rest of the year, the ground was hot and dry. Strong winds blew thick layers of dust across the ground.
* Farmers struggled to raise crops because they either had too little or too much water. They needed a way to control the water so they would have a reliable water supply all year round.
* Sumerian farmers began to create irrigation systems, or a way of supplying land with water, to their fields. When the land was dry, the farmers poked holes in the levees. The water flood through the holes and into the fields.
* Sumerians also learned other ways of controlling water. They dug canals to shape the paths the water took and constructed dams along the river to block the water and force it to collect in pools, or reservoirs, they had built and would store the water for later.

4.5 Building and Maintaining a Complex Irrigation System (page 37)

* Irrigation systems provided enough water for Sumerian farmers to grow plenty of food, but new problems arose:
* How to maintain the irrigation system across village boundaries?
* The irrigation system passed through a number of villages as it carried water from the river to the fields. The system needed to be repaired all the time. Canals became clogged with silk, so farmers had to clean them regularly. One clogged canal could clog the entire system.
* Villages were connected for miles by canals so farmers could no longer live apart. Farmers had to work together.
* Villages came to depend on one another to build and maintain the complex irrigation system. People who lived in the different villages worked together to clear silt from the canals to keep them open.
* Workers scooped water from one reservoir into another to make the water levels balanced.
* As the Sumerians worked together, they began to create larger communities. Villages grew into towns and some towns became cities with populations as large as several thousand people.

4.6 Attacks by Neighboring Communities (page 38)

* As Sumerian cities grew, they fought over the right to use more water. Sometimes people in cities located upriver (closer to where the river begins) built new canals or blocked other cities’ canals. These kept water from reaching the cities that were downriver (farther from where the river begins). Disputes over water became so intense that it led to bloodshed.
* The Sumerians looked for ways to protect their cities from neighboring communities. There were no natural barriers- mountain ranges or rivers to keep out enemies.
* The Sumerians began to build strong walls out of mud bricks that were baked in the sun until hard.
* The Sumerians also dug moats outside city walls to prevent enemies from coming into their cities. Farmers lived outside cities and during an attack they fled the fields for safety inside the city walls.
* Historians called the walled cities of Sumer city-states. By 3000 B.C.E., most Sumerians lived in city-states.

4.7 From Small Farming Villages to Large City-States (page 38-39)

* Beginning around 3500 B.C.E., the Sumerians progressed from living in small farming villages to building large, walled cities.
* Food shortages had forced settlers in Mesopotamia to move from the foothills down to the river valley. There, farmers faced the problem of having too little or too much water.
* To control the water supply, Sumerians built a complex irrigation system. The system crossed village boundaries, so the Sumerians had to work together with one another, which led to living in larger communities.
* Often city-states fought with one another. To defend themselves, the Sumerians built walls and dug moats around their cities.