

Is Geography Destiny?

Overview The early civilizations—Nile River Valley, Minoan, Indus, and the Yellow River Valley—were great centers of complex and urban cultures. We don't typically think of them as part of a global trade network. But emerging evidence questions whether long-distance trade between continents happened centuries earlier than we commonly believe.

For example, consider that lapis lazuli, a mineral excavated in present-day Afghanistan, found its way into Egyptian tombs. A common root language in the region (indeed, the root language for English) suggests pre-historical connections among people. Architecture, irrigation systems, and other complex infrastructural patterns are found throughout Eurasia, despite long distances between them.

Students are challenged to analyze whether evidence of continental trade and connections in pre-history. To do so, students must think like an archaeologist and historian, examine evidence, and draw conclusions whether the great Eurasian crossroads regions witnessed global trade as early as the third millennium BCE.

Students create a museum exhibition presenting and defending their thesis on early civilization and globalization. Along the way, students examine primary and secondary source evidence from the region, and start to detect patterns that repeat throughout history, and gain a deeper understanding of why this region has been a focal point in world history—and contemporary international relations.

Objectives Students should arrive at an enduring understanding that archaeological evidence tells us limited resources shaped people's lifestyles and identities. It sometimes brought people together, other times, it led to conflict. Some geopolitical patterns endure over time—that is, geography is, in part, destiny.

Student should know and be able to:

- consider evidence, arguments and perspectives
- pose hypotheses about early civilizations and globalization
- demonstrate learning by creating a (digital or

paper) museum exhibition that explores the hypothesis statement and is supported by evidence

- discuss the uncertainty of questions left unanswered

Prerequisite Educators and students should understand that the Hindu Kush area—what is today Afghanistan—developed just as many other civilizations did: humans first lived in caves and relied on hunting and gathering for nourishment. Soon, with the discovery of new ideas and technologies, including farming, metallurgy, animal husbandry, and architecture, some humans moved into small, settled communities. Other groups established organized but nomadic ways of living.

With time, the production of goods and services became specialized, signaling the start of bartering, selling, and economic systems. Villages supplied towns, and towns supplied cities, and a regional trade network developed. However, the mighty Hindu Kush mountain range created harsh conditions that made travel difficult. People living in the mountainous areas tended to stay in localized tribes, often with distinct cultures and sometimes with distinct language dialects. But at the same time, the mountain passes opened up the area to a variety of peoples, goods, and ideas passing through from far-flung regions. As the local tribes developed, isolated and yet connected to the larger world, they began to exert control over these trade networks.

This created a tradition of cultural intermingling and coexistence that persists to this day. Afghanistan's geography and early history, in many ways, foreshadowed several millennia of opportunities and challenges at the crossroads of cultures.

Explore the [Age of Settlement](#).

Time Required On average, four hours of teaching and learning time.

Materials Internet access and projector for class presentation
Student Internet access for research
Printer access and tape or access to a Flickr, Picasso, or similar photo-sharing account.

Assessment Quality of discussions
Project rubric
Peer critique of museum exhibitions (in the form of comment cards)

Procedure **Class period one:**

Whole-class introduction on modern perspectives on geography

Using Google Earth or Google Maps, zoom into the Hindu Kush region and ask students to describe what they see. Probe students to translate what simple visual clues tell us about how people live. Write human geographical features on the board. Here are some possible conclusions:

- Mountainous region probably means tough terrain, difficult for farming.
- Snow pack serves as a water source for the region.
- Mountain regions are typically less populated.
- Isolation means that different cultures and languages can develop in pockets.
- Mountains divide the Eurasian continent, but its passes offer a way for people to connect.
- Grasslands are good for herding, compels a nomadic way of life.
- There is evidence of farming, but the geography does not support a lot of it.

Mention that this is the region that will see great conquerors and empires, including the Scythians, Greeks, Indians, Persians, Mongols, Brits, Soviets, and Americans. What is it about the region that invited interest from such an array of peoples?

Understand Primary vs. Secondary Resources

Students will consider **evidence** of subsistence living by examining primary and secondary resources.

If needed, review what primary and secondary sources are: Primary sources are typically physical evidence from a time and place that is being studied. Secondary sources offers interpretations or analysis of the time and place that is being studied. Secondary sources may include primary source quotes, images, and other evidence.

For practice, call out the source materials below and see if students can identify the correct source type and defend their answers:

Photograph = primary
Newspaper article = secondary

Encyclopedia entry = secondary
Biography = primary
Interview = primary
First-hand account of an event = primary
Archaeological evidence = primary
Paintings = can be either, depending on context
Textbook = secondary source
Video = can be either, depending on context

Break students into small groups. Each group should watch one or two videos and make a sample (not exhaustive) list of primary and secondary sources.

For instance:

Primary sources:
Found objects, archaeological ruins
Secondary sources:
Herodotus' history, expert interviews

Watch:

[Nomadic and Sedentary](#)
[Lost Civilization of Oxus River](#)
[Invaders on Horseback](#)
[Nomads Bearing Gold](#)

Class period two:

What historical evidence offers

Debate: Are primary sources better, or are secondary sources?
Students should arrive at the conclusion that both are valuable for different reasons.

Ask students to watch the videos again.

Watch:

[Nomadic and Sedentary](#)
[Lost Civilization of Oxus River](#)
[Invaders on Horseback](#)
[Nomads Bearing Gold](#)

This time, chart what are known facts, and what is hypothesized. Do not give students a pre-constructed chart. Have them design their own visual construct.

Discuss: does everything fall neatly into two categories, or is there a continuum? Are there things that do not fit? Why or why not? What do we do with this?

Class period three:

A short task and discussion focused on the perspectives personal conclusions offer

Consider *evidence* of cosmopolitan urban centers and nomadic life. Specialization, diversified economy.

Watch:

[Traces of Early Humans](#)

[Qanat](#)

[The King of Kings](#)

Ask students to consider: Why did settlements develop or what are advantages to living as an organized group? Students should arrive at the conclusion that organized living offers specialization that's good for the economy and defense.

What questions remain? As an exercise to get students to think quickly about the most important thing to convey, have students write their thesis in 140 or fewer characters (tech integration: post it to a classroom twitter feed). What questions do they have, and can they state it in 50 or fewer characters? Do perspectives differ? Why? Discuss.

What lack of historical evidence means

Consider *evidence* of early long-distance trade and intermingling.

Watch:

[A Stone that Linked Continents](#)

[Lost Civilization of Oxus River](#)

[Invaders on Horseback](#)

[The First Gated Communities](#)

[Zoroastrianism](#)

[Qanat](#)

[The King of Kings](#)

Discuss: Do we, as modern humans, understand early history completely? What don't we know? Can the unknown change our understanding of humanity and history all together?

Class period four:

Whole-class discussion (and intro to optional capstone project) on drawing conclusions

Summarize that what we know from this period is sketchy. The evidence is fragmentary and has a lot of anomalies. It is, however, one of the oldest known settlements in the world.

This is largely an isolated region, but one with urban centers that were highly cosmopolitan. Nomadic pastoralists existed along side settled peoples, but there is no evidence that settled life overtook nomadic life. The co-existence points to a diversified economy, with people depending on others with specialized skills, to drive a robust local economy.

There is evidence that suggests continental trade goes further back in history than we commonly believe. By this time, there is already a rather mature melding of culture that comes from longer-term trade and contact.

Discuss:

- Do you agree with these statements? Why or why not? What other evidence do you need?
- Consider that these statements are sound; which ones might still hold true for the region today? (Only if learners have studied other units or have had other background on Afghanistan.)

Capstone project Challenge students to curate a paper or online exhibition based on the theme, fact, or question that most interested them.

See the attached student assignment sheet for instructions.

Paper

For paper exhibitions, students will need to use one page to design a title and offer explanatory text, followed by 5-10 pages with art images and captions.

Use or adapt the attached comment card to get students' reactions to the exhibition.

Online

If you opt for an online exhibition, ask students to use Flickr, Picassa, or similar photo-sharing websites. Consider creating an account for your class. Share the log-in so students can work in the same environment.

Students should create an album or set (terminology will vary depending on the service). The album or set title will be the title of his or her exhibition. The explanatory text will appear

on the album or set page. Students then upload 5-10 images and write captions.

Important: mark student work as “private” so the projects are not published for everyone on the Internet to see. Students who choose to pursue reprint permissions may publish their work online.

Use IdeaScale.com or similar Web 2.0 tool to solicit feedback on the student exhibitions. Students may vote on which comments were most useful.

Assignment Curate an Exhibition

Overview What interested you most about this unit? Use that theme (or fact or question) to design a museum exhibition. Your goal is to engage and educate viewers.

Procedure Create a paper or online exhibition based on your theme.

After you have a thesis, write an interesting title for your exhibition, and offer one paragraph of explanatory text.

Select 5-10 images that help viewers understand your hypothesis. Search for images online through museum collections, or by using screen-grab techniques during the video.

For each image in your exhibition, write a two- to three-sentence description that explains what the object is, and how it relates to the exhibition's theme.

All museum exhibitions ask viewers for their comments. This is often done through comment cards. Take into consideration the questions on the card as you design and execute your exhibition. The success of your exhibition will be determined in part by your viewers' reactions.

Checklist

You will need:

- ☐ Title
- ☐ One-paragraph of explanatory text
- ☐ Five to ten images with captions
- ☐ Comment card

Consider Consider how museum exhibitions are curated in the real world. Search online for various art or social science exhibitions to see models and get ideas.

Comment Card

Exhibition title: _____

Thank you for visiting our museum today. In order to help us better serve you in the future, please take a minute to tell us about your visit today.

What did you like most about today's exhibition?

What didn't you understand, or what could we have done better?

Other comments?