

History
UNFOLDING

ANCIENT INDIA



MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

India's Legacy

This MindSparks set is the first of two covering the story of India from ancient times through the Mughal empire that lasted until just before the age of British imperial control. The second set is titled India: the Mauryas to the Mughal Empire.

India's long, complex history cannot be covered in any depth even in two of our sets. All we can hope to do is provide the visual support materials needed to focus on some key cultural and political themes in that rich and enormous historical record. In this set, we look at the rise of one of the world's earliest civilizations in the Indus River valley, on the edge of the Indian subcontinent. We consider how India's geography has affected the way its history has unfolded. And then we focus on the unique spiritual and religious cultural heritage of India. In many ways, it is this heritage, rather than any political history or set of institutions, that has been the unifying factor in Indian society and its development.

These themes are explored in the set's 12 visual displays. Each lesson uses three of these visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

India: The Natural Setting

The vast mountain ranges in the north, the Indus and Ganges river systems, and the monsoon patterns and the isolated southern part of the subcontinent—these are the focus of the illustrations in this lesson.

The Indus River Civilization

A look at what was one of the four great early river-valley civilizations and perhaps the most mysterious and least understood of them.

Aryans and the Vedic Age

The Aryans were a nomadic, warlike people who brought their Vedic deities to India. These were nature gods, fierce and demanding. In time, perhaps under influences in India itself, they evolved. And the Vedas that guided worship of these gods also formed the foundation of the Hinduism still practiced in India today.

Hinduism and Early Indian Society

Our second set on India elaborates on what is depicted here. In this lesson, the basic ideas about the Hindu deities are summarized, along with a look at the caste system based upon those ideas.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will appreciate India's rich and complex natural environment.
 2. Students will better understand the key role the environment has played in shaping India's past.
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India: The Natural Setting

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustrations 1A & 1B**

The Indian subcontinent is roughly the size of Europe. It is made up of several regions based on climate and terrain. The most striking feature is found along India's northern edge—the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world. The natural barrier formed by the Himalayas helped isolate India from the rest of the world. Illustration 1A is of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, located north of India on the border between Nepal and Tibet. The mountains do not close off the northwest corner of the subcontinent. There, desert shades into what is now Pakistan and the flatter fertile area along the Indus River. Illustration 1B is a photo of this fertile area. It was here that India's oldest civilization flourished some 4000 years ago.

Illustration 2

The Indus River played a very important role in the earliest Indian civilization. But the most famous river in India is the Ganges. This 1835 drawing depicts trading boats on a distributory branch of the Ganges River where it filters through a huge delta into the Bay of Bengal. The Ganges arises in the Himalayas and drains the southern slopes of that massive mountain range. From there it carries rich soil to the plains south of the Himalayas. This rich soil, renewed each year by river flooding and the heavy monsoon rains in the summer, make these plains in the north among the most abundant agricultural areas in the world. While the monsoons are critical to ensuring a successful harvest, an excessive monsoon can spell disaster in the form of flooding.

Illustration 3

Southern India is a large triangular peninsula with a mountain range along the western coast, a flat eastern coast, and a large tableland plateau in the center of the subcontinent, called the Deccan Plateau. The Deccan is rocky but does contain areas of fertile soil. Parts of southern India are lush and tropical, as well as mountainous, as this 1938 tourism poster for the southern Indian state of Travancore suggests. In the past, the region was effectively cut off from the north by the Vindhya, a low but heavily forested mountain range in central India. Because of this, some of India's oldest cultures and traditions survived here more than in the north.

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



The Granger Collection, New York

1B



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. India is a land of tremendous geographical variety, and geography has played a big part in the way India has developed. Illustration 1A shows the most famous of the huge mountains that run along much of India's northern border. What mountains are those?
2. Throughout its early history, the Himalayas helped protect India from outside invaders. How does this image especially make that dramatically clear?
3. Further west, desert and a flatter fertile area lie along a major river system. Illustration 1B is a photo taken in that area. Can you name the important river system found there? How does this photo help to show why such river systems were so important in the rise of the earliest civilizations?
4. Actually, the Indus River does not flow through present-day India. In what nation is the Indus River now located? Why is this area no longer considered part of India?

Follow-up Activities

1. The Himalayas are the highest mountain range in the world and form a large part of India's northern border. Actually, more of the Himalayas lie in the nation of Nepal. Learn more about the Himalayas and the people who live in the region. Create your own map of the Himalayas showing how much of it lies in India and how much in Nepal. Explain to the class what life is like in India and Nepal in and around these mountains.
2. **Small-group activity:** Pretend your group will lead the rest of the class on a ten-day tour of northern India, from present-day Pakistan to the Ganges River delta. The aim is to teach the class about the geographical factors that have affected the history of that region. Choose ten places to visit, one for each day. Try to find pictures of your ten "tour stops." Create a bulletin-board display that helps show the class what they will be seeing and why. Also, create a short tour guide the students can have with them on the "trip."

Illustration 2



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Discussing the Illustration

1. The Indus River was very important to the earliest Indian civilization. But as important as it was, it is not the most famous river in India. That river begins in the Himalayas and flows down the southern slopes of that mountain range into India. What river is this?
2. This drawing shows some boats in the 1830s on a branch of the Ganges River where it filters through a delta into the seas. Where is the Ganges River delta located and into what body of water does it empty? How does this illustration help to show the importance of the Ganges River system to India?
3. Most Indians consider the Ganges River to be sacred. Why do they think they might have come to view it as sacred?
4. India has a good climate for growing crops in many areas. But perhaps the most important climatic forces influencing farmers in India are the monsoons. What are monsoons, and why do they have such big impact on life in India?

Follow-up Activities

1. Weather plays a vital role in Indian affairs. This is especially the case with the monsoons, or seasonal winds. India's economy does well when the monsoon season is normal, and it does poorly when it is not. As the above photo shows, an excessive monsoon season can cause massive flooding. Learn more about India's climate, especially the monsoons. Create a chart explaining the climatic patterns in India including the monsoon and its effects on various parts of India. Explain your chart to the class.
2. New Delhi is India's capital city. It lies in the state of Delhi, on the Yamuna River. The state of Delhi is home to many cities of key importance in Indian history. Learn more about the state of Delhi to find out why it has such crucial importance in Indian history. Create a map of Delhi to help explain its geographic significance. Use your map and what you learn in a brief talk to the class. Explain why Delhi's geography and location made it a center of Indian civilization.

Lesson 1 — India: The Natural Setting

Illustration 3



The Granger Collection, New York

Discussing the Illustration

1. This is a 1938 tourist poster for Travancore, which is mainly in what is now Kerala along the southwestern shore of India. What can you tell about the geography and climate of this region from the poster alone?
2. Southern India is often said to begin with a plateau region about halfway down the Indian subcontinent. The common name for this region is a Sanskrit word meaning “south.” Do you know what it is?
3. The Deccan Plateau was often the target of conquerors of India who were able to seize control of Ganges River plains. The Deccan proved much harder for them to hold. Why do you suppose that was?
4. Historians say many of India’s older traditions and beliefs survived more in southern India than in the north. Why do you suppose that was so?
5. What else about the geographical features of southern India might explain why it was able to stay more isolated from outside influence than other regions of India?

Follow-up Activities

1. Design an Internet resource guide to southern India and its major cities. Spend some time looking for the most informative Web sites dealing with this region and its history. Then pick the five best and write brief summaries of these sites, including your comments on what you like about them. Also include a picture of each site’s home page. Finally, hand out copies of your Internet guide to the class and give a brief presentation on it.
2. Learn more about the geography of the Deccan Plateau. Specifically, find out about the fortress complex of Golkanda. It was once the capital of the Bahmani kingdom (1364–1512) and today lies in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Then it was the capital of a Muslim sultanate, before being captured by a ruler named Aurangzeb. Write a brief essay on the centuries when Golkanda was at the height of its importance. Explain in particular how geography helps explain the history of this city and fortress.

OBJECTIVE

1. Students will better understand the nature and accomplishments of the Indus River civilization, the earliest complex society to emerge on the Indian subcontinent.

The Indus River Civilization

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustrations 1A & 1B**

The world's first great civilizations appeared along the banks of major rivers. The map here shows four great river valley civilizations, including ancient India's Indus River civilization, which flourished from around 2500 BCE to 1700 BCE. Major cities of this civilization have been found by archaeologists at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Actually, Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and the Indus River are not located in the present-day nation of India; rather, they are located in Pakistan. Pakistan was carved out of the Indian subcontinent and given statehood when British colonial rule there ended in 1947. The ruins of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro are an important source of information about the Indus River civilization. Illustration 1B shows ruins at Harappa.

Illustrations 2A & 2B

Here are two more scenes of the ruins of Harappa. Illustration 2A shows what was long thought to have been a granary. Recent research has cast doubt on this, and now most experts simply call it a great hall. It had several rooms and a wooden roof. Illustration 2B is a covered drain, which collected household wastes and drained the streets. Both of these images suggest a complex, highly organized civilization. The water-control systems that were built are a particularly interesting aspect of the Indus civilization. Archaeologists think the ruins of great baths found at both Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro are evidence that washing and cleanliness may have had a religious or ritual meaning.

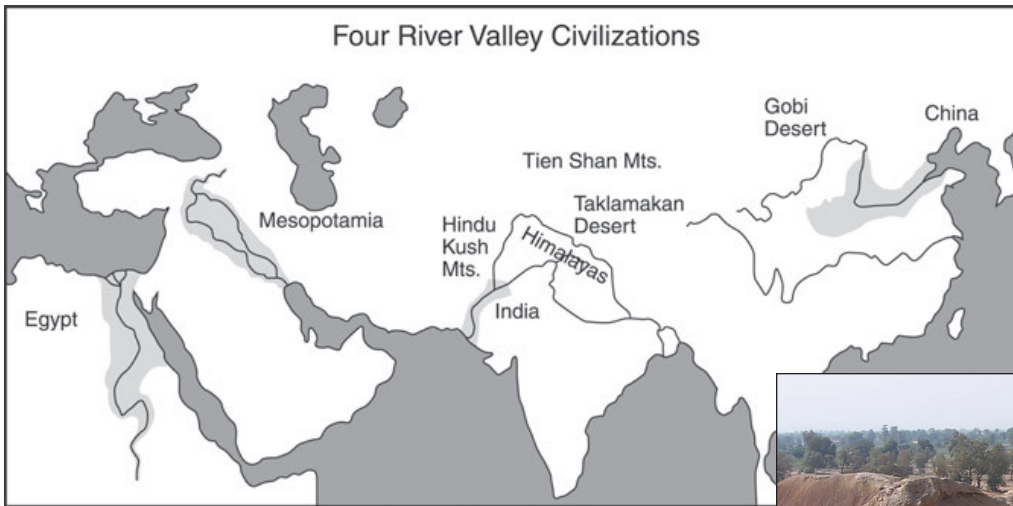
Illustration 3

Another achievement of the Indus River civilization was a writing system. This system is found on ancient stone seals such as those shown here. In addition to symbols and pictographs, human figures and animals are also often displayed, in particular the bull. This script has never been deciphered. But some experts think the seals may have been a means of identification, perhaps a way of indicating ownership of goods for sale. Or they may have had religious significance. Similar scripts have been found in Mesopotamia, but no connection between the two forms of writing has been established with certainty. If this script could be deciphered, it would undoubtedly tell historians a great deal about the Indus River civilization.

Lesson 2—The Indus River Civilization

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



1B



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. Illustration 1B shows ruins at Harappa, one of the two main cities of India's first ancient civilization. This civilization was located in the valley of a large river system. From Illustration 1A can you name that river?
2. What do you think the ruins in Illustration 1B are? What details seem to reveal the most about the ruins? What details are hardest to interpret?
3. The Indus River civilization is one of four ancient civilizations shown here. From this map, what major geographical feature did these civilizations have in common?
4. Historians say it is no accident that the world's first complex civilizations developed along major rivers. Why do you think they believe this?
5. Besides the Indus River civilization, can you name the other three civilizations shown on this map and the rivers along which they grew? What else do you know about each of these great civilizations?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** The Indus River drains several key mountain ranges, including the Himalayas. Learn more about these mountain ranges. Then create a bulletin-board map display of the entire Indus River watershed. Include historical and modern-day photos and other illustrations of the region. Give a talk to the class explaining the display.
2. **Small-group activity:** Learn more about how major river systems affected the earliest of the world's great civilizations—those in Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and along the Yellow River in China. Brainstorm to come up with a list of all of the ways these four civilizations were similar. Then come up with a list of the ways in which the Indus civilization was different from the other three. Present your findings to the class.

Lesson 2—The Indus River Civilization

Illustrations 2A & 2B

2A



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2B



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Discussing the Illustrations

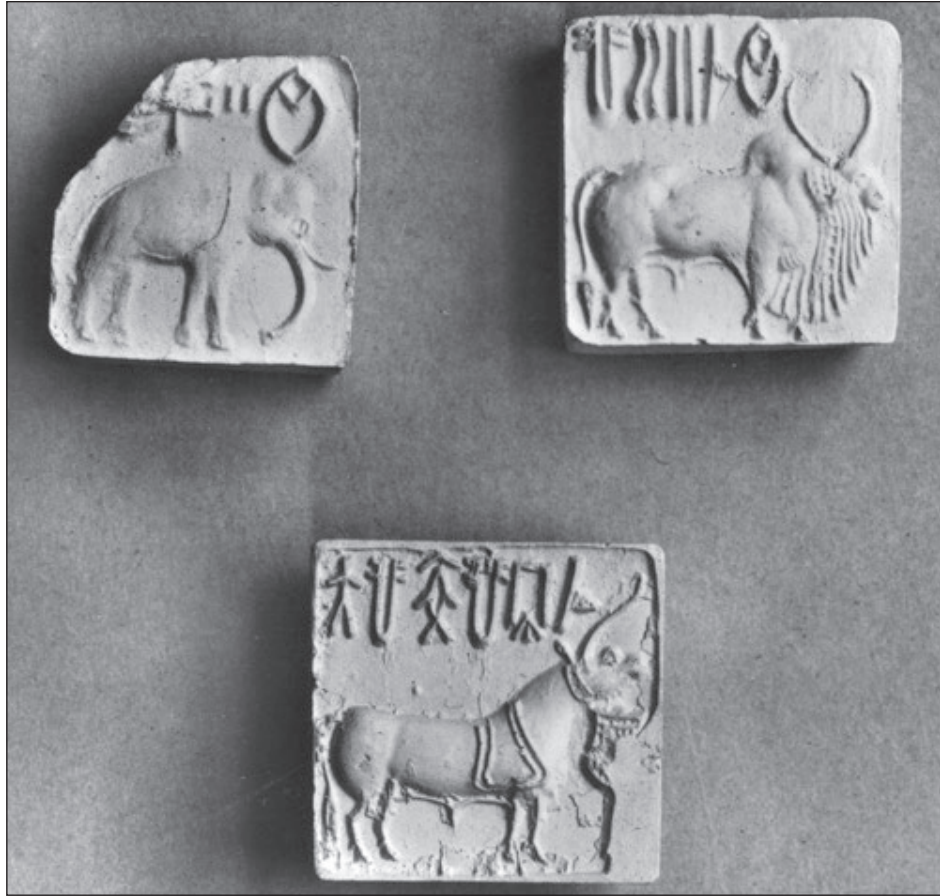
1. Here are two more photos of Harappa. The ruins in Illustration 2A are thought by some to have been a granary. Others say they were a great hall containing many rooms. From the photo, which interpretation seems most plausible? In either case, these ruins are a sign this was a complex, highly organized civilization. Why do you think they are evidence of this?
2. Can you guess what the bricks in Illustration 2B are?
3. Covered drains collected waste from households and drained the streets. What does this tell you about the nature of Harappan civilization and its level of organization?
4. Control of water was a major factor in many of the ruins at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Illustration 1B, shown previously, is of a central drain and bathing area. Some archaeologists think that washing may have had religious or ritual meaning. What do you think they mean by that? What else do you know about this aspect of the Indus River civilization?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Learn more about the ruins at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. As a group, make maps of both sites based on what you learn. Create a program for a guided tour of each site. Include at least five key parts of each site. Your guide should be organized so as to give as complete a notion of the importance of the Indus River civilization as possible. Make copies of your guide for the class.
2. One historian says of the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro, "It had a ceremonial center, with a royal palace and a sacred bath that was probably used by the priests as a means of achieving ritual purity." Learn more about Mohenjo-Daro. Research why historians think the baths at Mohenjo-Daro had ritual and religious significance and were not just for cleaning and bathing. Prepare a brief talk in which you relate your findings to the class. If possible, include photos or diagrams that you find in the course of your readings. Don't forget to use the Internet to help in doing your research.

Lesson 2—The Indus River Civilization

Illustration 3



The Granger Collection, New York

Discussing the Illustration

1. Fired clay seals such as these found at Mohenjo-Daro are further signs of the advanced nature of the Indus River civilization. The seals were meant to be impressed and leave marks. That is, they were a form of writing. Why do you think a system of writing is seen as such an important sign of a more complex civilization?
2. What uses can you imagine for seals of this sort?
3. These seals contain writing in the form of both marks (or lines) and pictographs. What are pictographs, and how are they different from our own writing system?
4. Similar seals containing marks and pictographs have been found in Mesopotamia. But unlike those, the ones found at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro remain undeciphered. What does that mean? Why do you think this Indus writing system has been so hard to decipher? What else do you know about the seals of the Indus River civilization?

Follow-up Activities

1. These tablets, or seals, found at Mohenjo-Daro often show the figure of a bull. The bulls were thought to have religious meaning. What else has been found on the clay seals found in the ruins of the Indus River civilization? Find a variety of photos or illustrations of these seals. Learn as much as you can about their meaning and purpose. Use the images you find to create a bulletin board display or slide show explaining what this evidence of a writing system may tell us about the Indus River civilization.
2. The pictographs on the seals found at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro have yet to be deciphered. Learn more about efforts to decipher ancient languages such as ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and Sumerian cuneiform writing. Bring in examples of hieroglyphics and writing symbols from various civilizations. Give a brief talk to the class about what you learn.

OBJECTIVE

1. Students will better understand some key cultural and religious traditions of the Aryans, who moved into India in the second millennium BCE.
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Aryans and the Vedic Age

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Little is known about how or why the Indus River civilization disappeared. Some say climate change or natural disasters were factors. Others say nomadic invaders from the north gradually overran the people of Indus Valley. These invaders, the Aryans, were among the Indo-European peoples who migrated in many directions from the steppes of southern Russia from between 4000 and 1000 BCE. It is believed the Aryans arrived in the Indus Valley itself around 1500 BCE. They were warriors who had mastered the horse-drawn chariot, giving them a distinct advantage over most local populations. Whatever the causes of the decline of the Indus civilization, the Aryans did impose their ways on much of India and helped to shape its culture profoundly.

Illustration 2

Much of what we know of the early Aryans comes from the Vedas, a collection of sacred texts. These consisted of rituals and hymns to the Aryan gods. The Rigveda is believed to be the oldest of the Vedas. Its gods are mainly nature deities, whom believers must praise and appease through sacrifices. The words here are part of a hymn to Indra, the god of storms and war. The statue from a later time is of the Hindu deity Shiva. However, Hindu gods take many forms, and Indra is said by many Hindus to be one form Shiva takes. The words make clear the awe—even fear—believers might feel toward these deities who controlled the fickle forces of nature on which life depended. The Vedas were passed down orally for many centuries. Much later, they were written down in Sanskrit.

Illustration 3

Hinduism is the major religion in India today, and many religious practices set forth in the Vedas still guide Hindus. Many Hindu deities are different forms of earlier Aryan deities. In one legend, Shiva ordered his beloved bull Nandi to help humans with their farming activities. That is why, as this photo shows, bullocks are adorned and honored during a South Indian rice-harvest festival. The list of Vedic gods here suggests their links to forces of nature such as light, fire, and the heavens. Vedic worship revolved around fire sacrifice. Over time, ritual sacrifices became so complex that priests, or brahmins, became indispensable. In time, this elite priesthood took its place at the top of a rigid social caste system.

Lesson 3—Aryans and the Vedic Age

Illustration 1



© Maps.com

Discussing the Illustration

1. The Indus River civilization lasted from around 2500 BCE to about 1700 BCE. No one knows for sure why it disappeared. Some say climate change or natural disasters might have been to blame. Can you think of some examples of catastrophic climate changes or natural disasters that would have been serious enough to wipe out an entire civilization?
2. This map may hold clues to another possible answer. It shows groups of people in Central Asia known as Indo-Europeans. Who were these peoples, and why they are called Indo-European? How does the map help to suggest their importance in world history?
3. One group of Indo-Europeans known as “Aryans” is believed to have moved into India around 1500 BCE. Now one knows for sure if the Aryans were to blame, but the Indus River civilization did disappear at about that time. What do you know about the end of the Indus River civilization and the possible reasons for its disappearance?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** The Indo-European languages are the most widely spoken family of languages in the world. They include Germanic, Celtic, Slavic, Italic (which includes Romance languages like Spanish and Italian) and many others. Learn more about the Indo-European languages that experts think existed around the times shown on this map and the modern languages that arose from them. Create a chart and map showing what you learn. Display the map and explain it to the class.
2. Many experts believe that after about 3000 BCE, the climate began to grow drier and cooler. Some say this might explain in part the increasing movements of Indo-European peoples and even, over time, the disappearance of the Indus River civilization. Learn more about climate change over the past five or six thousand years in this part of the world. What is and is not known about it? In a short essay, explain what is known and what effect climate change may have had on early civilization in India.

Illustration 2



© Instructional Resources Corporation

Part of Vedic Hymn to Indra

The one who is first and possessed of wisdom when born; the god who strove to protect the gods with strength; the one before whose force the two worlds were afraid because of the greatness of his virility: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who made firm the quaking earth; the one who made fast the shaken mountains; the one who measured out wide the atmosphere; the one who propped up heaven: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who, having killed the serpent, released the seven rivers; the one who drove out the cows by undoing Vala, the one who generates fire between two rocks, victor in battles: he, O people, is Indra.

The one by whom all things here were made moving; the one who put in hiding the lowly Dasa color; the one who, like a gambler who has won the stake, has taken the enemy's possessions: he, O people, is Indra.

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Not much is known about the Aryans, but we do know about their religious practices from the Vedas. Can you explain what the Vedas are?
2. It is believed the hymns of the Vedas were first written down in the Sanskrit language near the end of the third century BCE but were probably passed down orally for centuries before that. They are collections of rituals and hymns to gods the Aryans may have brought to India. One of the most important of these gods was Indra. From the hymn shown here, what sort of god do you think Indra was supposed to be? What attitude towards the god does this hymn take?
3. Many Hindus today believe Indra to be one of several forms taken by the Hindu deity Shiva. A 12th-century CE statue of Shiva is shown here. This Shiva appears with four arms, carrying a drum and fire. He dances gracefully on a dwarf, a symbol of ignorance or illusion. What ideas about Shiva or Hinduism in general do you get from the way this statue is designed?

Follow-up Activities

1. The Vedic hymns are compiled in four collections called the Rigveda (the oldest and most important), the Samaveda, the Yajurveda, and the Atharvaveda. Together, these are referred to as the "Samhitas." These ancient texts are seen as the earliest sacred writings of Hinduism. Find out more about them, what each contains, when they were first written down, and their role in the development of Hinduism. Create a chart with a timeline and brief descriptions. Share your timeline with the rest of the class.
2. In one legend, Indra (god of storms and war) takes the form of an eagle in order to kill the serpent Vitra, a demonic power believed to prevent the rain from watering the earth. Indra was the most celebrated of the Vedic gods. More than 250 Vedic hymns are addressed to him. Learn more about myths having to do with Indra and the powers ascribed to this god. Write a brief account of Indra and early Aryan and Indian beliefs about him.

Illustration 3



© Instructional Resources Corporation

Some Vedic Gods

Indra	God of storms and war
Agni	God of fire
Varuna	God of the cosmos, lord of rain
Surya	God of the sun

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Aryan gods such as Indra are really the earliest forms of the gods in Hinduism, the religion most widely practiced in India today. Yet Vedic gods were different from the major Hindu deities who came later. As this list shows, early Vedic gods mainly had to do with specific aspects of the natural world and the human desire to control nature. Many early cultures believed in gods of this sort. Why do you think that was so?
2. Even in their later forms, the Hindu gods often still reveal their roots in India's past. Shiva is one example already discussed. In one legend, Shiva ordered his beloved bull Nandi to help humans with their farming activities. This photo shows bullocks being honored during a South Indian rice-harvest festival. How does this suggest links between Hindu religion and India's long agrarian past?
3. What does this photo suggest about Hinduism and its relationship to India's villages and traditional culture?

Follow-up Activities

1. The Vedas are considered the foundation of Hinduism. The religious practices set forth in the Vedas still guide most Hindus. Find at least one Vedic myth, hymn, or ritual associated with each of the above deities. Prepare a brief presentation and share what you find with the class. Be sure to explain more fully the role of that deity in early Aryan and Indian culture, as well as its relevance to Hinduism. Include images of the gods to help enliven your class presentation.
2. The bullock shown being adorned and honored in Illustration 3 is part of Pongal, a harvest festival celebrated mainly in southern India but also in the north. It takes place over several days, and each day has a separate theme and set of rituals. Learn more about Pongal, and prepare a brief report to the class on it. Use as many photos or other images as you can find to explain the various parts of this festival and their meanings.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand how Hindu beliefs evolved over the centuries from the early form they took in the Vedic Age.
 2. Students will consider the relationship of Hindu beliefs to the caste system in India.
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Hinduism and Early Indian Society

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustrations 1A & 1B**

In many parts of India, life is not that different today from what it was like many centuries ago. These photos suggest how. Both are actually from Pakistan, next to Harappa, one of the sites of the ancient Indus civilization. However, life is still much like this in many Indian villages as well. On the left, a farmer is feeding milk cattle. And on the right, cow dung is drying on the side of a brick wall. It burns well and will be used as a fuel source. The cow holds a special place in India. Hindus consider it to be sacred, and Vedic hymns praised the cow as the mother of us all.

Illustration 2

The Hindu tradition goes back at least to the Aryans and the Vedas. The emphasis there is mainly on ritual sacrifices to gods that are associated with specific natural forces. Later, in the so-called Vedantic Age, from around 800 to 400 BCE, Hindu thinkers began to search for a broader meaning to the universe and human existence. In a group of writings called the “Upanishads,” they developed the idea of Brahman as a spiritual force underlying all of creation. Atman is the form Brahman takes as it is expressed in each true individual self or soul. Other Hindu gods are partial aspects of this universal spiritual reality. Of these, the three basic ones are Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Each deity expresses one phase of a cyclical pattern of change in the universe that is repeated over and over through all eternity.

Illustration 3

Another key aspect of Hindu belief is the caste system. It is a strict division of people into very broad groups, somewhat limited by occupation, and with each person fixed by birth in one caste. Castes are ranked according to a supposed level of spiritual “pollution,” with the highest ranked being the Brahmin priests. In its final form, the system included the four broadly defined castes shown here, along with a fifth group that is really a kind of outcast group, often called the “untouchables.” They performed the most menial or degrading tasks in society. In the 1930s, Indian nationalist leader Mohandas Gandhi began calling these people Harijan, or “children of God.” One family of Harijan is shown on the right. Despite efforts to officially abolish the caste system, it continues to thrive in India.

Lesson 4—Hinduism and Early Indian Society

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



© David A. Burack

1B



© David A. Burack

Discussing the Illustrations

1. As these photos show, even today life in much of India is not that different from what it was like at the time of the Aryans. How do these photos help to show that? What, if anything, about them appears more modern? What seems traditional and likely to have been found in Indian villages centuries ago?
2. Illustration 1A shows a man feeding milk cattle. Illustration 1B shows cattle dung hung up to dry. Can you guess what this cattle dung is used for?
3. The cow is special in India. As one writer puts it:

“Indian scriptures tell us that the cow is a gift of the gods to the human race. ...Gui, as the cow is called in Hindi, is symbolic of Earth itself (similar to Gaia, the Greek goddess of earth). It follows that the cow represents the Divine Mother that sustains all human beings and brings them up as her very own offspring.”

Why might such a view have appealed to millions in the rural villages of ancient Hindu India?

Follow-up Activities

1. These two photographs were actually taken in Pakistan, though the area in which they were taken, the Indus River Valley, has always been seen as part of ancient India. Learn more about what village life is like in India and Pakistan today. Then, imagine you are an assignment writer for National Geographic magazine sent to this area to write a short piece on village life on the border of India and Pakistan. Post your essay on the bulletin board along with any photos you are able to find of the region.
2. Learn more about the origin and meaning of the ancient Indian reverence for the cow. Explain the historical significance of the cow in India in a brief report to the class. Include in your report a discussion of the ways in which traditional Indian beliefs about the cow are like those of animal-rights advocates today, as well as the ways in which they are different.

Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York

Brahman/Atman
(ultimate reality/universal soul)

Major Hindu Deities

Brahma (creation)

Vishnu (preservation)

Shiva (destruction)

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Over time, Hinduism went beyond earlier Vedic beliefs to what some might call a more philo-sophical system of ideas. For example, Hindus seem to have adopted a notion of a universal god. How does the list shown here suggest this?
2. *Brahman* and *Atman* are really two aspects of the same universal truth. *Brahman* refers to a universal world soul or spiritual reality, while *Atman* refers to the individual soul. Of all the Hindu gods, the three listed next—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—became the major gods most Hindus worshiped. These gods also have a more general, spiritual role than the Vedic gods did. How do the words here suggest that?
3. The three deities listed are really all just different aspects of *Brahman/Atman*. The drawing here depicts these deities—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (from left). How does this visual depiction express the notion that these are all different aspects of one another, and of *Brahman/Atman*?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** One of the great epic poems of ancient India, one that has influenced devout Hindus for centuries, is the *Mahabharata*. It contains perhaps the most famous and popular Hindu story, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which tells the story of Krishna and Arjuna. About the *Bhagavad-Gita*, one writer says,

One reason for the Gita's religious significance is Krishna's explanation of the relationship between a Hindu cosmology—based on concepts such as dharma, karma, and samsara—and the ethical life of the individual. We can all, to a certain extent, sympathize with the difficult dilemma faced by Arjuna. ...Krishna's teaching, then, is meant to be instructive, not just to Arjuna, but to anyone who looks for guidance in making an ethical choice.

Your group's task is to first read and discuss the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Then use your group discussion as the basis for a class presentation in which you explain explicitly what you think this writer means.

Illustration 3

The Caste System

Brahmin

(priests)

Kshatriya

(warriors, kings, princes)

Vaishya

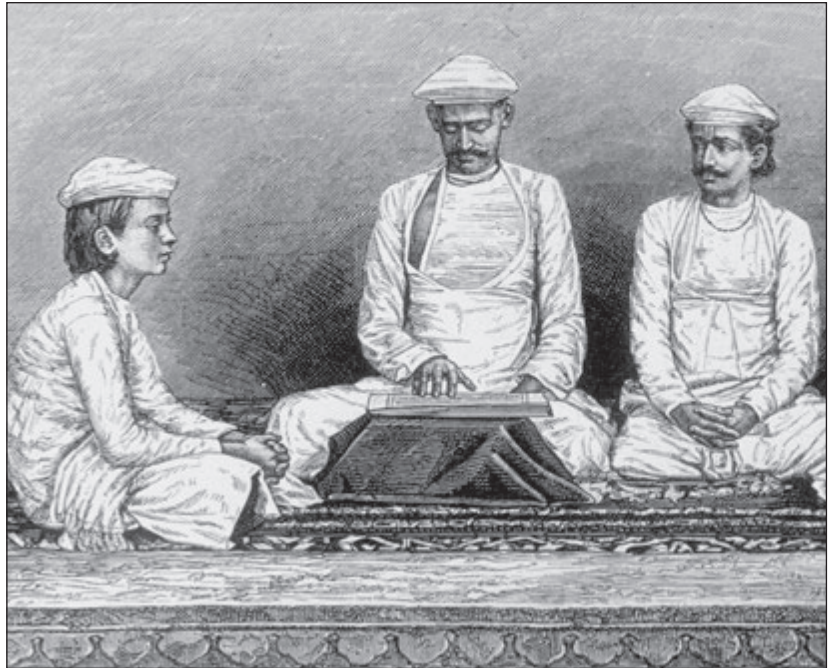
(merchants, farmers, artisans)

Shudra

(servants, laborers)

Harijan

(outcasts, untouchables)



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Discussing the Illustrations

1. Another aspect of Hindu belief is the caste system. Can you explain what this is?
2. Each caste was limited to some extent to certain kinds of occupations. Castes were ranked by their supposed level of “spiritual pollution.” What do you think this means? The highest caste was the least spiritually polluted. Which caste is highest?
3. Three Brahmin priests are shown here taking part in the sacred thread ceremony marking the time when boys of the top three classes begin their education. What view of Brahmin priesthood do you get from this drawing?
4. In addition to the four main castes, a fifth “outcast” group called “untouchables” did menial or degrading types of labor. Some say the Hindu idea of reincarnation makes the system less difficult to bear for those at the bottom of it. Can you explain what they say this? Do you think they are right? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. The four original castes have actually evolved over many centuries. And the relationship of caste to a person’s occupation is not as clear as the simple summary above may suggest. Learn more about the caste system in India and how it has evolved. Prepare a report to class. Use a flip chart, slides, or overheads to illustrate both how the system evolved and what its relationship is to occupation (or the work people do) and to marriage and family life in general.
2. Indian nationalist leader Mohandas Gandhi was a member of the Vaishya caste (the name Gandhi means “greengrocer”). At one point he was ejected from his caste, becoming an outcast. In the 1930s, Gandhi became a leader in the movement against the caste system. He fought hard to improve the status of the “untouchables.” Find out as much as you can about this and write a brief essay about the role caste played in Gandhi’s life and thinking.

Image Close-ups

India: The Natural Setting

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



The Granger Collection, New York

1B



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India: The Natural Setting
Illustration 2



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India: The Natural Setting

Illustration 3

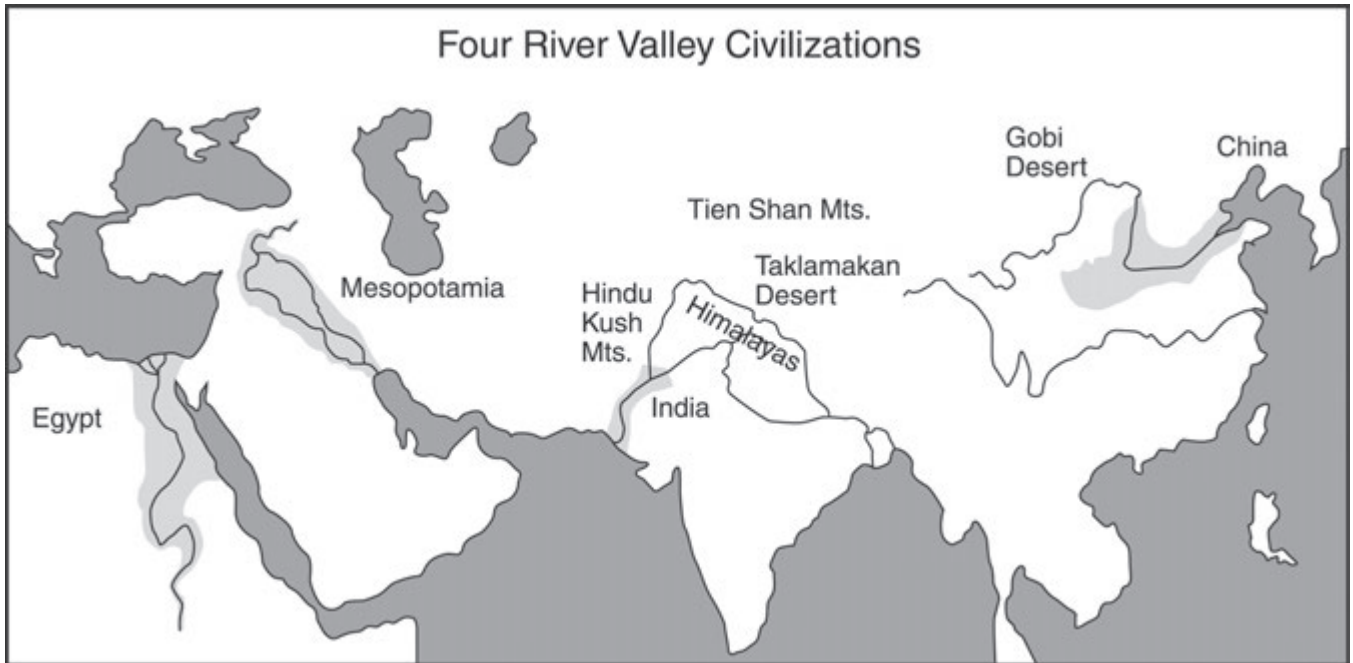


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The Indus River Civilization

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



1B



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The Indus River Civilization

Illustrations 2A & 2B

2A



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2B



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The Indus River Civilization

Illustration 3



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Aryans and the Vedic Age

Illustration 1

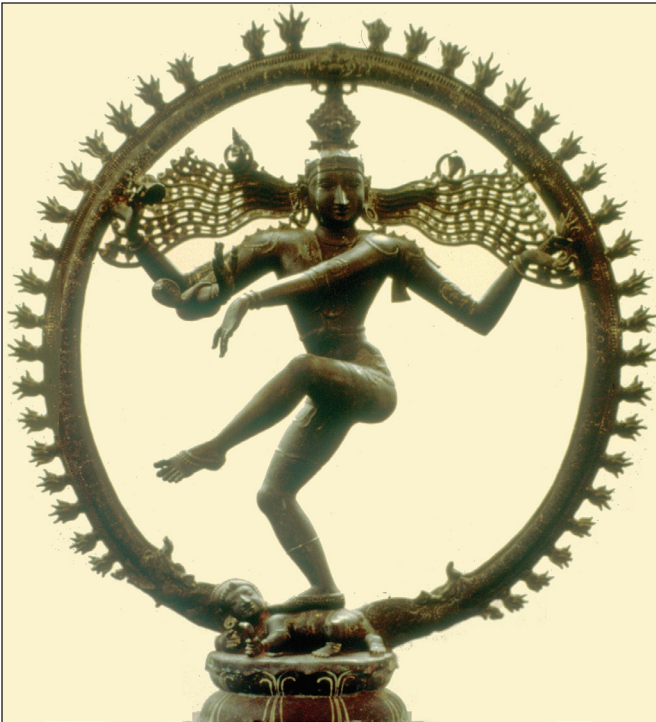


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Aryans and the Vedic Age

Illustration 2

Part of Vedic Hymn to Indra



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The one who is first and possessed of wisdom when born; the god who strove to protect the gods with strength; the one before whose force the two worlds were afraid because of the greatness of his virility: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who made firm the quaking earth; the one who made fast the shaken mountains; the one who measured out wide the atmosphere; the one who propped up heaven: he, O people, is Indra.

The one who, having killed the serpent, released the seven rivers; the one who drove out the cows by undoing Vala, the one who generates fire between two rocks, victor in battles: he, O people, is Indra.

The one by whom all things here were made moving; the one who put in hiding the lowly Dasa color; the one who, like a gambler who has won the stake, has taken the enemy's possessions: he, O people, is Indra.

Aryans and the Vedic Age

Illustration 3



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Some Vedic Gods

Indra	God of storms and war
Agni	God of fire
Varuna	God of the cosmos, lord of rain
Surya	God of the sun

Hinduism and Early Indian Society

Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A



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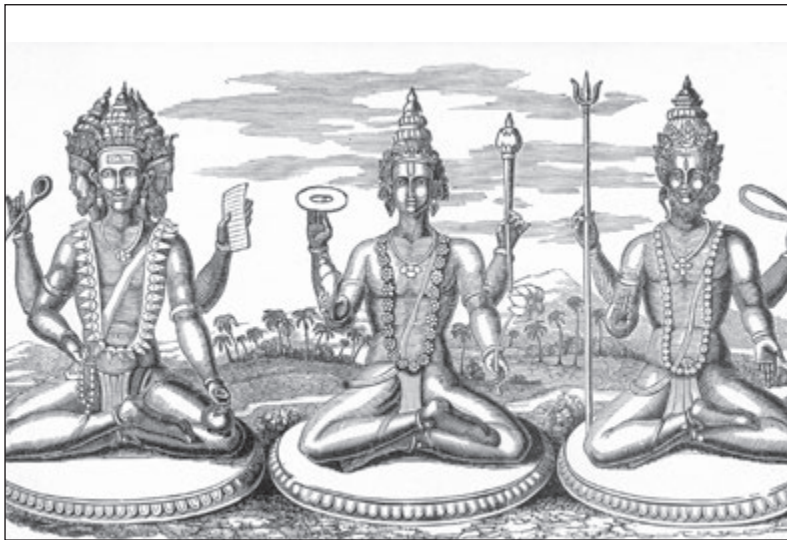
1B



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Hinduism and Early Indian Society

Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York

Brahman/Atman
(ultimate reality/universal soul)

Major Hindu Deities

Brahma (creation)

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Hinduism and Early Indian Society

Illustration 3

The Caste System

Brahmin

(priests)

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(warriors, kings, princes)

Vaishya

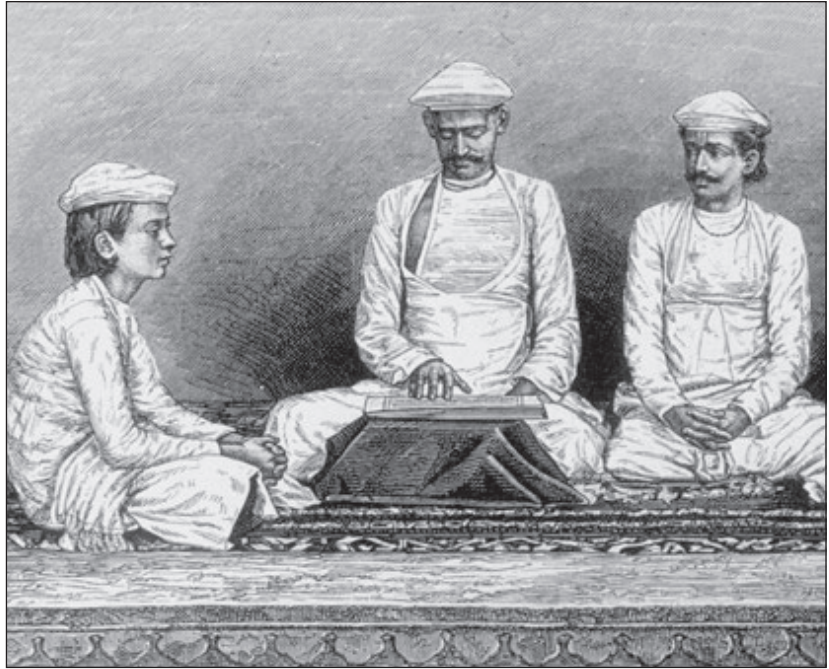
(merchants, farmers, artisans)

Shudra

(servants, laborers)

Harijan

(outcasts, untouchables)



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