General World Cultures

Chapter 16- The Middle East: Southwest Asia

**pilgrimage**- a trip to a place that has special religious importance

**fertile**- capable of producing a great deal

**socialism**- a political system in which the government controls farms and businesses

**monotheism**- the belief that there is only one god

**Holocaust**- the mass murder of Jewish and other people by Nazi forces

**civilian**- a person who is not a soldier

**terrorism**- violence directed against civilians in order to put pressure on governments

**intifada**- an organized rebellion by the people of Palestine against Israel

**Oil and Water**

\* The Middle East is a region defined by history and politics. It stretches from Africa across the Arabian Peninsula into Asia.

*Complete the Middle East Map Study on page 222.*

The Middle East has a dry climate. Most of the Arabian Peninsula, in fact, is covered by desert. In the Middle East, water is a precious resource because it is scarce. The area has plenty of oil, however.

\* About 65% of the world’s oil is in North Africa and the Middle East. Drilling for this oil began in the 1930s. Since then, oil has brought great wealth to some countries in this region.

\* As you can imagine, oil has brought economic power and wealth to the region as a whole. OPEC stands for the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Decisions made by the OPEC countries can affect the price of oil. For example, they can decide how much oil to produce. When they produce less, the price of oil goes up. The U.S. is not in OPEC.

\* Oil has helped with the water shortage in the Middle East. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have used their oil wealth to build **desalination** plants, which remove salt from water. Desalination plants turn seawater into fresh drinking water. Do you think that water is more important than oil? Defend your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Jesse Ventura’s show, Conspiracy Theory, speculates that water can be more valuable than water. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teuaXrhkyUw>

**Islam**

\* To many people, the most important feature of the Middle East is not oil but religion. Islam began on the Arabian Peninsula, and it is still centered there.

\* Islam began around A.D. 600. According to the Islamic faith, God sent the angel Gabriel to a man named Muhammad, an ordinary camel driver who lived in the city of Mecca. Muhammad was told he was God’s chosen prophet, or messenger. From that day forth, Muhammad preached the word of God s he received it. These messages were written in the Koran, the sacred book of Islam.

\* The basic belief of Islam is that there is only one God and Muhammad is his messenger. All Muslims are considered equal and part of the large community of believers.

\* Islam is based on 5 duties called the Five Pillars of Islam.

 1.) state the faith

 2.) pray

 3.) give money to the poor

 4.) **fast**, or go without food or drink

 5.) make a **pilgrimage** to Mecca

**Life in Muslim Society**

\* Islam deals with all aspects of life. For example, Islam forbids pork and alcohol. Islam has rules about women’s clothing. Islam has rules about marriage, and inheritance. Islam forbids gambling and no interest can be charged on loans. It rules on how crimes are punishable.

\* Muslin men are allowed to have more than one wife. Marriages are often arranged by families and women marry at 15 or younger. Children must respect their parents. Kindness, generosity, honesty, and tolerance are valued.

**The Desert Kingdoms**

\* A desert of fine, golden sand covers most of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is the largest. Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Yemen, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates are all located here.

\* The original people of this peninsula were the Bedouins, who were nomadic herders and raiders. Only 300,000 are nomadic Bedouins today. The culture valued loyalty, courage, and generosity. Hospitality is considered a duty.

\* Saudi Arabia is the richest Arabic country because it produces the most oil. It brings workers from the poorer countries. Oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia also give loans to other Arabic countries.

\* With oil money, the kingdoms have built large, modern cities. The men often wear a head cloth and long, white robe. The gear protects against the wind and sun.

**Ancient Middle East**

\* North of the Arabian Peninsula are two big rivers that flow southeast into the Persian Gulf. These rivers are the Tigris and Euphrates, which bring water to the dry region around them. They have rich soil like the Nile. The land between the rivers is very **fertile**. Civilizations began 5500 years ago.

*Complete the Ancient Middle East Map Study on page 227.*

\* Sumerians, ancient settlers, invented the wheel, the plow, and the sail. They developed geometry and arithmetic. They had a written language called cuneiform. Sumerian buildings were made of clay, so most have crumbled.

\* The Phoenicians invented a 22-symbol alphabet that stood for sounds. The letters used to write these notes grew from the Phoenician alphabet.

\* In A.D. 750, a new family took control of the Arabic empire. They built a new city called Baghdad. Today, this city is capital of the country of Iraq.

**Iraq and Syria**

\* **Socialism** is practiced in parts of this region. Water might be a source of possible future conflicts here. The Euphrates River, for example, flows through Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. All three countries need water from this river. Less is available as it is taken from the river. Dams have been built to prevent water from getting to others. Wars have been fought over the years for various reasons in this part of the world.

**Saudi Arabia**

\* Saudi Arabia is a land of heat, dryness, and sand. It is the largest country in the Middle East, but more than half is desert.

\* Saudi Arabia is a traditional, Islamic country. It is ruled by the Saud family, an ancient dynasty. Law is based on Islam as well.

\* Before oil was discovered, Saudi Arabia was home to herders and nomads. Today, it holds 25% of all the world’s oil reserves. Oil money has been used to buy roads, airports, industry, and plants to desalinate water.

\* Oil has allowed Saudi Arabia to provide generous benefits for its citizens. Schooling is free, although no child is required to go. The government also pays for medicine and medical care. As the world’s need for oil continues, the country of Saudi Arabia will continue to prosper.

**Israel**

\* Modern Israel was founded in 1948. It is the only non-Islamic country in the Middle East. About 95% of the people of Israel are of Jewish heritage. The main language is Hebrew, although many people also speak Yiddish and English.

\* The religion practiced by Jewish people is called Judaism, which began 5,000 years ago, when Jewish people were called Hebrews. Judaism was the first religion based on **monotheism**. Islam and Christianity are also monotheistic religions.

\* The sacred writings of Judaism are called the Torah. Social justice has always been an important value in Judaism.

\* The Hebrews settled in a land called Palestine. Moses, their greatest prophet, led the Hebrews out of their slavery. The journey out of Egypt and slavery was called Exodus. During the Exodus, god gave Moses the Ten Commandments, which are basic to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

\* Although Israelis mostly live in cities, agriculture is important to the country. Israel has had some success overcoming desertification. The Israelis have planted trees and have used advanced irrigation systems to create new farmland. Israelis grow and export many crops, such as tomatoes, grapefruit, potatoes, wheat, and cotton.

**The Arab-Israeli Conflict**

\* Israel has been in conflict with its Arabic neighbors since it was founded in 1948. This conflict is rooted in history. Over the centuries, the Jewish people have been a persecuted minority in many lands.

\* During World War II, Nazi Germany killed about 6 million Jewish and other peoples in Europe. This event became known as the **Holocaust**. The war created thousands of desperate Jewish refugees. Many Jewish people headed for Palestine when Western countries would no longer give them refuge.

\* Both Jewish and Arabic people claimed Palestine. The United Nations split it between the two. There have been wars between the Israelis and different Arabic countries. Small groups of Palestinians attacked Jewish **civilians**. Palestinians and their allies called this guerilla warfare. The Israelis and their allies, however, called it **terrorism**.

\* In the late 1980s, Palestinian opposition to Israel became an organized rebellion called the **intifada**.

**The Arts and the Middle East**

\* Arabic art is rooted in Bedouin culture and has been shaped by Islam. From long ago, the Bedouins have prided themselves on their poetry, which has a musical quality. Reading aloud from the Koran is considered an art and is done in a special musical voice not used for any other book.

\* Arabs view handwriting as a fine art, too. Quotations from the Koran are often written in an elegant style called calligraphy. Calligraphy also decorates buildings and vases. Israel is also known for classical and progressive instrumental music.