

Critical Thinking, Part I

Mesopotamia's Resources

Mesopotamia's major resources were a mild climate, fertile soil, marshes with lots of reeds, and an unusual substance called *bitumen*. Bitumen was a tarry substance that seeped out of the ground in some places. There were no trees and no rocks or stones of any size in Mesopotamia. There were no minerals such as copper, tin, iron, gold, or silver.

People soon found that the water supply could be a problem. In the spring, water was plentiful. Rain and melted snow from the mountains flowed into the rivers, and the rivers flooded the fields. This seemed helpful at first, because it softened the ground and made it easy to plant. The problem was that the floods were unpredictable and came any time between April and early June. When the floods came in April, the same month that the farmers had planted their crops, all the young plants were washed away.

During the rest of the year, the hot sun baked the soil rock-hard, and it was impossible to cultivate unless water was available. A steady water supply was also needed to keep the plants alive.

Instructions: Use the information you have just read and the map (BLM 3-4) to solve the problem below. Later, your group will be given its own problem to solve.

Finding a New Place to Live: Critical-Thinking Class Activity

- The time is about 5000 BCE.
- You are with a group of people who have been living in the Zagros Mountains.
- The group has grown larger over the years.
- It is becoming difficult to find enough farmland to grow food to feed all of you.
- You must move.

Think/Pair/Square (individual list/pair/four + report to class)

1. Before you move, you must decide what your most important needs are. Individually, list 5-10 things that you would look for in choosing your new home (e.g., food supply). In groups of four, put the lists together, categorize the items, and present 4 or 5 main concerns to your group leader.
2. On your map (BLM 3-4), look at the area nearest the Zagros Mountains. Individually, decide where you are likely to find the best conditions for the 4 or 5 things your group agreed were the most important concerns. (Remember: In ancient times people did not have maps; they decided where to live after moving around and looking at the land and water.)
3. Choose your location, and prepare to present your reasons for choosing this spot to the rest of your group.
4. Reach a group consensus, and mark the location on a group map.
5. As a class, check the location of Sumer on the map. How close was your group to where the Sumerians settled in about 5000 BCE?

Critical Thinking, Part II

Situation 1: Making Homes

- Your group has moved to the plains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Now you need to build homes.
 - You have no trees to use for making tools or for building homes.
 - You have no stones to make tools or to build homes.
1. Reread the information in Mesopotamia's Resources, and decide what you will use to make tools and to build homes.
 2. Write a few sentences to explain how you will make tools (and what you will use). Draw a diagram.
 3. Write a few sentences to explain what you will use to build a house and what the house will look like. Draw a diagram.
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Situation 2: Controlling Water

Your society has plenty of water, but you have two problems:

- unpredictable floods in the spring
- no water for the crops by the end of the season

Your group leader calls a meeting to discuss the following:

- What can we do to control the spring floods and to save enough water to have a supply at the end of the season?
1. Use the information in Mesopotamia's Resources and your map (BLM 3-4) to help you decide what to do.
 2. Make some diagrams to help you explain your plan to the others in your society.
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Situation 3: Getting Resources for Sumer

Your group is in charge of the industries in Sumer, and it is your job to find resources that Sumer does not have, including wood, stone, and metals. You need these resources to make Sumer prosperous and secure.

Your group leader calls a meeting to discuss the following:

- How can we get these resources?
1. Use the information in Mesopotamia's Resources and your map (BLM 3-4) to help you decide what to do.
 2. Make some diagrams to help you explain your plan to the others in your society.

Situation 4: Keeping Records

Your group consists of the scholars and accountants. You must find a way to keep records in your new city. You need to record all business accounts, and you want to record your history.

Your group leader calls a meeting to discuss the following:

- What can we use for keeping records, and how will we do it?
1. Use the information in Mesopotamia's Resources and your map (BLM 3-4) to help you decide what to do.
 2. Make some diagrams to help you explain your plan to the others in your society.

Situation 5: Defending the City

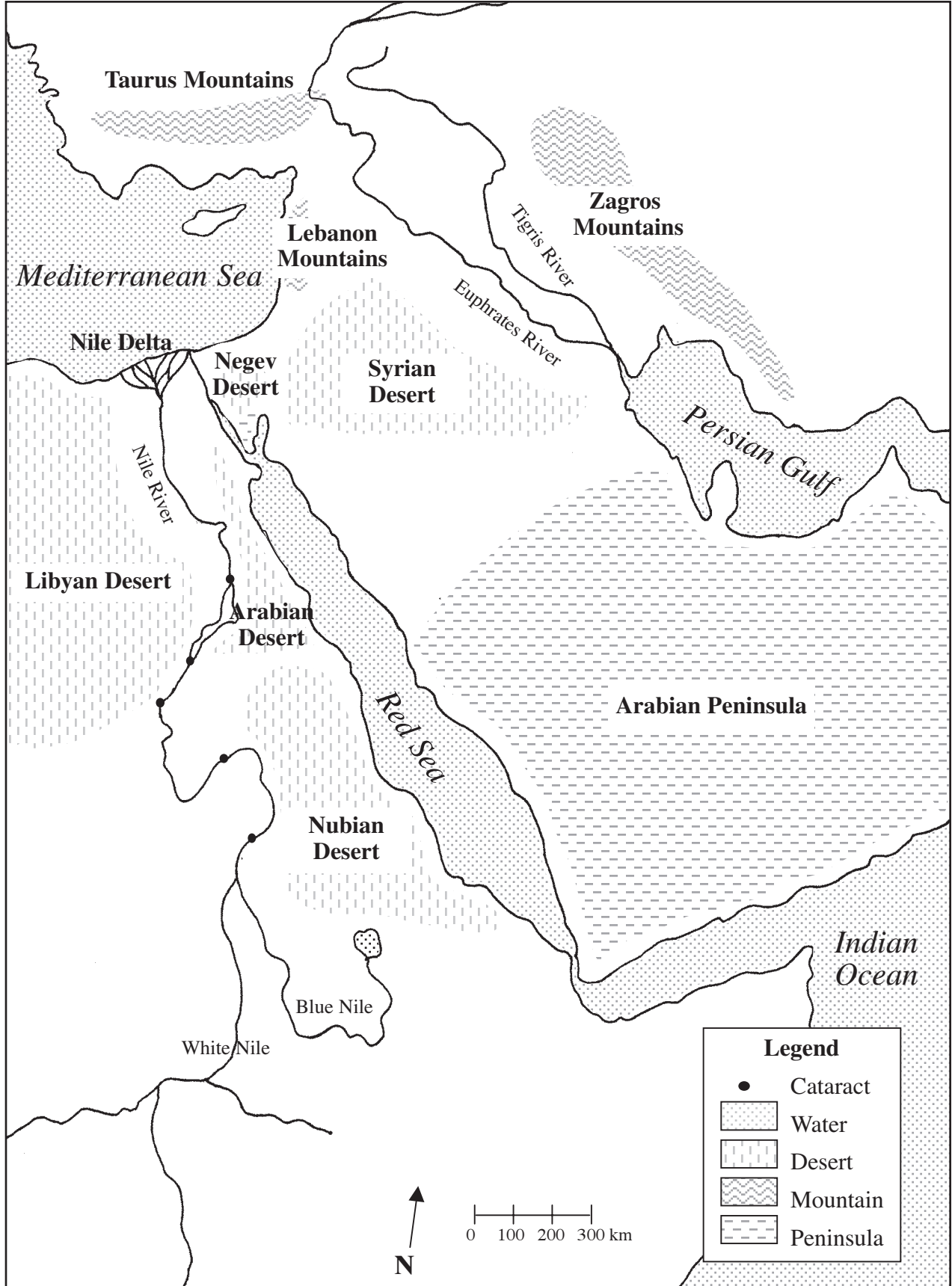
Your city-state has become rich and famous, because you have plenty of water, good farms, and good craftspeople who work in your city. Some neighbouring city-states are envious of your success, and you are afraid they will try to conquer the city.

Your group consists of the military leaders of your city-state, and you must decide how to protect your city.

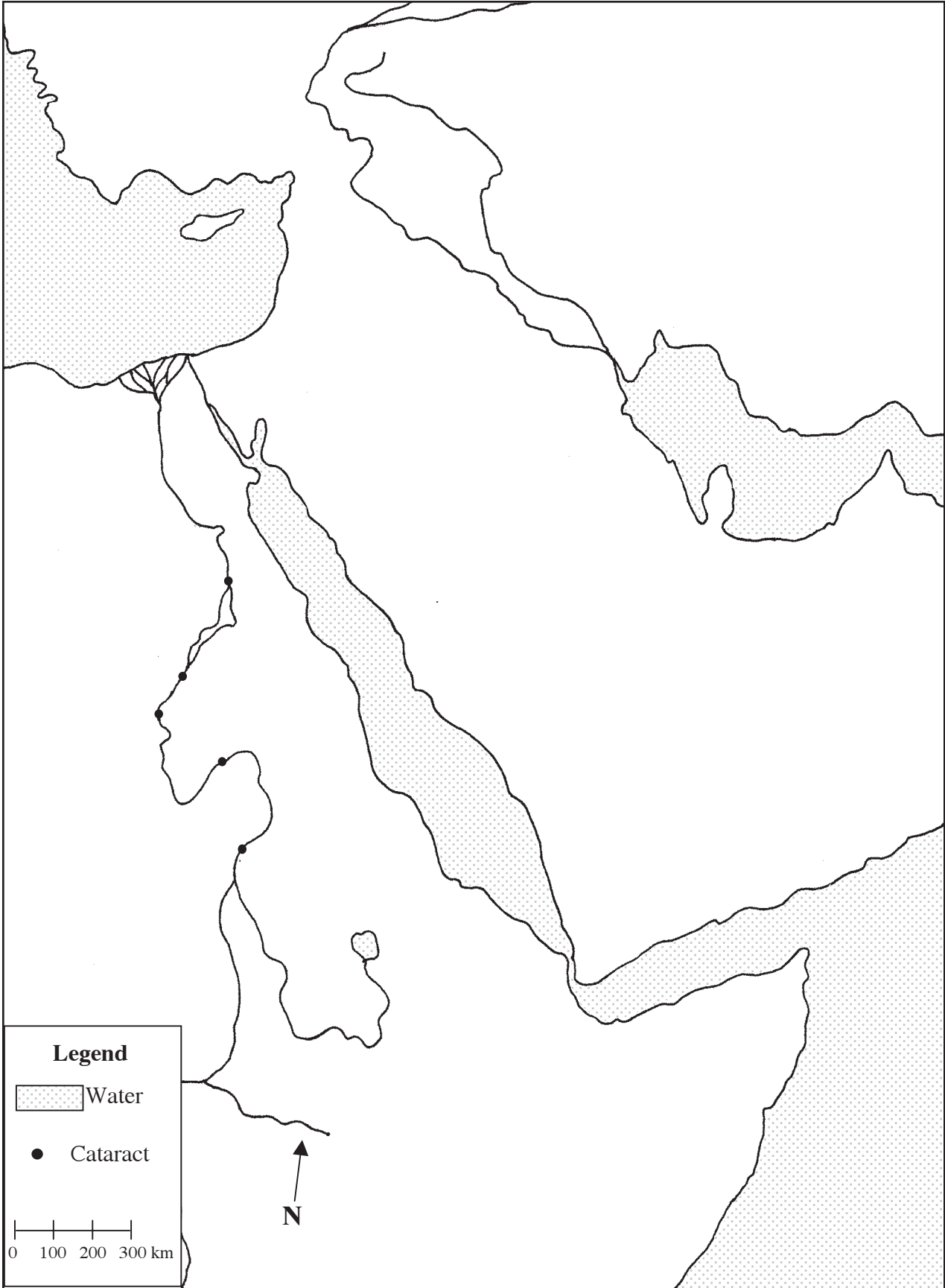
Your group leader calls a meeting to discuss the following:

- What can we do to make it hard for others to conquer our city?
 - What materials do we have to make weapons?
 - How can we get enough metal to make weapons?
1. Use the information in Mesopotamia's Resources and your map (BLM 3-4) to help you decide what to do.
 2. Draw diagrams or maps to show others what your plans are for protecting the city.
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Egypt and Mesopotamia



Map: Egypt and Mesopotamia



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