

Student Handout 1- The Origins of Writing in Mesopotamia

Directions for summarization exercise: Important information in this passage is underlined. Read the passage once as a whole section. Then, with a partner, take turns reading the underlined sentences out loud. Next, talk about how you could summarize these ideas in your own words. Working with your partner, create a summary with no more than three sentences that capture the most important ideas.



Ancient Mesopotamia: The Invention of Writing

Writing emerged in many different cultures and in numerous locations throughout the ancient world. It was not the creation of any one people. However, the Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia are credited with inventing the earliest form of writing, which appeared ca. 3500 B.C.E. The clay tablets shown above date from around 3200 B.C.E.

The writings on these tablets are simple pictures, or pictograms, which represent an object or an idea. Because clay is a difficult material on which to draw lines and curves, the Mesopotamians eventually reduced pictograms into a series of wedge-shaped signs that they pressed into clay with a reed stylus. This wedge-shaped writing is called cuneiform. The invention of writing was the dawn of the information revolution. This great technological advance allowed news and ideas to be carried to distant places without having to rely on a messenger's memory. Like all inventions, writing emerged because there was a need for it. In Mesopotamia, it was developed as a record-keeping vehicle for commercial transactions or administrative procedures. There are also texts that served as "copy books" for the education of future scribes. Eventually, cuneiform script was used to produce some of the greatest literary works in recorded history.

Adapted from *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Invention of Writing*. Teacher Resource Center. The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. 18 April 2012 <<http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/ED/TRC/MESO/writing.html>>.