

CLUES FROM THE PAST: Architecture

VISIT A MESOPOTAMIAN HOUSE

Meets Illinois State Standards: 1, 3, 5, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 (Subject Areas: Language Arts, Social Studies)

Background Information for Teachers

Built around an open-air courtyard that let light into windowless rooms, the typical Mesopotamian home was a single story mud-brick house with floors of packed-down earth or brick. The house plan chosen for this lesson is an archaeologist's idea, based on excavations, of what an upper middle-class home looked like in the ancient city of Ur. In this drawing, the house has been "cut open" to let the viewer see inside, an approach archaeologists often use in their illustrations.

The drawing shows a woman in the courtyard, carrying a jar. This type of vessel would be filled with water so that people entering the courtyard could wash the dirt of the streets from their feet. This house had a lavatory, or bathroom, just off the courtyard. Most bathrooms were small, brick-paved enclosures with a central drainage hole. Alongside the hole might be bricks where people could place their feet and "squat." Other ground floor areas of the house included:

- A kitchen with its fireplaces and utensils of clay, stone, and metal.
- A long, narrow reception room to receive guests. Rooms like this had a long runner rug for people to sit upon; bedding would be laid across the rug if guests stayed overnight.
- A chapel with an altar for offering food to a statue or relief carving of the household's personal god. Behind the altar was a recess for burning incense.
- A tomb under the pavement. Family members were buried there, except for small children whose remains were placed in large, sealed vases and kept in the chapel. People felt burial at home allowed the deceased to continue taking part in family life.
- An open-air yard, with storage sheds or stalls for domestic animals—cows, sheep, goats.

Bedrooms on the second floor were reached by stairs that led to a wooden balcony. Supported by columns, the balcony extended the whole way around the central courtyard. A ladder led to the roof top, where the family slept on summer nights. Low beds on wooden legs were used, or simply a mat on the floor. Other furniture was sparse—low stools and tables, a chest or two, and quantities of rugs and large cushions. Braziers—pottery jars filled with burning embers—provided heat. For light, linseed or sesame oil was placed in clay saucers and burned with reed or wool strands as wicks.

Objectives

- Recognize how climate, natural resources, and cultural traditions affect how people live
- Enhance observation skills
- Use various sources for writing

Materials

Copies of Student Stuff hand-out: "Picture This! Visit a Mesopotamian House"

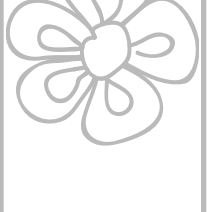
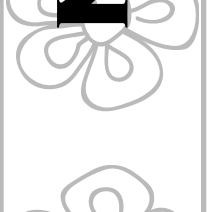
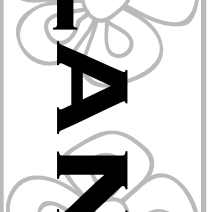
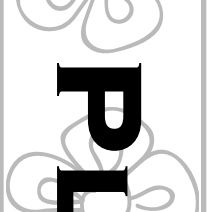
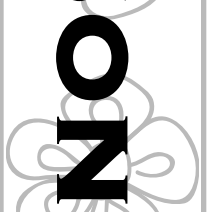
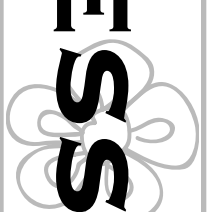
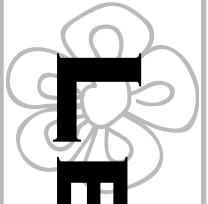
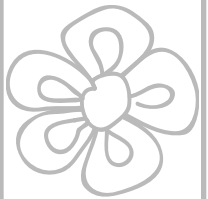
Pencils and paper

Suggested Time Needed

One class period

Suggested Procedure

1. Hand out copies of Student Stuff sheets and give students some background on the house.
2. Ask students to examine the plan and compare this house with homes of today. What features and rooms are the same? Which are different? (You might focus on features related to climate, such as the courtyard and roof top; features that reflect culture, such as the guest room, chapel, and tomb; and structural features such as arches and columns, since these were developed in Mesopotamia.)
3. After students have examined and discussed the house plan, ask them to imagine they live in the city of Ur and that their family has just moved into this house. Have them write a letter to a friend describing what their new home is like and three or four of their favorite things about it.



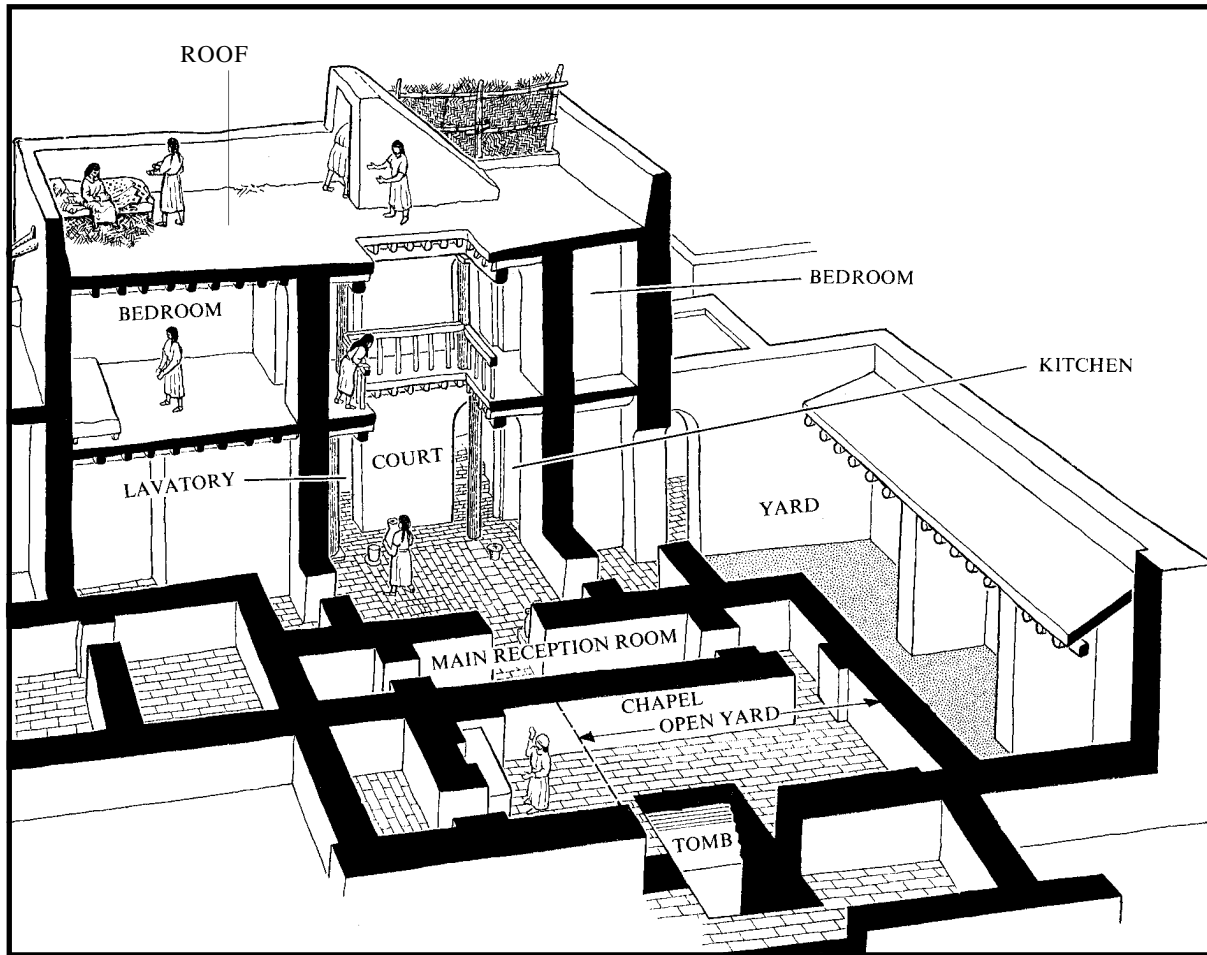
LESSON PLAN

Architecture

PICTURE THIS!

VISIT A MESOPOTAMIAN HOUSE

This house was built in the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur more than 4,000 years ago. The drawing of the house was made by archaeologists, who left out most of the roof and walls so you can see inside.



STUDENT STUFF



How is this house like the homes of today? How is it different?

Architecture