



The Savvy Humanities

SIMPLIFYING MINDS, SHAPING THINKERS

CLASS 11 · HISTORY · CBSE 2026-27 SYLLABUS

Section I — Early Societies · Chapter I

Writing and City Life

36

pages of notes

10

marks of 80

12

board questions solved

29

key terms defined

What's inside

- Mind map and a timeline of every date
- Why cities grew — not rural prosperity alone
- Temples, kings and the rise of Uruk
- Seals, family life and the houses of Ur
- Mari and Zimrilim's palace
- Cuneiform, literacy and the uses of writing
- Legacy, Assurbanipal and Nabonidus
- Places to know for the map question
- Every NCERT exercise, solved

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Handwritten-style, for revision

Every page inside is handwritten-style with highlighting, boxes and a mind map — built to be read the night before, not skimmed.



How to use these notes

What the paper wants

Theme 1 is marked on its own — 10 marks out of 80. CBSE's paper design gives this theme three 1-mark MCQs, one 3-mark short answer and one 4-mark source-based question, so short, exact answers matter more here than long essays. CBSE lists three sub-topics — the growth of towns, the nature of early urban societies, and the uses of writing. The places this theme names can also come up in the 5-mark map question. All six NCERT exercises are solved here.

Study order that works

1. Keep your NCERT open beside you — these notes describe its maps and pictures in words.
2. Read the mind map first. It is the whole chapter on one page.
3. Read the notes once, slowly.
4. Cover the page and say each **Definition** box aloud.
5. Write the model answers by hand, timed.

What the boxes mean

- Definition — exact wording to write
- Exam tip — how to score
- Remember — board favourite
- Common mistake

CBSE topics in this chapter — and your revision tracker

Tick a box each time you finish a pass. Three ticks across a row means that topic is exam-ready.

Syllabus topic	Read	Practised	Revised
Mesopotamia — names, languages, geography	☐	☐	☐
Why cities grew — division of labour, organisation	☐	☐	☐
Trade and water transport	☐	☐	☐
Temples to kings — Uruk, war, compulsory labour	☐	☐	☐



Syllabus topic	Read	Practised	Revised
The cylinder seal	☐	☐	☐
Life in the city — family, marriage, Ur's houses	☐	☐	☐
Mari — a trading town in a pastoral zone	☐	☐	☐
Writing — tablets, cuneiform, literacy	☐	☐	☐
Uses of writing — Enmerkar and the debate	☐	☐	☐
Legacy — time, maths, schools	☐	☐	☐
Assurbanipal's library and Nabonidus	☐	☐	☐

Not in these notes

Nothing from CBSE's list for this theme is left out — all three sub-topics are covered in full. The Section I introduction and Timeline I that open the NCERT book carry no marks and are not taught here. NCERT's maps and pictures are described in words, not reproduced; look at them in your textbook while you read. CBSE has not published a list of map items for Class 11, so the map table in these notes lists the places this theme itself names. Facts the textbook does not give — Hammurabi, the Sumerian King List, trade with the Indus valley — are deliberately not added.



Chapter at a Glance — Mind Map

Writing and City Life

Land and Geography

- Mesos + potamos — land between rivers
- Sumer and Akkad, Babylonia, Assyria
- Steppe, north-east plains, southern desert
- Silt and canals — richest farming

Temples to Kings

- Temple — main urban institution
- Hazards, war over land and water
- Kings — booty to gods, authority
- Uruk — 250 ha, then 400 ha

Mari

- Upstream on the Euphrates
- Herders and farmers
- Amorite kings, Dagan
- Trade toll — one-tenth

Uses of Writing

- Records of transactions
- Enmerkar — kingship, trade, writing
- Sign of superiority
- Science needs written texts

Why Cities Grew

- Not rural prosperity alone
- Division of labour
- Social organisation, trade, storage
- Cheapest transport — water

Urban Society

- Cylinder seal — authenticity
- Nuclear family the norm
- Ur — no town planning, no street drains
- Omens, cemetery

Writing

- Tablets c.3200 BCE, Uruk
- Cuneiform by 2600 BCE or so
- Signs = syllables, hundreds
- Very few could read

Legacy

- 12 months, 24 hours, 60 minutes
- Maths tables c.1800 BCE
- Assurbanipal's library, Nineveh
- Nabonidus — early archaeologist



Where This Theme Sits

The NCERT book is called *Themes in World History*, and CBSE calls each chapter a **theme**. This first theme takes you to **Mesopotamia**, the land where **city life** and **writing** began, and asks two big questions: *why did people start living in cities?* and *what did writing do for them?*

Marks

Theme 1 is marked on its own — 10 marks out of 80. CBSE's sub-topics, with the focus "Iraq, 3rd millennium BCE": (a) **growth of towns**; (b) **nature of early urban societies**; (c) **historians' debate on uses of writing**. In CBSE's paper design this theme brings **three 1-mark MCQs**, **one 3-mark short answer** and **one 4-mark source-based question**.

The book's opening line is worth knowing word for word: "**CITY** life began in Mesopotamia, the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers that is now part of the Republic of Iraq."

1.1 Mesopotamia — the Land and its Names

Mesopotamia

"The name Mesopotamia is derived from the Greek words *mesos*, meaning middle, and *potamos*, meaning river." — the land **between the Euphrates and the Tigris**, now part of Iraq.

Mesopotamian civilisation is known for its **prosperity**, **city life**, **voluminous literature**, **mathematics** and **astronomy**. After **2000 BCE** its writing system and literature spread to the eastern Mediterranean, northern Syria and Turkey.

The names of the land change with its rulers

Period	Name used	Why
Beginning of recorded history	Sumer and Akkad	The urbanised south