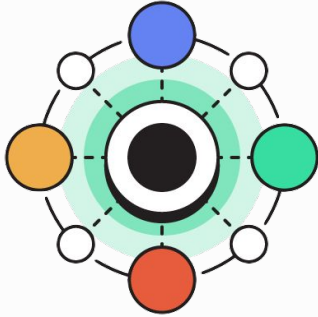


Formative Assessment: Contextualization and Sourcing



Thinking historically means interpreting historical events, developments, or processes in light of the surrounding historical context. It also means understanding key information about a historical source, such as its purpose, perspective, and reliability as a piece of evidence.

Directions: Read the following primary source. Then, answer the questions on contextualization that follow. The multiple choice questions for this formative assessment are Weighted Multiple Choice (WMC) questions. This means that there is only one *incorrect* answer, but the other 3 choices are weighted. The *two best* answers are **2** points, the *next-best* answer is **1** points, and the *incorrect* answer is **0** points.

Source: Cuneiform tablet recording a balanced account with barley, Mesopotamia, 2200–1900 B.C.E. [Library of Congress](#).

Note: From the Library of Congress, "The tablet begins with 4 lines stating the receipt of barley, with the total, 29 se gur (29 gur of barley) on line 5. Line 6, sa-bi-ta, means the following amounts are expanded from the total of 29 gur. The five expenditures add up to 29, leaving a balanced account. "



This tablet represents an early example of writing. In ancient Mesopotamia, farmers would document the amount of crops they grew with pictographs, symbols for a word or phrase used as the earliest known form of writing. Crops were also used as currency. Here, the tablet documents some sort of account with barley being the currency. This type of writing began around 3500 B.C.E., more than 6000 years after the plants and animals began to be domesticated in that region.

1. What information do you know about this source?

By looking at the source section, we know that this tablet records a balanced account using barley as the currency in Mesopotamia. We know it comes from around 2200-1900 B.C.E., which was 7000 years after the development of agriculture in this region. We can assume this crop had some importance to Mesopotamian society.

2. Which **two questions** would best help to better understand the purpose of this document?

A. What was the climate like in Mesopotamia? **(0 points)**

B. What type of economy did Mesopotamia have? **(2 points)**

C. Why were records kept of transactions using crops as currency? **(2 points)**

D. What was the value of 1 gur of barley? **(1 point)**

3. Explain why the two questions you chose could best help you to better understand purpose of this document.

Choice B and Choice C are worth two points, since knowing their answers would help best understand the purpose of the tablet. Knowing the type of economy, or how the economy worked, would provide helpful context to why this information was recorded the way it was, as it appears it was worth noting that the account was balanced in writing. Similarly, knowing why records would be kept of crop-based transactions would speak to the creation of the tablet in the first place. It would provide insight as to the role of the agrarian class in the larger context of Mesopotamian culture. Choice D is worth one point, as it does not specifically help to understand the purpose of the document, but could help to understand the economic value and overall importance of the crops. Lastly, Choice A is worth 0 points, as it doesn't help to provide any context about the document.



1. Short Answer: Known Information

1 point	0 points
Information available in source section of primary source—author, title, and date—is clearly identified.	Student does not identify the information available in the “source” section of the primary source.
Subtotal: _____ / 1	

2. Weighted Multiple Choice

Choice 1	2 points (Choice B or C)	1 point (Choice D)	0 points (Choice A)
Choice 2	2 points (Choice B or C)	1 point (Choice D)	0 points (Choice A)
Subtotal: _____ / 4			

3. Short Answer: Most Helpful Questions

3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
Clear reasons are provided for why the two questions (worth 1 or 2 points) that the student chose would be most helpful for better understanding the document. Student explains why answers to those questions would better contextualize the document.	Mostly clear reasons are provided for why the two (worth 1 or 2 points) questions that the student chose would be most helpful for better understanding the document.	Student attempts to provide reasons for why the two questions they chose would be most helpful for better understanding the document, but those reasons remain unclear.	Student does not attempt to provide reasons for why the two questions would be most helpful for better understanding the document.
Subtotal: _____ / 3			

Total: _____ / 8

