

# Lesson Plan: The River of Civilization

## The Shang Dynasty and the Huang-He Valley

### Materials Needed

- Large sheet of paper or whiteboard
- Pencils and markers (especially blue, yellow, brown, and green)
- Playdough in various colors (blue, yellow, green, brown are essential)
- Notebook or paper for writing

### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Locate the Huang-He (Yellow River) on a simple map of China.
- Explain why the river was important for the start of Chinese civilization.
- Describe at least three key features of a settlement in the Shang Dynasty.

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## Lesson Plan

### 1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Hook:** "Hey Vienna, think about some of the biggest cities in the world today, like London, Paris, or New York. What do they all have near them? (Answer: A major river). Why do you think so many ancient civilizations and modern cities started right next to a river? Let's brainstorm some ideas." (Guide discussion towards water for drinking, farming, travel, etc.)
- **Connecting to China:** "That's exactly what happened in ancient China! Their civilization began along a very special and powerful river. Today, we're going to travel back in time over 3,000 years to the Shang Dynasty and build a model of where they lived and learn why this river was both a gift and a challenge."
- **Stating Objectives:** "Our goal today is to be able to find the Huang-He river valley, understand its importance, and describe what a Shang Dynasty village might have looked like."

### 2. Body: Content & Practice (30-35 minutes)

This part follows an 'I do, We do, You do' model to build your understanding step-by-step.

#### Part A: I Do - Modeling the Geography (10 mins)

- The educator will take a large piece of paper or a whiteboard. "First, let's get our bearings. I'm going to draw a very simple outline of China." (Draws a basic shape).
- "Now, I'll draw the most important river for our story. This is the Huang-He, which means 'Yellow River'." (Draws a winding river through the northern part of the drawing).
- "It gets its name from a special, yellow, dusty soil called 'loess'. When the river floods, it leaves this soil behind, which is amazing for growing crops. Think of it like a natural fertilizer. But, the floods could also be huge and destructive. That's why the river was sometimes called 'China's Sorrow'."
- "The Shang people were one of the first groups to figure out how to live and thrive here. They

learned to grow food in the fertile soil and built cities."

### Part B: We Do - Building the Valley Together (10 mins)

- "Okay, Vienna, now it's our turn to build this valley. Let's use this paper as our land."
- **Guide the creation of a shared model:**
  - "Take the blue playdough and let's create the path of the Huang-He river across the paper."
  - "Now, let's use yellow playdough or a yellow marker. How can we show the 'loess' soil that the river deposits?" (Sprinkle tiny bits of yellow playdough or color the area right next to the river).
  - "If the soil is so good for farming, what should we put next to the yellow loess? Let's use green playdough to make some farm fields."
  - "The Shang Dynasty built walled cities to protect themselves. Let's use brown playdough to build a wall for a small settlement near our farms. Why would they need a wall?" (Guide towards protection from floods and enemies).
- As you build together, discuss the purpose of each element. This is a great time for questions and answers.

### Part C: You Do - Create a Shang Settlement (10-15 mins)

- **The Challenge:** "Now you get to be the city planner! On your own sheet of paper, use the playdough and markers to create your own map of a Shang Dynasty settlement in the Huang-He Valley."
- **Instructions:** "Your map needs to show that you understand what life was like back then. Make sure you include and label these three things:"
  1. The Huang-He (Yellow River).
  2. Farmland (showing it's near the river).
  3. A walled settlement or village.
- **Success Criteria:** You'll know you've done a great job when you can point to each part of your map and explain why it's there and why it was important to the Shang people.

### 3. Conclusion (10 minutes)

- **Show and Tell (Summative Assessment):** "Vienna, present your map to me! Tell me the story of your settlement. Where is it located and why? What are the most important features you included? How do your people use the river?"
- **Recap:** "Awesome job! So, let's quickly review. What was the name of the river where Chinese civilization began? (Huang-He). What was one 'gift' it gave the people? (Fertile soil/loess). What was one 'challenge' or reason it was called 'China's Sorrow'? (Destructive floods). And which early dynasty did we learn about today? (The Shang Dynasty)."
- **Reflection:** "Thinking about everything you learned, if you were a Shang farmer, what do you think would be your biggest worry each year?"

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## Assessment

- **Formative (During the lesson):** Observing Vienna's responses during the initial discussion and her participation and understanding while building the "We Do" model.
- **Summative (End of lesson):** Vienna's completed playdough map and her verbal explanation of its key features. This directly shows if she can locate and describe the origins of the civilization as per the objective.

## Differentiation & Extension

- **For Scaffolding (If extra support is needed):** Provide a pre-drawn outline of the river on the paper. Use a checklist for the "You Do" activity so she can check off each required element as she adds it.
- **For Extension (To go deeper):** Challenge Vienna to add more advanced features to her map, such as a palace for the king, a workshop for bronze-making (the Shang were famous for this!), or small, flat playdough rectangles to represent 'oracle bones' used for predicting the future. She could also write a short paragraph from the perspective of a child living in her settlement.