**MIDDLE EAST 2 - Section One - Geography**

* There are three peninsulas in the area – Arabian, Anatolia, & Sinai.
* Peninsula – a piece of land surrounded by water on three sides.
* The Sinai Peninsula is separated from Africa by the Suez Canal, which was dug in 1868.
* A large body of water called the Dead Sea is one of the saltiest bodies of water on Earth
* Salt and other minerals have collected in it because it has no rivers running through it to make the water fresh
* The Dead Sea is more than a thousand feet below sea level.
* Nothing but bacteria lives here.
* This is important to know because different resources may call this region by either name
* Middle East = Southwest Asia = Middle East
* Most of the Arabian Peninsula is made up of the Arabian Desert
* An area in the south called the Empty Quarter is the largest sand desert in the world.
* Water is very hard to find and is very valuable.
* The little water in the desert is found at oases.
* Oases – a place in a desert where water is available near the surface.
* The most fertile land in the Middle East is found along the Tigris and Euphrates River in modern Iraq.
* The Middle East is home to some of the world’s earliest civilizations.
* Europe and Asia meet at Istanbul, Turkey, which is located on both sides of the Bosporus strait.
* Strait – a narrow channel connecting two bodies of water
* The rivers of Southwest Asia (Middle East) are important because much of this region of the world is dry and desert or semi-desert.
* One of the longest rivers in the region is the Euphrates River, which begins in Turkey, and flows through Syria and Iraq.
  + In southern Iraq, the Euphrates River joins with the Tigers River to form one waterway called the Shaat al-Arab, which then flows along the border between Kuwait and Iran before emptying into the Persian Gulf.
* Tigris River
  + The Tigris River begins in the mountains of Turkey and flows south through Iraq.
  + It joins the Euphrates in southern Iraq.
* These two rivers provide water for both drinking and farming.
* The countries that share these rivers have had problems over how the water will be shared among them.
* Persian Gulf
  + The Persian Gulf is one of the main ways oil is shipped from the rich fields of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other countries that line its shores.
  + All of the countries that produce oil in that region depend on the Persian Gulf as a shipping route.
  + Any ships coming out of or into the Persian Gulf must navigate through the very narrow Strait of Hormuz, located at one end of the Persian Gulf.
  + This waterway connects the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.
* Suez Canal
  + Once in the Arabian Sea, ships can sail east into the Red Sea, which is bordered by Saudi Arabia to the east and Egypt to the west.
  + At the northern end of the Red Sea, ships can enter the man-made Suez Canal, which will allow then to get to the Mediterranean Sea without having to sail all around the continent of Africa.
* Jordan River
  + The Jordan River is a much smaller river than either the Tigris or the Euphrates, but it is still very important.
  + The waters that form the Jordan River began in the mountains of Lebanon and Syria and flow down into the Hula Valley in northern Israel before reaching the Sea of Galilee.
  + The Jordan River begins at the southern end of the Sea of Galilee and flows south until it reaches the Dead Sea.
  + This river is one of the main sources of water for Israel, Jordan, parts of Syria, and many of those living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
* The Dead Sea
  + Because so much water is taken out of the Jordan River by the different groups that depend on it, less and less water reaches the Dead Sea.
  + The Dead Sea has no outlets.
  + Water that flows in stays there and because so much evaporates in the desert air, the water remaining is high in salts and other chemicals.
  + There are no fish living in the Dead Sea, and that is the reason for its name.
* The Jordan River is also important because it is the political boundary between Israel and the West Bank, and Jordan.
* Deserts
  + The Middle East has a number of very large deserts areas: the Syrian Desert shared between Syria and Iraq, and the Rub al-Khali, or “empty Quarter,” in southern Saudi Arabia.
  + These deserts have historically provided the Middle East with natural barriers against invasion.
  + They have also led to a way of life that developed around the need to survive in such harsh surroundings.
  + Some people have always managed to live in and around the desert, living in tent camps and surviving as sheep and camel herders and making a living by trading animals and handmade goods with those who lived in the towns on the desert’s edge.
  + These people are known as “Bedouins,” or desert nomads, and their way of life is gradually disappearing.
* Climate
  + The countries of the Middle East generally have a very hot and dry climate.
  + The climate is the type of weather a region has over a very long period.
  + Four large oceans or bodies of water, the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Arabian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean border the Middle East.
  + Even so, mountain ranges close to many of the coastal areas block rains coming from these bodies of water and the result is that much of the interior of this region is desert.
* Because there are coastal areas as well as a number of large rivers, other parts of this region have enough water to support agriculture and towns and cities of significant size.
* Afghanistan
  + The country of Afghanistan is located at the far eastern edge of the Middle East.
  + This country is landlocked, which means it has no seacoast.
  + Afghanistan is very mountainous, and the people who live there are divided into a number of different ethnic groups or tribes.
* Iran
  + Iran, to the west of Afghanistan, is one of the largest countries in the Middle East.
  + Iran is mountainous as, but this country has long sea coasts and is able to use both the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea.
  + Iran uses the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to transport its exports to the Arabian Sea and then on to many different world markets.
* Iraq
  + Just to the west of Iran is the country of Iraq.
  + Iraq has the added advantage of having two of the largest rivers in the region, the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, flowing through its territory.
* Saudi Arabia
  + The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest country of the Arabian Peninsula.
  + The Persian Gulf lies to the northwest of the country and the Red Sea is to its west.
* Turkey
  + Turkey is located to the north and west of Iraq.
  + Turkey shares a border with Iraq, Syria, and Iran.
  + Turkey is also the country in which the Euphrates and the Tigris begins.
  + Turkey has built a number of dams in recent years to try saving water from these two rivers for use by Turkish farms, villagers, and towns.
* Israel
  + Israel was created by the United Nations in 1948 as a homeland for the Jewish people of the world.
  + The country of Israel is bound by the Gaza Strip along the southern coast and the West Bank to the east.
  + The Jordan River forms the boundary between the West Bank and the country Jordan.

**Section 2 – Resources & Cultures of the Middle East - Water**

* Water is a natural resource that is distributed unevenly in the Middle East.
* Some countries, like Turkey and Iraq, have major rivers that provide enough drinking water for farming communities.
* These two countries share the Tigris and Euphrates river systems.
* Israel, Syria, and Jordan share the Jordan River.
* Others, like Saudi Arabia, have almost no water.
* They are mostly made up of desert.
* Others, like Iran, have areas with access to rivers and areas that are made up of deserts.
* Because water is in short supply in so many parts of Southwest Asia, irrigation has been necessary for those who want to farm and raise animals for market.

Irrigation

* Many types of irrigation can be found in Southwest Asia farmers struggle to bring water to their fields from local rivers and from underground aquifers (layers of underground rock where water runoff from rains and streams is trapped.)
* Some farmers use water from wells that tap into fossil water (water that has been underground for centuries).
* Rains and steams do not replace this water, and once it is used, is gone forever.
* Farmers in very rural areas still use methods used by their ancestors to irrigate their fields, including water wheels, irrigation ditches and canals, and animal power to lift water from underground wells.
* Farmers in countries with more technology use modern irrigation techniques.
* Israel and Saudi Arabia have developed systems of drip irrigation using computers that measure out how much water each plant receives.
* There has also been a lot of work done to learn how to take water from the ocean and desalinate it to use for drinking and irrigation.
* Desalination (the process of removing salt and other chemicals from seawater) is very expensiveand requires complex technology.

Water Problems

* As countries in the Middle East have worked to modernize their systems of agriculture, water pollution has been a growing problem.
* Increased demand for irrigation to expand farming has led to overuse of rivers and streams.
* Many farmers have begun to use chemical fertilizers, which have contaminated water supplies through runoff into these same rivers and streams.
* Constant planting and fertilizer use have led to the build-up of salt levels in soils, eventually making it impossible to farm in those areas.
* In the rush to develop industry, many cities and towns have grown rapidly, but the people living there have been slow to create effective ways to manage garbage and treat sewage.
* Access to water is also a source of conflict, especially among countries that share a river system.
* Dams built along a river to create lakes for irrigation and the production of hydroelectric power (electricity produced from the energy of running water) in one country reduce the amount of water available to other countries located further downstream.

**Oil in the Middle East**

* Two of the most important natural resources found in Southwest Asia are natural gas and oil.
* These two resources bring wealth into the region because they are needed for much of the world’s economy.
* Over half of the world’s known oil reserves are found in this part of the world.
* This has made some of these countries extremely rich and has led them to have a lot of control over the global economy.
* OPEC
* In the 1960s, several of these Southwest Asian countries joined with other oil-rich countries around the world to create the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in order to have more control over the price of oil on the world market.
* OPEC has called for an embargo, or a slow-down or temporary halt, to oil supplies at different times in the past to get political and economic agreements from the other countries in the world.
* While some countries in the Middle East have grown very rich due to their oil production, others have struggled to help their populations make a decent living.

Who has the oil?

* The Middle Eastern nations with the greatest reserves of natural gas and oil are Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait.
* Some other countries have smaller reserves, especially those found around the Persian Gulf.
* These countries have enjoyed tremendous growth in national wealth and an improved standard of living in the past fifty years.
* Those countries without oil reserves have a much harder time improving living conditions for their populations.
* This difference in wealth in some of the Middle East has led to conflicts among the nations.

Farming

* Many people in the Middle East practice subsistence agriculture, growing small amounts of crops, to take care of their local needs.
* Because the climate is so dry, agriculture nearly always depends on irrigation, directing water from small rivers and streams to the farmers’ fields.
* There is some commercial agriculture (growing crops for industrial markets), but even that is limited by lack of water.