



# World History (High School) Lesson 1

# The Early Americas

## Lesson 1



### MAIN IDEAS

1. The geography of the Americas is varied, with a wide range of landforms.
2. The first people to arrive in the Americas were hunter-gatherers.
3. The development of farming led to early settlements in the Americas.

## Key Terms and People

**Mesoamerica** region that includes the southern part of what is now Mexico and parts of the northern countries of Central America

**maize** corn

## Lesson Summary

### GEOGRAPHY OF THE AMERICAS

The Americas are made up of two continents, North America and South America. These continents have a wide range of landforms. North America has high mountains, desert plateaus, grassy plains, and forests.

Historians call the cultural region in the southern part of North America **Mesoamerica**. Mesoamerica reached from the middle of modern-day Mexico south into Central America. The region's many rain forests and rivers created fertile farmland. The first farmers in the Americas domesticated plants there.

The Andes Mountains run along the western side of South America. Narrow desert runs along the edge of fishing waters in the Pacific Ocean. East of the Andes lies a region with a hot rain forest and a mighty river. The region, the river, and the rain forest all share the same name—Amazon.

### THE FIRST PEOPLE ARRIVE

No one is sure how people first arrived in the Americas. Some scientists believe they came between 12,000 and 14,000 years ago by walking over a strip of land connecting Asia to North America. Other historians think the first Americans arrived by sea.

**Where was the region of Mesoamerica located?**

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**What three geographic elements share the name Amazon?**

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**Underline two ways that scientists think people might have come to the Americas.**

Lesson 1, *continued*

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The earliest people were hunter-gatherers. These people survived on wild buffalo and other animals, as well as fruits, nuts, and wild grains. They moved often, going where food was most plentiful. Some people eventually settled along the coastal areas. They fished and planted different types of seeds.

**FARMING AND SETTLEMENT**

The experiments with seeds led to farming. This allowed people to live in one place permanently. The first farming settlements were in Mesoamerica. By 3500 BCE, Mesoamericans were growing **maize**, or corn. Later they learned to grow squash and beans. South Americans in the Andes started growing potatoes. By about 2000 BCE, they were also growing maize and beans. Once people settled, the population grew. Societies began to develop religion, art, and trade opportunities.

Historians believe that the Olmec (OHL-mek) were the first Mesoamericans to live in villages. Some Olmec lived in bigger towns, which were the centers of government and religion. They developed a large trading network. Archaeological evidence suggests the Olmec may have created the first written language in the Americas and designed a calendar. The Chavín was the first major civilization in South America. Its city was also a center for areas of life like religion and trade. The Chavín wove textiles, carved monuments, and created pottery shaped like animals.

**When did the South Americans start growing maize and beans?**  
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**What were some accomplishments of the Olmec and the Chavin?**  
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**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Sequence** Draw a series of sketches showing how the first human civilization developed in the Americas. Start with the two theories of how humans first arrived to the Americas, and end with the establishment of the Olmec and Chavín civilizations.

**DIRECTIONS** Write a word or descriptive phrase to describe each term.

1. Mesoamerica \_\_\_\_\_

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2. maize \_\_\_\_\_

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Amazon	Chavín	Mesoamerica	North America
Olmec	pottery	South America	textiles

**DIRECTIONS** Answer each question by writing a sentence that contains at least one word from the word bank. Not all words are used.

1. Where are the Amazon region, river, and rain forest all located?

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2. Which civilization lived in villages or bigger towns that were centers of government and religion?

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3. What did the Chavín create that was shaped like animals?

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