Comparing Civilizations
Lesson Plan

Subject Areas: Social Studies

Grade Levels: The lesson can be adapted for grades 4–12 (ages 9–18).

Time: At least two 50-minute class periods; time outside of class as necessary

Lesson Objectives:
Students will:
- Conduct research to better understand a past civilization.
- Analyze data they gather about the civilization and compare it to others with the aid of dynamic, visual plots (graphs).
- Explain their findings in writing and visual slide shows.

Standards:
National Council for the Social Studies Standards\(^1\):
The Ten Themes of Social Studies

**Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change**
- Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

**Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments**
- Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Common Core State Standards\(^2\):
Common Core State Standards for Mathematics:

**Mathematical Practices**
- Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
- Use appropriate tools strategically.

**Measurement and Data**
- Represent and interpret data.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing:

**Standard 6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

**Standard 7.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
Overview:
How do civilizations from Asia compare to those from the Americas, Europe, and/or the Middle East? Which hallmarks of a sophisticated society are present in multiple civilizations and regions? What factors might have accounted for the rise and fall of civilizations? In this lesson, students will use InspireData’s Civilizations database to guide them as they research a variety of civilizations, and analyze and compare various data fields. For example, axis plots, pie plots, and stack plots will be used to better understand the differences and common threads between civilizations throughout history and around the globe. Students will explain their findings in annotated slide shows.

Preparation:
• This lesson requires the InspireData® software application published by Inspiration Software, Inc. You can download a 30-day trial at http://www.inspiration.com/InspireData.
• Arrange access to library resources and/or the Internet for student research.

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Lesson:

1. Before beginning the lesson, students should be familiar with the locations of important world regions such as the Middle East, Mesoamerica, South America, East Asia, South Asia, and Europe. Consider spending a few minutes having students point out regions that you specify on a world map. For each of these areas of the world, ask students to name an ancient or modern civilization found in the region. If time allows, have students brainstorm what they already know about these civilizations.

2. Demonstrate how to open
   *InspireData’s *Civilizations* database:
   **InspireData Starter>Databases>
   Social Studies>Civilizations.**

3. Briefly explain the fields in the first table, allowing time for questions. Be sure students understand the systems used to designate time, such as B.C. and A.D., or alternatively, B.C.E. and C.E. Explain that negative dates refer to B.C.E. and positive dates refer to C.E. Tell students that they will be choosing one of the civilizations—or an entirely different one—to research more in-depth.
4. Click on the Characteristics (Database Template, Partially Completed) tab and explain that this is where students will record data about the characteristics of the civilizations they research. Data in the two tables can be linked together by choosing the Civilization field on either table in the database and changing the field format to Link. This will allow data from the two tables to be used on the same plots. For example, agricultural methods could be compared by region.

5. Data from four of the civilizations from the Americas has already been collected in the second table, so it is ready to be analyzed in Plot View. However, first students should choose a different civilization to research and add the data just like that which is already filled in.

6. Divide students into groups of two to four and have them decide which civilization they are most interested in researching. Explain that if students have different interests, they can form smaller groups or work independently. They will use the database template to record data about the characteristics of the civilization, including agricultural methods, crops, types of tools, type of religion, and other features of the civilization, such as advanced architecture, a writing system, etc. As they learn about the civilization, students have several options for entering data:
   • Fill in the blank areas of the table for the civilizations already listed but not complete.
   • Add a new record to the database for a civilization not already listed.
   • Use the Survey or e-Survey tools.

   Note: The class could also use the same e-Survey so that every student would have access to the data gathered about all of the civilizations. For more information, refer to the “Learn to Use Surveys” handout:
   Help>Documentation>Handouts>Learn to Use Surveys.
7. Once student groups have entered the data for the civilizations, tell them that they can delete the records of civilizations in the Characteristics tab for which there is no data.

8. Demonstrate how to switch to Plot View to analyze the data and compare and contrast the characteristics of the civilizations. Encourage students to look for relationships and correlations by manipulating different variables and experimenting with different plot types using the plot type buttons on the Toolbar. Students may use custom icons, the Color by Field feature, or the Label feature to help emphasize connections and contrast among the data.

9. Explain that students will be creating slides with notes that describe the data and what they learned in their research. Demonstrate how to use the Notes area to record an analysis for each plot. Click on in the lower right to open the area. Be sure to show students how to capture a slide for each plot, including their notes, by clicking the Slide Sorter button to open the Slide Sorter and then the Capture Slide button.
10. Ask each group to create at least six slides with written analyses. Tell students that the quality of their writing is important in addition to their analysis of the data, so they should write in complete sentences and be as clear as possible. Emphasize with students that for each plot they should:

- Add a title (Plot menu>Plot Title…).
- Record an analysis in the Notes area.
- Add statistics such as mean, median, and percent as appropriate.
- Capture a slide.

11. If time allows, have student groups present their work to the class in a slide show and discuss their findings. Ask individual students or student groups to explain which plot or plots they found most interesting and describe the finding(s) that plot supports.
12. Conclude the lesson with a class discussion and review of the data analysis. What insights have they gained from plotting the data? Do shared characteristics appear among the civilizations? If so, what might explain that? How might varying geographic and climatic conditions explain the similarities and differences?

Adaptations/Extensions:

- Before beginning the research and data analysis process in InspireData, have students brainstorm what they already know about one of the civilizations and create an Inspiration® or Kidspiration® diagram.
- After examining the database, have students brainstorm additional fields that could be researched, such as types of housing used by people in the civilizations or common occupations.
- After completing the InspireData project, ask students to compare how life during one of the civilizations researched was similar to and different from life today.
- Begin the lesson by showing a clip from a film depicting life in one of the civilizations to be studied. What does the clip reveal about life during that time period in that part of the world? How was life similar to and different from life today or in another civilization or time period? How did the filmmakers know what life was like then, and how reliable is their interpretation?
- Students may use Inspiration® or Kidspiration® to create a diagram that summarizes what they learned using the database and in their other research.
- Refer students to the “Learn to Use” handouts for help with plotting and analysis (Help>Documentation>Handouts). You may want to print one or more sets of handouts to make them available for students.
- For younger students, consider analyzing more of the data as a whole class, at least until students understand the process. The entire lesson could also be conducted as a class.
