

Exercise A: Reading

NEW-FANGLED FARMING

THIS SPECIAL REPORT, first printed in 8,400 BC, broke the hottest news story of recent times. In it, our Middle East reporter describes a new way of gathering food that’s been developed there – called farming.

It is the Neolithic period, ‘late stone-age’, and I’d heard a rumor that some people in Syria were experimenting with a new way of producing food, and that instead of following the herds like the rest of us, they were living in one place! I just had to investigate this behavior.

When I arrived, one of the women offered to show me around. She took me to an area where hundreds of tall plants were growing in clusters. I recognized them as rye, wheat and barley, but I had never seen so many growing this close together before. Usually you just find one or two small clumps at a time. I asked my guide to tell me how these big clusters of plants had come about.

SEEDS OF SUCCESS

Apparently some years ago, the climate in this region became extremely dry. Reliable sources of water were harder and harder to find, so many people couldn’t roam as widely as they once had. Instead they were forced to remain close to rivers.

Because they could no longer go far in search of food, they started to build up a store of grains to last them through the winter months. Then, one spring, they noticed how some grains that had been dropped on the ground had sprouted.

As an experiment, they tried spilling more seeds, this time on land they had cleared by gathering wild grain the previous year. It took several attempts, but at last they managed to grow their own plants. Now they scatter grain in designated fields each spring. My guide said this process is called ‘CULTIVATION’.

When the seed-heads become ripe, they are cut off using curved, flint bladed knives. The grain is then separated from the husks and spread out to dry in the sun, before being stored in baskets.

TAMING THE WILD BEAST

More astoundingly my guide showed me how they captured wild animals such as sheep, pigs, cows, goats and horses; and kept them in an area surrounded by walls of wood and rock. ‘DOMESTICATION’ was the word she used. Since these animals couldn’t climb the walls, they could provide a steady supply of meat, fat and hides for the village.

Additionally, I saw some of the cows being attached to a large hooked piece of wood, a ‘plow’ my guide called it, and as they were guided forward, it would create a shallow trench in the land. This ingenious idea saves the farmers a LOT of energy and time when it comes to digging holes for the seeds.

Where water wasn’t reaching the plants properly, I witnessed the cows being used to help dig deeper trenches from the river and around the field. This trench then filled with water and helps the plants grow. My guide called it ‘IRRIGATION’.

AGRARIAN REVOLUTION

I was astounded by all that I had seen. The more I thought about it, the more this farming (‘AGRICULTURE’) idea made sense. It could change everything! Just think, we could settle in one place and grow our own food plants, as the people do here. Then we wouldn’t have to spend all those long autumn days scouring the land for enough wild food to last through the winter. And whenever animals are scarce and the hunting poor, there will still be a supply of food at home.

Source: Stone-age news by Fiona Macdonald
Exercise B: Comprehension

1. Give a definition for the following terms;
   - Domestication - ____________________________
   - Irrigation – ____________________________
   - Cultivation - ____________________________
   - Neolithic - ____________________________
   - Agriculture - ____________________________

2. What are some of the advantages of this new method of living?
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   ____________________________
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3. What are some of the disadvantages of this new method of living?
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4. Write your own response to ‘Was the Agrarian Revolution a turning point in human evolution?’ You can agree or disagree but remember to back up your opinion with facts.
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Exercise C: Cloze

Read the text and fill in the blanks using the words in the **WORD BOX**.

When ______ came on the scene, it allowed people to give up the ________ life and settle in one location. People often congregated around a reliable source of food, such as a ________ with spawning salmon. These areas were some of the first that were ________. It takes a lot of work to prepare the soil for planting and tend crops. Along with the extra work comes a ________ of food that can provide for larger populations. Cities developed which ________ on the growing of various foods to supply them with energy.

Farmers did not just grow plants for ________. Agricultural societies developed ________ animals as a ready source of meat. Land that was in grass could be used to grow sheep for wool and meat. People were no longer reliant on an unsteady supply of wild animals for high-quality food. These domesticated animals also provided milk and eggs, good sources of ________. The animal wastes from the farms were applied to the fields as ________ to increase yields long before people understood the scientific reasons behind the use of it.
5. What characteristics of agriculture does the cartoon promote?

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6. Imagine you are from a Hunter-Gatherer group. Would this source change your mind? Explain.

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