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| Name: |  | Date: |  |

## Purpose

Comparison is a key process that historians use to help them better understand the past. While comparing and contrasting is something that you’ve likely engaged in prior to this course, in this activity you’re introduced to a systematic way of conducting historical comparison. The ultimate goal is for you to be able to describe and explain the relevant similarities and differences between specific historical developments and processes, as well as be able to explain the relative historical significance of similarities and differences between the topics of study. In addition, you’ll learn to use the Comparison Tool (which you’ll see an example of in this activity’s worksheet) to conduct and generate historical comparisons.

## Process

1. Although comparing and contrasting may sound simple, it actually gets really complicated when what you’re comparing is multidimensional, as is the case with historical topics. Because comparison is harder than it looks, your teacher will show you a tool you can use to conduct historical comparisons using the frames you learned about earlier in this unit.
2. Review the questions associated with each of the frames in Part 1: Identifying and Describing chart of the Comparison – Life in the Neolithic and Today worksheet. The questions in the left-hand column of the worksheet chart have been selected because they are most relevant to this particular comparison. As this is the first comparison activity of the course, you’ll complete this one together as a class. Your teacher will guide you through the process of using these questions to fill in the columns in the top few rows of the worksheet.
3. Before you read the synopsis about life in the Neolithic (c. 10,000 BCE to 4500 BCE), decide which period you’d rather live in—the Neolithic or today. Be sure to explain your choice.
4. Read the synopsis of life in the Neolithic. This is a general story of what life was like during this time period; the specifics would change depending on your geographic location and the exact time period, such as in the early, middle, or late Neolithic.
5. As a class, work to fill out the first part of the worksheet using the synopsis for the Neolithic. After this, do the same thing to complete the sections for life today, using your own knowledge of today to fill out those columns. Remember that *community* focuses on how people organize into groups, usually with shared values or beliefs as well as being inhabitants of the same region or nation. *Production and distribution* refers to how people make goods and get them into the hands of other people. For example, do they make goods at home or in a factory? Do they travel to markets to sell these goods or do they trade with neighbors? *Networks* is about how people connect with others, sometimes through work-related connections or through trade or, in the twenty- first century, via social media and the Internet.
6. Once you’ve filled out the Today section with your class, discuss the following questions:

* How are these stories similar?
* How are they different?
* What’s important about those similarities and differences?
* Would you change the answer you gave at the start of this activity about which period you’d rather live in? Be prepared to share your reasoning with the class.

1. Work in small groups to identify similarities and differences between life in the Neolithic and today. You’ll then add these to the similarities and differences sections in the Comparison Tool.
2. Finally, you’ll come back together as a class to share the similarities and differences your groups came up with.
3. Your teacher may also discuss how to use these similarities and differences to develop two thesis statements, one about the similarities between the Neolithic and today, and another about the differences between the Neolithic and today. Don’t worry—if your teacher wants you to do this extension, they’ll walk you through the definition of a thesis statement and how to create a thesis statement that answers a comparison prompt.

## LIFE IN THE NEOLITHIC AND TODAY

Note that this is a general story of what life would have been like in the Neolithic; specifics would change depending on your geographic region and whether you lived in the early, middle, or late Neolithic.

***Synopsis of Life in the Neolithic—A General Overview***

The Neolithic was the time period when many communities made the transition from foraging to farming. However, most people who lived during this time would have continued to supplement their food by foraging, as farming was a relatively recent phenomenon. Yet, as certain regions made the transition

to farming, these communities would have been more settled—they would have been living in one area rather than moving around to follow their food sources. The first communities to make this transition were those located in the Fertile Crescent (Mesopotamia); the Nile River Valley (Egypt); the Huang He River Valley (China); the Indus River Valley (Pakistan); and in Norte Chico (Peru). These early farming communities would also hunt, fish, and gather some of their food.

The peoples who made this transition to farming built more permanent structures in which to live. Some communities built larger structures to use as temples, others to store food, and some to house important people in the society, such as rulers. Specialization of labor emerged as some members of the community began to do jobs other than farming and became potters, builders, priests, merchants, scribes, and soldiers. Social hierarchies and gender divisions also emerged, with some members of the community acquiring more wealth and power than others. While men and women both had to work in order to produce food or generate income for their families, gender differences were beginning to become more rigid, with men generally having more power than women.

These communities would have been linked through local networks of exchange as well as through ties based on the community and its beliefs, such as coming together for religious ceremonies. Larger regional networks were also becoming thicker as members of one community became connected to societies outside of their own. The goods produced in one community were exchanged for items that they could not produce or acquire on their own. Transactions between communities, as well as those within the community, such as the production and distribution of grain and the collection of taxes, were recorded through the use of early writing systems. Only a small percentage of the population was literate and trained to create these written records. Life for most people was still very local, as most did not travel outside of their own society. And even though people began doing other jobs, the vast majority of people were farmers. There were, however, some communities that continued to be foragers and pastoralists with nomadic or seminomadic lifestyles. Farming communities, foragers, and pastoralists also interacted with each other, sharing goods, ideas, and information.

## Part 1: Identifying and Describing

1. Write the topic of comparison at the top of the chart, and then add the cases you’re comparing and their associated time periods.
2. Respond to the questions in the Part 1 chart for each case you’re comparing. Use the resources provided for this comparison.
3. After responding to the questions for each case, identify and describe the similarities and differences between these cases.

## Part 2: Analyzing

1. If you were going to write two essays about the similarities and/or differences you’ve identified for this topic, what are two thesis statements you might use? Write one thesis statement about similarities and one about differences in spaces provided.
2. If required, use your thesis statements to craft a response to the comparison prompt for this activity.

## Topic of Comparison

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| --- |
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## Part 1: Identifying and Describing

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Cases You’re Comparing |  |  |
| Time Period |  |  |
| Location |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **P&D**  How were goods produced and distributed in each of these periods of time? |  | **Similarities** |  |
|  |
| **Differences** |
|  |
| **Community**  What types of networks were people members of in each of these periods of time? |  | **Similarities** |  |
|  |
| **Differences** |
|  |
| **Belief systems**  How were communities structured in each of these time periods? |  | **Similarities** |  |
|  |
| **Differences** |
|  |

## Part 2: Analyzing

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis Statement 1: Similarities |  |
| Thesis Statement 2: Differences |  |
| Response |  |