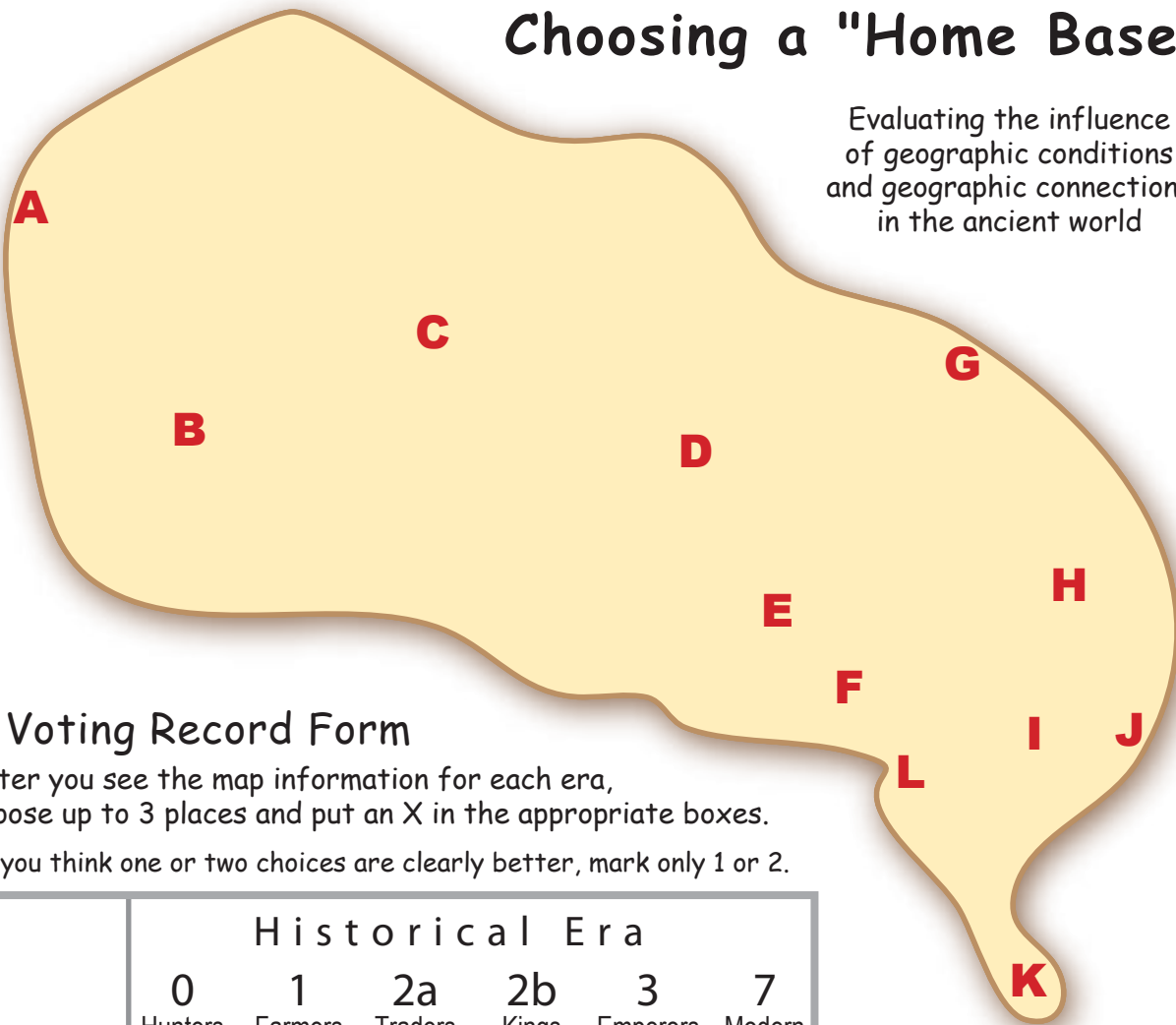


# Choosing a "Home Base"

Evaluating the influence of geographic conditions and geographic connections in the ancient world



## Voting Record Form

After you see the map information for each era, choose up to 3 places and put an X in the appropriate boxes.

If you think one or two choices are clearly better, mark only 1 or 2.

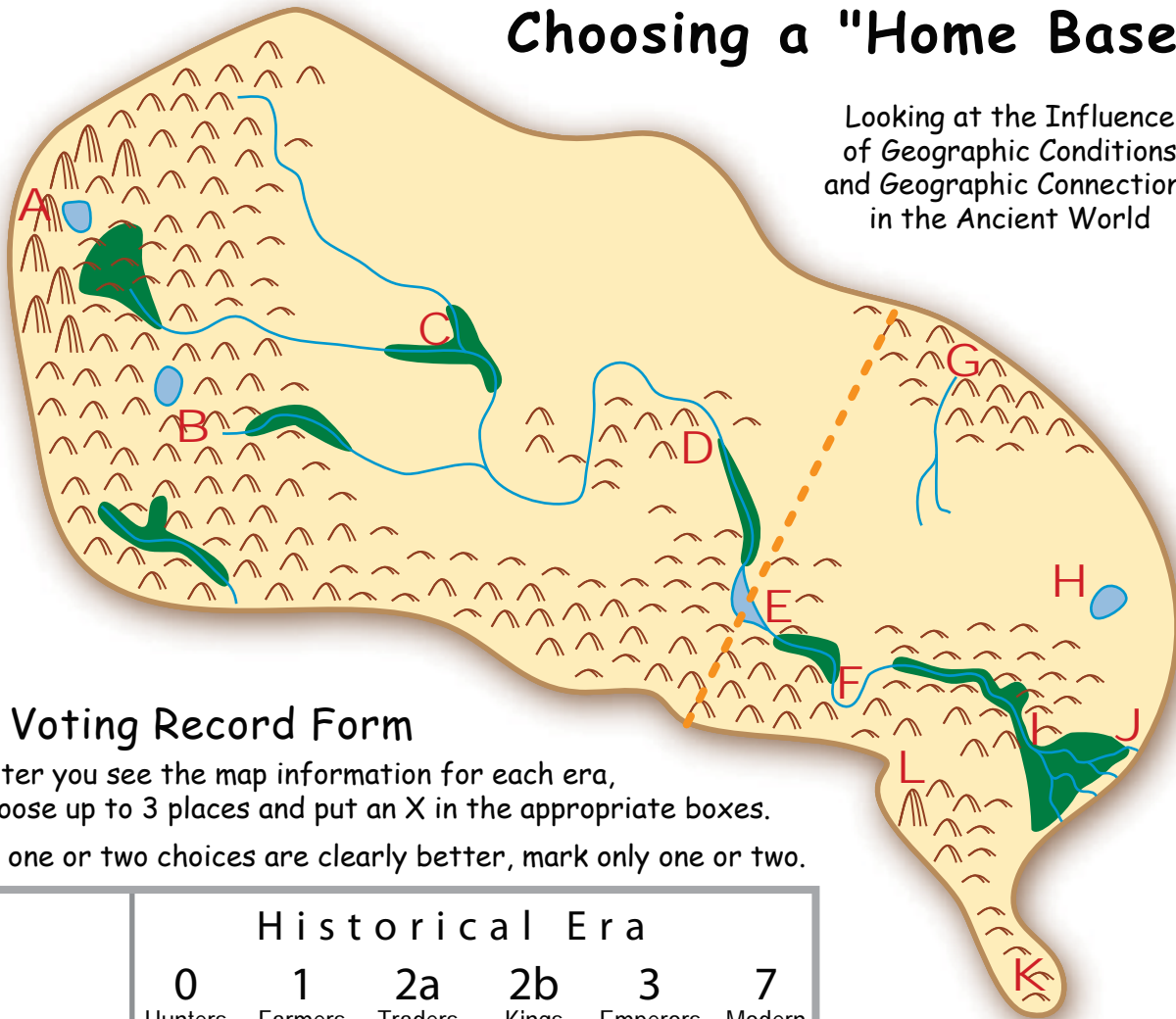
Place	Historical Era					
	0 Hunters	1 Farmers	2a Traders	2b Kings	3 Emperors	7 Modern
A						
B						
C						
D						
E						
F						
G						
H						
I						
J						
K						
L						

You can also make notes directly on the map as the presentation gives you information about this area.

For example, you might want to mark the locations of deserts when the presentation shows where they are.

# Choosing a "Home Base"

Looking at the Influence of Geographic Conditions and Geographic Connections in the Ancient World

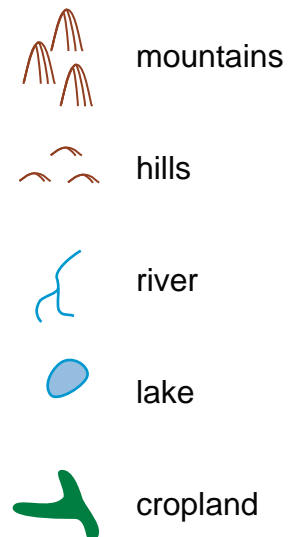


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## TEACHER NOTES - LOCATIONS OF ANCIENT CAPITALS

**Overview.** This lesson uses a computer presentation to guide a whole-class decision-making simulation. The 12 places on the map are all real places – see the next page for background details. The era-based “script” on this page has modern names in parentheses for your reference, but the activity works MUCH better if you use generic phrases like “western edge” or “river junction” and do NOT mention the modern names until the debriefing (when the map is rotated to reveal the modern relationships). The main goal is to diagnose students’ background and critical thinking process – so listen, praise good comments, and resist the temptation to try to “teach” facts and causal relationships now. Instead, often say things like “We’ll learn more about the effects of irrigation in November (trade in January, empires in March, etc.)”

**Learner outcomes.** The goal is to pique interest, and to suggest that social studies are about making decisions. The main factual message is that people viewed different locations as important at different times in history, for reasons that reflect the technology and the economic and social conditions of each era (GLCEs 6G221, 6G222, 6G414, 6G432; 7H125, 7W111, 7W121, 7W213, 7W316):

**Prehistory.** During this time, humans lived by hunting and gathering. Where did they want to live? places with mild climate and somewhat complex terrain (which can support a variety of plants and animals). Proximity to a lake or river added a source of water (and fish as a potential food). If students see only a black map with 12 letters on it, they might choose a central location or a protected one on a peninsula (K) or bay (L). When you add information about rainfall, they are likely to choose places A (Rift highlands), B (Ethiopia), and K (Canaan/Judea/Palestine) more frequently than other lettered places on the map. Knowledge of the locations of lakes and rivers may encourage votes for B or H – a teacher might try to elicit awareness that a lake in a desert (e.g., place H) might be salty (though this one was fresh back when the Sahara was rainier).

**Era 1: Beginnings.** During this era, people learned how to plant seeds. Farming was easier on river floodplains with soft, easy-to-work soil (especially before iron tools were invented). When they see a map of fertile soil, students are likely to choose places C (at the junction of two rivers) and I (at the head of the Nile Delta). NOTE: it is important to emphasize that hunters and gatherers (e.g. at places A, B, and K) could continue with that lifestyle, though their relative importance declined as farming regions gained population and wealth.

**Era 2a: Traders.** As population and wealth continued to grow, people invented boats, wagons, and other technologies for transporting goods and people. Locations along trade routes became important. Places near shallow river crossings, rapids, and waterfalls became especially useful, because roads would converge there, and boats had to portage around the obstacles. Students might choose places D (near the second cataract of the Nile) or E (Aswan, near the first cataract of the Nile). Along with C and I, both places became quite important at times during this era.

**Era 2b: Early cities.** People learned how to control river water and move it to fields when needed. Irrigation can produce a tremendous increase in food production per square mile of land. This productivity allowed some people to choose other occupations, including education, government, religion, and arts. Specialization also could help farmers with engineering, legal systems, and political infrastructures to support more effective irrigation systems. Places I (Memphis/ Giza) and F (Thebes/Karnak) were able to support rapid growth of urban populations – place C is also favorable, but less likely to grow, because it had less cropland and a more isolated location.

**Era 3: Empires.** The Nile Valley was a great place to start urban civilization, but potential growth was limited by the relatively small amount of fertile soil and irrigation water in the valley. Other places, like Persia and Rome, eventually became powerful empires that conquered Egypt and made it a colony. Place J (Alexandria) emerged during Greek and Roman times as a center of colonial trade and government – it was like a link between agricultural Egypt and the trade-based military empires around the Mediterranean Sea. (It’s Caesar and Cleopatra time!)

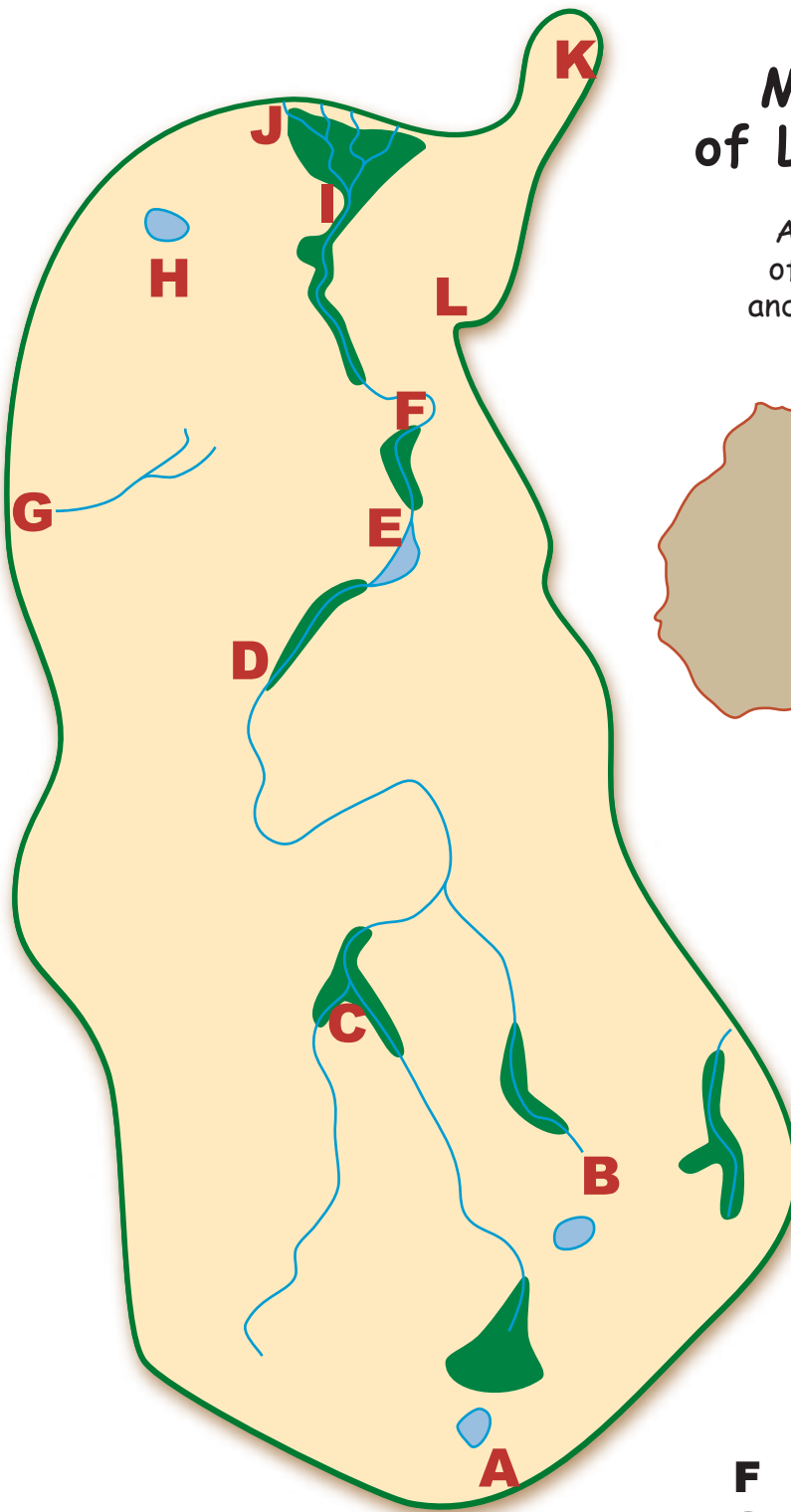
**Later eras:** When the British divided this region, places I and C became the capitals of newly independent Egypt and Sudan. I (Cairo) was located across the river from Memphis, the Old Kingdom capital of Egypt, and C (Khartoum) near a regional capital of ancient Meroe.

## **Background on the choices in the Locating a Capital simulation**

- A. Omo valley is one of the places where archaeologists have found fossil evidence for very early human settlement. Students often choose this site early in the simulation, because it has hills, lakes, and rain. In short, it is a good place for subsistence living by hunting and gathering, and humans found it!
- B. Highlands of Ethiopia are mentioned several times in the Bible. Humans lived here as long as in the Nile Valley. These highlands are remote and somewhat rugged, better for subsistence than for trying to amass great wealth and military power, although the capitals of several regional empires were located in this area at times when the Nile Valley was weak or divided.
- C. Khartoum is the capital of modern-day North Sudan. It has a modest amount of fertile land nearby, but its real advantage was a strategic location where the Blue Nile and White Nile join. As a result, it was always regionally important, but it is too far from major population centers to be a real power.
- D. The Second Cataract of the Nile is a major barrier to river travel, and therefore this place had some importance as a place to portage around the rapids and waterfalls. It had gold mines but little cropland, which made it a poor choice for even a regional capital throughout much of its history.
- E. The cataracts at Aswan were another barrier, but this area had more productive land and a larger population. In modern times, this is the site of one of the major hydroelectric dams in the world, which also diverts millions of gallons of water to irrigation projects on both sides of the Nile.
- F. Thebes (the Valley of the Kings) was well located for protection and local economic growth. At times, a capital in this area ruled the entire Nile Valley, but it could not really compete with any well-organized group in a more favorable location farther north, closer to the Mediterranean Sea.
- G. On the blank map, this place looks really out of the way, and in fact it was until trans-Sahara caravans became important thousands of years after the first Egyptian kings. To caravaners, a stopping place with water in the middle of the desert was really important, even if it could not grow very large.
- H. This out-of-the-way place looks better on the first map – a place in the desert with a lake nearby. Desert lakes, however, tend to accumulate salt and become unusable for drinking or even irrigation. The particular lake had fresh water thousands of years ago, but was already salty in Egyptian times.
- I. Many students are likely to choose this place at the head of the Nile Delta during Eras 1 and 2 (valley farming and river trade). Best known as Memphis, this was indeed the capital of several powerful Egyptian kingdoms. Not surprisingly, it is also the site of the Sphinx and Great Pyramids. Interestingly, Memphis, Tennessee, has a similar position in the Mississippi Delta – it is the last hilly area before the Mississippi River enters the flat floodplain that stretches to the Gulf of Mexico.
- J. The site of Alexandria was out of the way, flood-prone, and unimportant during much of Egyptian history. It gained strategic significance as a regional capital for the Greek and Roman empires. Merchant ships carried food, wine, cloth, tools, and salt across the Mediterranean Sea. Later, Alexandria became even more important as a center of learning and one of the ten largest cities in the world, although it was always part of another empire, never the capital of its own empire.
- K. The hills of Judea/Canaan/Samaria/Palestine are often called part of the “Fertile Crescent.” The land is actually hilly, rocky, and not particularly fertile, but it has more rain than most parts of this region. Some students may therefore choose it as a place to live in the early stages of the simulation. Later, of course, this area became a kind of battleground between many opposed pairs of political entities – Egypt vs. the Hittites, Egypt vs. Assyria; Greece and then Rome vs. Persia, European Crusaders vs. Sultans and Turks; and now Palestine vs. Israel and Sunni vs. Shi’a Muslims.
- L. The tip of Sinai, by contrast, is a barren desert, of little importance to land-based powers. People trying to use the seas, however, call this a strategic location. It is a “chokepoint” along the tanker-ship route from the oilfields of Southwest Asia through the Suez Canal to the oil-hungry cities of Europe.

## Modern Names of Location Options

Assessing the Influence of Geographic Conditions and Geographic Connections



- A** Omo Valley hominid fossil site
- B** highlands of Ethiopia
- C** Khartoum, capital of Sudan
- D** Second cataract of the Nile
- E** Aswan falls, modern dam

- F** Thebes, Valley of the Kings
- G** Strategic oasis in Sahara
- H** Salt lake, formerly fresh
- I** Memphis, pyramids & sphinx
- J** Alexandria, Greek/Roman city
- K** Hills of Palestine/Judea
- L** Sinai, entrance to Gulf of Suez