

## **Cuneiform Writing**

The Sumerians were accomplished traders and businessmen. As their business dealings became more complex, they needed a way to keep track of their goods and payments. They developed the first known written language, called cuneiform, to keep business records and accounts.

The name cuneiform means “wedge-shape” – cuneiform characters are wide at one end and pointed at the other. Developed around 3000 B.C.E., the characters were made by pressing a wedge-shaped tool, or stylus, into a damp clay tablet. The tablets were dried in the sun until they hardened. Cuneiform was also written in metal and stone.

Boys in school labored long hours to memorize cuneiform characters. There were five hundred possible combinations of cuneiform characters to stand for words, phrases, and complete sentences.

Because cuneiform was difficult to master, not everyone knew how to read and write in Sumeria. A young man was guaranteed a good job in the government, law, trade, or in the ziggurat if he could understand cuneiform.

Hundreds of thousands of cuneiform tablets were discovered in Iraq. They tell us about Sumerian politics, literature, economy, law, and religion.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Period \_\_\_\_\_

### **Cuneiform Writing**

Answer each of the following questions using complete sentences.

1.) Why did the Sumerians develop writing? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.) What does the name "cuneiform" mean, and why is that a good name? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3.) How did people make the cuneiform characters or letters? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4.) Why did people have to study hard to memorize cuneiform? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5.) What jobs were available for those who could read and write in cuneiform?

a.) \_\_\_\_\_

b.) \_\_\_\_\_

c.) \_\_\_\_\_

d.) \_\_\_\_\_

6.) What can be learned from the remains of the Sumerian's cuneiform tablets?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7.) If you had lived in ancient Mesopotamia and could read and write in cuneiform, what job would you have taken and why?