

## Southwest Asia

### Lesson 3: Life in Southwest Asia

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

*How does religion shape society?*

#### Terms to Know

**hydropolitics** the politics related to water access and usage

**fossil water** water that fell as rain thousands of years ago and is now trapped deep below ground

#### What Do You Know?

In the first column, answer the questions based on what you know before you study. After this lesson, complete the last column.

Now...		Later...
	What major ethnic groups live in Southwest Asia?	
	How has petroleum changed life in Southwest Asia?	
	What is the Arab Spring?	

#### Identifying

1. What are Southwest Asia's two most populous countries, and approximately how many people live in each country?

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#### People and Places

**Guiding Question** *In what parts of Southwest Asia do most people live?*

Southwest Asia is about three-fourths the size of the United States but is home to around 330 million people. Iran and Turkey, the most populous countries, each have about 80 million people. Some oil-rich countries around the Persian Gulf are experiencing population booms as their fast-growing economies are attracting foreign workers. Many countries are highly urbanized. In others, the majority of people live in rural areas. People below the age of 15 make up a large part of the population here.

Population is not evenly distributed. The region's northern and western parts and southern tip have the highest densities. Many of these areas have relatively higher rainfall. Areas with dry or somewhat dry climates are more sparsely populated. One exception is Mesopotamia in Iraq, where the rivers provide abundant water for irrigating crops.

## Southwest Asia

### Lesson 3: Life in Southwest Asia, *continued*

Southwest Asia has thriving metropolises that are home to millions. It also has ancient rural villages that seem untouched by the passing of time. In some desert areas, nomadic people known as Bedouins live in tents and herd camels, goats, and cattle.

### People and Cultures

**Guiding Question** *What cultural differences are found across Southwest Asia?*

Arabs are the largest ethnic group in Southwest Asia. In Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan, more than 90 percent of the people are Arab. The two most populous countries have only small Arab populations. In Turkey, Turks form the majority. In Iran, which was formerly known as Persia, most people are Persian. Jews make up three-fourths of the population in Israel. The Kurds have no country of their own, but make up significant minorities in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. The region where they live is traditionally known as Kurdistan.

Arabic is the most widespread language in Southwest Asia. Other important tongues include Turkish and Farsi, the language of Persians. Hebrew is the official language of Israel. Kurds speak Kurdish. Some of the region's countries have complex ethnic and linguistic makeups. Many people identify with their ethnic group more strongly than with the country in which they live. Afghanistan for example has many ethnic groups.

Afghanistan	
<i>Ethnic Groups</i>	<i>Languages</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pashtuns</li> <li>• Tajiks</li> <li>• Hazaras</li> <li>• Uzbeks</li> <li>• Aimaks</li> <li>• Turkmen</li> <li>• Balochs</li> </ul>	<p><i>Official:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Afghan Persian</li> <li>• Pashto</li> </ul> <p><i>Spoken:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more than 30 other languages</li> </ul>

People in Afghanistan identify themselves as Pashtun or Hazari rather than Afghani. Even in countries that are mostly Arab, people identify with tribes that are based on family relationships. Tribal identity is often stronger than national identity.

#### Describing

2. Who are the Bedouin?

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#### Reading Progress Check

3. Why do some countries around the Persian Gulf have rapidly growing populations?

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#### Marking the Text

4. Read the text on the left. Underline sentences that refer to the people and culture of Israel.

#### Determining Central Ideas

5. Why has it been difficult to create a sense of national identity in some Southwest Asian nations?

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**Southwest Asia**

**Lesson 3: Life in Southwest Asia, *continued***

**? Identifying**

6. What are the two main branches of Islam? To which branch do most Southwest Asians belong?

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**✎ Marking the Text**

7. Read the text on the right. Underline the sentence that tells what areas in life are governed by Islam.

**✓ Reading Progress Check**

8. What is the major ethnic group in Iran? What language does that group speak?

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**⚙ Drawing Conclusions**

9. How might Persian Gulf countries be affected if countries began turning to alternate energy sources?

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Islam remains the region’s dominant religion. It unites people of different ethnicities and languages. It has two main branches, Sunni and Shia. Most of Southwest Asia’s Muslims are Sunnis. In Iran, however, Shias outnumber Sunnis nine to one. Judaism is practiced by three-fourths of the people in Israel. Christians make up about 40 percent of the population in Lebanon and 10 percent in Syria.

Religion and art have always been closely tied in the region. Some of its most magnificent works of architecture are religious structures. Sacred texts such as the Hebrew and Christian Bible and the Muslim Quran are also works of literature. There are also other rich artistic traditions, including calligraphy, mosaics, weaving, storytelling, and poetry. Handwoven Persian carpets have been famous for centuries. So has the collection of folktales known as *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Daily life varies greatly across the region. Throughout history, most people practiced traditional livelihoods such as farming, raising livestock, or fishing. In recent times, people have gone to work in petroleum production, food processing, auto manufacturing, textiles, and construction.

Religion plays a major role in the daily lives of many people in Southwest Asia. Islam is a way of life. There are rules governing diet, hygiene, relationships, business, law, and more. To Muslims, families are the foundation of a healthy society. Maintaining family ties is an important duty.

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, is a holy month of fasting. Muslims refrain from eating and drinking between dawn and dusk. After ending their fast with prayer each evening, people enjoy festive meals. The end of Ramadan is marked by a three-day festival called *Eid al-Fitr*.

**Issues**

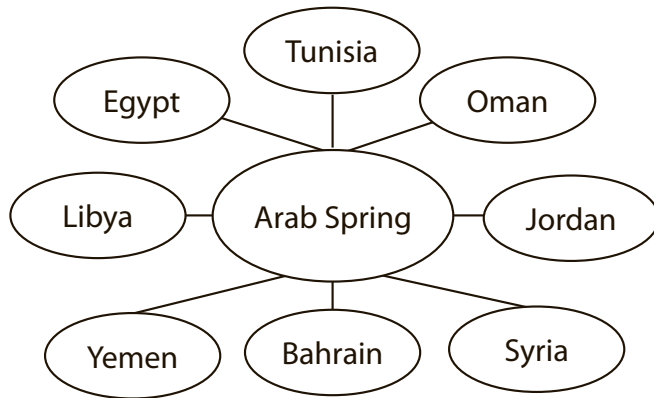
**Guiding Question** *How have oil wealth and availability of natural resources created challenges for countries of Southwest Asia?*

The discovery in the mid-1900s of vast petroleum deposits in Southwest Asia had a strong impact on the region. Exports of petroleum products have brought great wealth to countries around the Persian Gulf. With this wealth came development in some countries. Petroleum has also brought new challenges. Some Muslims believe that the increased exposure to Western ways is corrupting the region’s people. There is a growing gap between rich and poor countries. The struggle to control oil has led to tension and wars. It has also brought foreign intervention.

## Southwest Asia

### Lesson 3: Life in Southwest Asia, *continued*

The years 2010 and 2011 marked the beginning of the Arab Spring. This was a wave of pro-democracy protests in North Africa and Southwest Asia. By the end of the year, leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen were overthrown. Syria fell into upheaval.



The scarcity of freshwater has plagued the region throughout history. Dramatic population growth has greatly increased demand, making the situation more dire. This has increased the importance of **hydropolitics**, or politics related to water usage and access. Salt can be removed from the seawater, but this process is expensive and therefore impractical.

With no rivers that flow year-round, Saudi Arabia has tapped into **fossil water**. This is water that fell thousands of years ago as rain and is now trapped deep underground. This is not a renewable source, however. The region's greatest source of freshwater is the Tigris-Euphrates river system. However, a dam-building project in Turkey threatens to reduce river flow to Syria and Iraq.



#### Analyzing

10. How might dams built on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in Turkey affect agriculture in Syria and Iraq?

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#### Reading Progress Check

11. What was the Arab Spring? What countries in Southwest Asia were involved?

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## Writing

### Check for Understanding

1. **Informative/Explanatory** How has religion shaped society in Southwest Asia?

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2. **Informative/Explanatory** How have hydropolitics affected Southwest Asia?

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