Where Humans Live

Connection to Current Times

The Importance of Location

You don't have to be in real estate to have heard this catchy phrase, "Location, location, location!" When it comes to buying or renting houses, a good location is an important factor. What makes a good location? It depends. Think about where you live. Perhaps it is close to a parent's job. Maybe it is close to relatives. You might even live close to a highway or subway to make it easier for you to get to school.

For early humans, location was equally important. A good location had nothing to do with living close to relatives or being near work. It had to do with meeting the people's basic needs. The most basic of these needs was a source for water. With a water source, they were assured of having water to drink and animals to hunt. Because water is a necessity for all life, many early humans lived near rivers.

This map shows early human archaeological sites. The origin of the human species traces to Africa. Early humans then migrated to other parts of the world.

The colored dots on this map:

Red = *Australopithecus*
Blue = *Homo habilis*
Green = *Homo erectus*
White and Purple = archaic *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals
Yellow = modern

Where Early Humans Lived

On every continent, there are examples of early man's dependence on water as a source of life. The Sumerians were an ancient people who lived between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, an area that used to have soil so rich that the whole region is called the Fertile Crescent. Here, people were able to survive by hunting animals or gathering wild berries and plants for food. The kingdoms of Egypt and Kush thrived along the flowing waters of the Nile. In Asia, the early Chinese civilizations lived along the Huang He River. Early humans later migrated to North America, settling near banks of rivers like the Mississippi.

Perhaps you are wondering how these early humans found all of these great locations. Let's step back even farther to some of the oldest known human-like skeletons, which were found in Ethiopia, East Africa. In 1974, scientists discovered a female skeleton fossil that they determined was approximately 3.2 million years old. They named her Lucy. She represents the species *Australopithecus,* our human ancestors that walked upright but had very small brains and an ape-like appearance. Since that discovery, other early human skeletons have been discovered. From these fossils, scientists have learned that

our human ancestors originated in East Africa. To meet their basic needs for food and water, these early humans started moving away from East Africa in search of more resources. Scientists have determined that *Homo erectus*, a human ancestor from about 1.7 million years ago, moved from Africa to other continents.

On the Go

Why did our early ancestors move? What paths did they take? How do scientists know what happened? Through a science called genetic anthropology, scientists have traced this migration by examining fossils and examining the DNA molecules found in the bones of early humans. From this evidence, scientists are able to give approximate dates of when humans reached the continents and where they settled. This DNA evidence has shown that all people living today share the same common ancestor.

The Hoover Dam is on the border of Nevada and Arizona. It dams the Colorado River. The Bypass Bridge is also shown in the photo.

This migration process was very slow. It took hundreds of thousands of years. These early people traveled along coastlines, always traveling near sources of water and staying close to the herds of animals they hunted. The routes they traveled are thought to be from Africa to the Middle East and then to Asia. As people learned to adapt and made discoveries, such as fire, they were able to move father into Asia and eventually into Europe. Scientists believe there was a land bridge that connected Asia and North America. Our earliest ancestors followed herds of animals traveling this path and settled in North America.

Where People Live Today

Through the use of DNA and genetic analysis, scientists have traced human migration. They have drawn some interesting conclusions. First, they confirm that humans, no matter where they live or where they came from, are not so different after all. DNA analysis has shown that modern humans can be linked to early humans. Second, many people still live where they can satisfy their everyday needs—water and food. In many of the less developed places of the

world, meeting these basic needs is no easy task. It is the most important part of the day for many people. About 900 million people in the world do not have access to clean water, which makes them more likely to get sick and die than people who do have clean water. Technology can help improve this statistic. A group called Engineers Without Borders works to provide rural people around the world with simple tools to improve their lives. In many places, such as rural Belize, the group has helped install simple water wells. These wells keep the water covered and clean, which makes the water safer for everyone to use.

Not everyone in today's world must live near available food and water. Today's technology makes it possible for people to live further from where they work. With cars, trains, and planes, people can move about the world quickly. By using computers, some people work for companies located far away, all from the comfort of their own homes.

Our ability to conquer the environment is incredible. Rivers can be harnessed into energy-producing dams, such as the Hoover Dam. Desert climates can be cultivated to produce crops. For example, the arid land in California's Imperial Valley is irrigated by the waters of the Colorado River. The farmers in this region produce 80 percent of the country's winter vegetables. Not only can people live where they choose, but they can grow enough food to feed others, even in a harsh environment. Planes and ships can bring the resources to the people. Buildings can be constructed to withstand earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. We now successfully live in harsh conditions, such as Antarctica. Humans even live in outer space, on the International Space Station. Today, we can live, learn, explore, and play where we want. Imagine what Lucy would think.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. How did early people in the Fertile Crescent survive?
   - **A.** They climbed mountains to hunt large animals.
   - **B.** They hunted animals and gathered plants.
   - **C.** They caught seafood from the oceans.
   - **D.** They traded with other continents.

2. How has the use of DNA and genetic analysis enabled scientists to trace the migration of early man?
   - **A.** They have shown a link between modern humans and early humans.
   - **B.** They show that people live where they can satisfy their basic needs.
   - **C.** They have determined that people traveled along water sources during migration.
   - **D.** They show that people live where they can be close to family and friends.

3. According to this passage, the Imperial Valley is an example of people's ability to do what?
   - **A.** live in densely populated cities
   - **B.** control their environment
   - **C.** produce solar power
   - **D.** overcome massive flooding

4. People today are able to live in different places than early humans. Where did early humans live, and how is human settlement different today? Provide details from the reading passage to explain your answer.