

The Agricultural Revolution

Directions: Read the following article on the *Agricultural Revolution*. Answer the questions which follow in full sentences on a clean sheet of paper. Then, make a timeline from what you have read. You should find five events within the text for your timeline. After that, write single-sentence summaries of all the paragraphs in the article.

Throughout history, humans have gone through a series of technological revolutions. These brought new inventions which changed humankind. They changed the way we lived. They also changed the way we thought and worked together.

When George Washington died, most of America's people lived on farms raising food. Very few lived in cities. It took people days of travel to go from Boston to New York. The things people used were made one at a time by skilled craftsmen in small workshops. People worked from dawn to dusk year round.

Over the next 150 years, America went through the Industrial Revolution. Then, machines replaced hand labor and animal power at work and on the farm. It took fewer people to grow more food. So, many left the countryside to take up jobs in the factories in cities. With the coming of the steam train, it took less than a day for people to travel from Boston to New York. Huge factories which hired thousands of unskilled laborers made nearly all of the goods people used in their homes and on the job. And workers now punched the clock. They worked long shifts on the factory floors. Machines had forever changed how humans lived their lives.

Thousands of years before, however, the world went through another time of change. It also had great effects on the human race. Over the advance of thousands of years, humans all over the world traded one way of living for another. They put down their spears as hunters and picked up their sickles to become farmers. This epic change in human history was called the Agricultural Revolution.

Hunter-Gatherer Societies

Before we became a world of farmers, humans roamed the earth looking for food, clothing, and shelter from wild sources. They hunted for animals to supply meat for food. These also gave them bones, hides, and other

resources to make clothing and tools. They also collected wild plants to provide food, clothing, tools, and shelter. Such cultures which take what they need to live from Mother Nature alone are called *hunter-gatherers*.

We can learn how these hunter-gatherer societies lived in ancient times by looking at modern examples. They are scattered all across the globe today. But groups of people who live like this are rapidly dying out. A few remain in the Arctic, hunting seals, whales, and caribou. Others live in the jungles of the Amazon and Africa. And a small number of them wander the deserts and plains of Africa.

The Hadza people count themselves among them. They live in one of the harshest places imaginable on earth. They roam the land around the briny Lake Eyasi. It is in the Great Rift Valley in Tanzania. Sources of fresh water there are scarce. The soil is salty, too. Only the hardiest desert plants can grow in it. Among them are the acacia. It is a desert tree which grows finger-long thorns to keep passing animals from browsing its branches. During the dry season from May to October, the sun bakes the land without mercy. And swarms of biting insects plague animals and humans alike.

Yet about a thousand Hadza thrive on this land. They live in small camps of about 30 people. They hunt wild game like giraffes, wildebeests, dik-diks, and baboons. They do this with arrows tipped with a lethal poison made from the sap of the desert rose. They also gather food from the land. Men take honey from wild hives. The women harvest tubers from the earth and gather fruits like the fruit of the baobab tree. They work about four to six hours a day to get enough food to survive. Certainly, the land is harsh. But the Hadza cannot remember a time when anyone among them went hungry.

The Hadza move their camps often, about once a month. They do this when hunting becomes difficult. They also do it when no more fruit can be found around their camp. When their hunters take down a giraffe, they often move camp to the kill site. That's easier than dragging the heavy carcass back to camp. They also move when someone dies or gets very sick.

The Hadza live a life of equality. This is very different from modern cultures around the world. They have few things they call their own. They carry only what small things can be slung over their backs in a cloth like hatchet from camp to camp. When one hunter takes down an animal in the bush, the whole camp shares in his good luck.

Equal in wealth, they are also equal in to one another in power. In their society, no adult can tell another what to do. Still, each camp is led by a single senior male. Although men and women have different jobs, they are seen as equals. Women do not occupy a lower place in society like we see in other cultures. Men and women both are free to leave camp to go to live with others if they wish. To avoid fighting, people simply pick up and move to other camps.

Scholars believe that ancient hunter-gatherer societies lived like the Hadza. This way of living, however, changed with the invention of agriculture.

The Agricultural Revolution

Long ago, humans began changing how they lived. They switched from hunting and gathering to agriculture. That is to say, they learned how to grow crops and raise animals to survive. When they started this depended on the culture. In the Levant (a region in the Middle East that includes Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel), it began around 8000 BC. About that time, humans there began to learn how to grow grain. In China, however, it came a thousand years later. Only then did the people there first grow rice.

This new technology changed human beings to their very core. For a very long time, humans had survived by following the herds. They moved from place to place in search of food just as the Hadza do today. They never stayed in one place for very long. When humans began farming, they had to give up this way of life.

As they tended crops, humans could no longer move from place to place. They had to settle down and stay close to their fields to plant them, weed them, water them, and keep them safe from pests. So, they began building permanent shelters near their fields. They built sturdy houses out of mud brick, wood, and stone.

More food from farming meant more people and larger settlements. Before long, clusters of their huts grew into villages. These

villages grew into towns. Towns grew into cities. Ancient people, for example, built the ancient town of Çatalöyük in 5000 BC. It is in what is now called Turkey. This town had no doors to the outside. The people who lived there went into their homes in holes in the roofs of their houses.

With the surplus of food farming made, humans could trade no longer needed to spend the day looking for food. This gave them time to try out new technologies. They learned how to weave cloth on looms. They also learned how to fire pottery. To do this, ancient people built kilns in the ancient village of Yarim Tepe in modern Iraq c. 6000 BC. Soon, cultures which used kilns to fire pottery learned how to work with metals like copper, too.

While the ancient hunter-gatherers lived in camps in which people were equal, this did not hold after humans learned to farm. Some came to acquire more from the land than others. This newfound wealth gave them the means to hire warriors to protect themselves from outsiders. With them they could also force people to obey their commands. As a result, social classes began to form. Soon, the first great kings began to appear to rule them. One of these, King Narmer, unified the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt around 3100 BC. From these beginnings, the great civilizations of the ancient world formed.

Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level 5.3

- 1. What is a hunter-gatherer?**
- 2. What is agriculture?**
- 3. Write down as many facts as you can about the way the Hadza live in modern-day Africa.**
- 4. Write down as many facts as you can about the way people in agricultural societies live.**
- 5. Describe how agricultural societies are different from the way the Hadza people live.**

For Further Reading

Finkel, Michael. "The Hadza." National Geographic Magazine. National Geographic Society. Dec. 2009. Web. 4 Aug. 2012. <<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/12/hadza/finkel-text/1>>.

Hyslop, Stephen, Bob Somerville, and John Thompson. *Eyewitness History: From Ancient Times to the Modern Era*. Washington, DC, National Geographic Society, 2011.

Overy, Richard. *The Times Complete History of the World*. 6th Ed. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004. Print.

Roberts, J.M. *The New History of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.