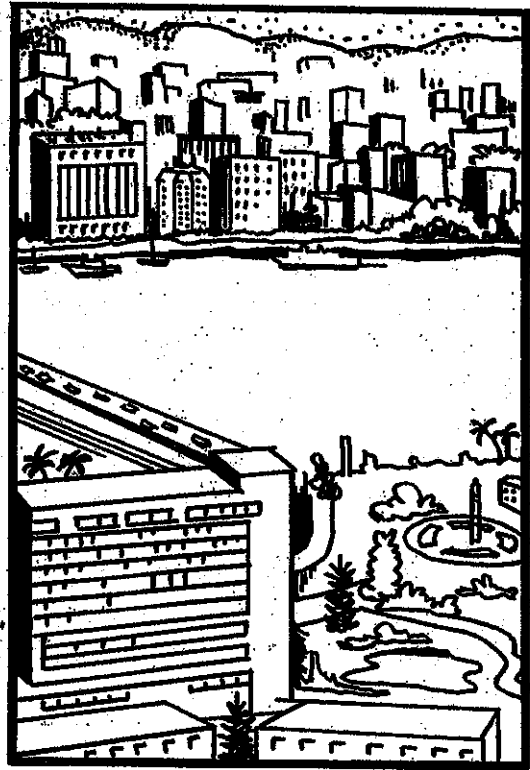


LANDING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

You awake to find yourself 10,000 feet above the deep blue of the Mediterranean Sea. Your last memory before dozing off was of landing in Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport for refueling before continuing your journey. As you stretch your legs, you notice a crescent-shaped moon that has not yet faded in the morning light. When you look down again, you see the coast of a huge, reddish-brown land mass striped with lines of green in the shape of a fan. Here the Nile Delta flows into the sea. Your plane banks as it prepares to land and you gaze down upon a densely constructed city of narrow streets and high, thin towers the color of sand. This is Cairo, Egypt, and you have arrived in the Middle East.

The term *Middle East* refers to an area of the world made up of the present-day countries of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, South Yemen, Yemen, Sudan, and Turkey. The term is also used to describe the culture of other nations that border those listed above, such as Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Turkistan, and Pakistan. Even though people in the Middle East call their area of the world by that name, the term itself originated in the United States just before World War I. Therefore, it is a very modern term and reflects a view of the world from Washington or New York. The Middle East, however, is a very ancient place, and for much of its history, it saw itself, very reasonably, as the center of the world. Europe and later the Americas were only on the periphery. Later it was seen as merely a bridge or crossroads to be fought over by outsiders, but in more recent times, the Middle East has again become the center of the world's attention.

The geographical features of the area have been important throughout its history. First, its location as a bridge between Africa, Europe, and Asia has meant that a constant flow of peoples, tribes, armies, merchants, and pilgrims have entered the Middle East. Much of the land is made up of flat, arid grasslands or desert, so it was easy for invaders to enter the area. Yet, there are also rugged mountainous regions for groups of people to go to in order to maintain their independence. Many of the invaders stayed to enjoy the advanced civilization and the wealth of the area, while others spread what they had seen and heard in the Middle East throughout the three continents. The Middle East is also a bridge between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea, which opens into the Indian Ocean. Thus, it became important to trade between Europe and Asia. This became especially true after the Suez Canal was cut through the narrow isthmus dividing the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

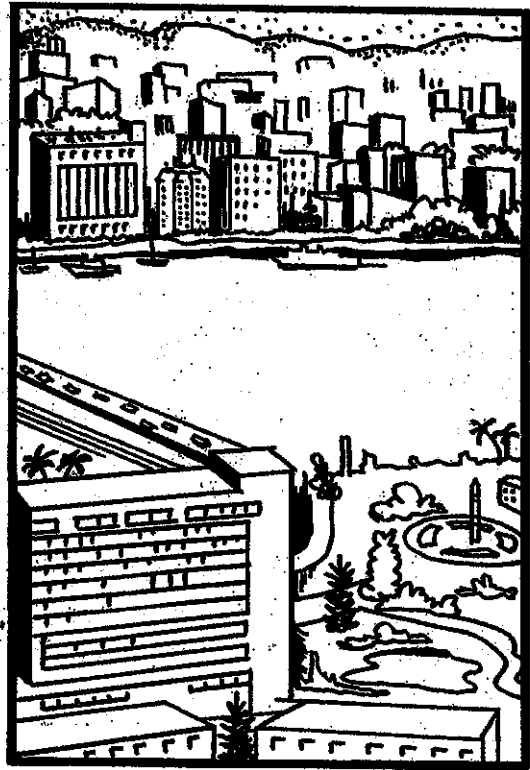


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Name _____ Date _____

CHALLENGES

1. Describe the view of the Nile delta from above.

2. What countries make up the modern Middle East?

3. What countries share the culture of the Middle East but only border on it?

4. Where did the term *Middle East* come from?

5. The fact that the Middle East is a land bridge between continents had what impact on the area?

6. How large is the Middle East?

7. Because the Middle East is arid, what is agriculture dependent on?

8. How did irrigation lead to civilization?

9. Upon what rivers did settlement occur in the Middle East?

10. Describe the area included by the name "Fertile Crescent."
