***Middle East***

Physical Characteristics notes 2

**Location**

      Crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia; Middle East consists primarily of Southwest Asia and Northern Africa

      Turkey also owns a small strip of land in Europe where part of the city of Istanbul is located

**Desert and semiarid climates**

Sahara

      largest hot desert in the world; roughly the same size as the United States

      stretches across countries of northern Africa, especially Algeria and Libya

Sahel

      mostly savanna (semi-arid grasslands)

      hot and dry; vegetation is limited to grasses, thorns/weeds

      desertification is a major problem; occurs because of overgrazing of the land

      stretches across northern Africa below the Sahara Desert, especially in Mali, Niger, and Chad

**Mountains**

Atlas Mountains

      northwest Africa in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia

      Rock of Gibraltar is part of this mountain range

      between Sahara Desert and Atlantic/Mediterranean coast

      formed when Africa and America collided millions of years ago

Taurus Mountains

      Eastern Turkey

      source of Euphrates River that flows southeast through Syria and Iraq

Zagros Mountains

      extend throughout western Iran along the border with Iraq and in the ethnic region of Kurdistan

      range ends at the Strait of Hormuz that separates the Persian Gulf from the Arabian Sea

Mount Ararat

      part of Caucasus Mountains; Eastern Turkey

      tallest mountain peak in Turkey

      many believe that Noah’s Ark came to rest here

**Rivers**

      Seasonal flooding deposits alluvial soils (silt and other deposits) on shorelines and riverbeds

      Delta regions:  area where rivers spread out and drain into a larger body of water; creates fertile soil

        --deltas of the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates are fertile areas

      Oasis:  isolated area of vegetation in a desert; surrounding a spring or other water source

        --necessary for trade via caravan routes, military advantages

      Wadis:  dry riverbeds that contain water only after heavy rains; underground water available (wells)

        --populations centered around wadis in primarily desert countries

Nile River

      longest river in the world, flows north into the Mediterranean Sea

      city of Cairo grew on fertile land of the Nile Delta

      Khartoum, Sudan grew at confluence of Blue and White Nile

      White Nile begins at Lake Victoria

      Blue Nile begins in the Ethiopian Highlands

      frequent flooding before construction of Aswan High Dam

        --controls flooding, but blocks silt

        --Lake Nassar formed by dam

      ancient Egyptian civilizations grew on fertile land near the river

Tigris River

      Northeastern member of a pair of rivers that define Mesopotamia (along with the Euphrates)

      Flows from Taurus Mountains in Turkey past Baghdad, Iraq into the Persian Gulf

      Turkish dams have been a source of controversy

      Used for irrigation in a primarily desert country

      Navigable only as far as Baghdad

Euphrates River

      Southwestern member of a pair of rivers that define Mesopotamia (along with the Tigris)

      Flows from mountains in Turkey through Syria and Iraq into the Persian Gulf

      Combines with the Tigris before emptying into the gulf

      Turkish dams cause controversy; very limited navigability

Jordan River

      Flows south through the Sea of Galilee into the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth

      Much of the river forms the border between Jordan and Israel

      Water heavily used for human purposes (irrigation, etc.), causing the Dead Sea to shrink

      Frequently mentioned in the Christian Bible; Jesus baptized in it

**Other Water Features**

Mediterranean Sea

      Divides S. Europe, N. Africa, and S.W. Asia

Red Sea

      Gulf of the Indian Ocean between Asia and Africa (Egypt and Saudi Arabia)

      Connected to Mediterranean Sea by Suez Canal

Black Sea

      Between Europe and Asia; important for trade; Turkish straits allows access to Mediterranean

Arabian Sea

      Northwestern part of the Indian Ocean; touches western India and the Arabian Peninsula

Persian/Arabian Gulf

      Gulf of the Indian Ocean between Iran and Saudi Arabia; connected to ocean by Strait of Hormuz

      Also touches many other small oil-rich countries; richest oil-producing region in the world

      Site of recent wars (Iran v. Iraq; Iraq v. Kuwait & US, etc.); many oil tankers sunk in the gulf

      Tigris/Euphrates River flows into it

Strait of Hormuz

      Narrow strip of Indian Ocean that connects the Persian/Arabian Gulf to the Arabian Sea

      Very important shipping route for oil coming from the Persian Gulf countries

Bosporus Strait

      Small strip of water that allows shipping between the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea

      Separates Europe from Asia

      Sea of Marmara below leads to Mediterranean

      Straddled by strategically important Turkish city of Istanbul (formerly Constantinople, Byzantium)

        --Historically important for military and trade

Dardanelles Strait

      Southernmost of two important Turkish straits (Bosporus is the other one) that control access from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea

      Connects the Aegean Sea (part of Mediterranean) to the Sea of Marmara