

ACTIVITY Ideas: Math & Measurement

What? No Numbers?

(Subject Area: *Math*)

Create and post a chart of the cuneiform symbols for numerals* or have students create their own charts. (Use vertical triangles for “ones” and “sixties” and horizontal triangles for tens.) Then have students use the cuneiform numerals to answer such questions as:

How old are you?

How many students are in this class?

How would a Mesopotamian scribe write the following numbers: 26, 45, 524?

Mathematics on Clay

(Subject Areas: *Math, Fine Arts*)

Using the lesson plan that appears in *The Invention of Writing* section of our website, have students create their own clay tablets and use them to answer questions like the ones listed above. Students could also write cuneiform numbers or math problems on their tablets and trade them with classmates to decipher and solve.

How Much Did It Cost?

(Subject Area: *Math*)

Although we do not know the shekel's modern monetary equivalent, the famous Law Collection of Hammurabi (hah-moor-RAH-bee) tells us that an artisan or laborer earned about five barleycorns of silver a day. This meant it took 36 days to earn a shekel. Using this information, students could determine how long a Mesopotamian needed to work—in days, weeks, or years—to buy items from the following ancient “price list.”

7 pounds of wool, or 3 1/2 bushels of barley = 1 shekel

1 sheep = 2 shekels

1 cow = 5 shekels

1 donkey = 20 shekels

1 acre garden = 35 shekels

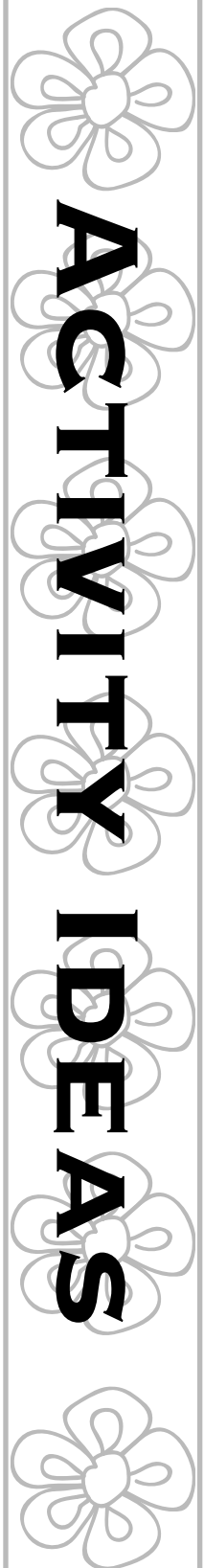
1 house = 40 shekels

Compare and Contrast

(Subject Areas: *Math, Social Studies*)

Compare and contrast Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Roman numerals. A fine source for introducing students to Egyptian numerals is Beatrice Lumpkin's *Senefer: A Young Genius in Old Egypt*. Africa World Press: P.O. Box 1892, Trenton, New Jersey, 1991.

*The numerals for this activity are available in the Oriental Institute's "Life in Ancient Mesopotamia" curriculum guide.



*Math and
Measurement*