



## Centers of Progress, Pt. 1: Jericho (Agriculture)

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### Lesson Overview

Featured article: [Centers of Progress, Pt. 1: Jericho \(Agriculture\)](#) by [Chelsea Follett](#)

Why did our ancestors turn their backs on a nomadic way of life that was thousands of years old? Why did people begin to live in farming communities about 10,000 years ago? This article answers those questions by discussing the history of Jericho—the world's oldest city and possibly the birthplace of agriculture.

In the article, author Chelsea Follett writes about the domestication of plants in the Fertile Crescent and the momentous changes brought on by it. She writes, "The invention of agriculture, often called the First Agricultural Revolution or the Neolithic Revolution, was a decisive turning point in our species' history. It dramatically changed the way that we live. By producing a surplus of food that could be stored for difficult times ahead or traded for other goods, agriculture ultimately allowed for far greater prosperity than hunting and gathering ever could."



## Warm-up

- What do you know about hunter-gatherers? Watch this National Geographic [video](#) featuring Jared Diamond. Then answer the following questions:
  - Until approximately what time period did all humans live as nomadic hunter-gatherers?
  - About how many years ago did people begin to domesticate wild plants?
  - According to Diamond, farmers have an advantage over nonfarmers because of their ability to produce food surpluses. What other factor cited by Diamond led to inequalities in standards of living between different groups of people?
- How much do you know about peasant farmers? The first farmers, who lived 10,000 years ago in the Middle East, had a marginally better material existence than their nomadic ancestors. Contemporary peasant farmers have a much lower standard of living than most people enjoy in the industrialized countries. Learn about the Kabore family from Burkina Faso on the site [Dollar Street](#). Then answer the following questions:
  - How many family members live in this household?
  - What is the occupation of the parents?
  - How does the family get water?
  - Where do they store their grain?
  - What type of fruit do they grow?
  - What is their most valuable item?

## Questions for reading, writing, and discussion

Read the [article](#), then answer the following questions:

- Why was the First Agricultural Revolution (Neolithic Revolution) such an important turning point for humankind?
- Describe the lifestyle of the Natufians. What were their main food sources and how did they obtain them? What tools did they use? How did they carry their supplies?
- Why did the Natufians originally decide to settle at the Jericho site? What attracted them to that spot?
- What climatic factor may have influenced the Natufians' decision to stop their nomadic wanderings?
- When and where did people first start to practice agriculture? Why do you think human beings began to farm?
- Which two products did the first farmers make from cultivated cereals?
- What evidence exists of specialization in early Jericho society?

- How did human social structures change during the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one of settled agricultural communities?
- What is the relationship between egalitarianism and a hunter-gatherer society?
- What is the relationship between hierarchy and a sedentary agricultural society?
- According to the penultimate paragraph, what is the main payoff of an agricultural way of life?
- Trace cause and effect by completing the chart:

Cause	Effect
Natufians intentionally planted seeds	
Natufians selectively bred cereal plants	
Natufians made bread and beer from cultivated cereals	
Jerichoans cultivated enough food to survive	
Jerichoans maintained a surplus of grain	
Specialization and hierarchy emerged in Jericho	

## Extension Activity/Homework

- **Conduct a Socratic seminar, panel discussion, or class debate**

Have students hold a Socratic seminar, panel discussion, or class debate on this topic:

The benefits of abandoning the nomadic way of life for a settled, agricultural society far outweighed the costs.

In making their arguments, students should use specific evidence from the article as well as their own historical background knowledge.

- **Investigate Jericho**

Many Learn more about Jericho by watching this [documentary](#). After watching, write a one-page essay answering this question:

Why is Jericho considered one of the birthplaces of civilization?

Write a short introduction providing context, a thesis, and at least three specific pieces of evidence from the documentary to back up your claim.