The Rise of Agriculture

**Direction:** Read the following article on the Rise of Agriculture. When you are done, answer the questions which follow in one or more complete sentences. Remember to restate the question in the answer when you do. Please highlight the sections of the text where you find your answers.

Before they invented agriculture, modern humans lived as hunter-gatherers. They lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving constantly from place to place, searching for food. They hunted animals for their meat and hides, simultaneously gathering wild plants for food, medicine, and other uses. When they exhausted all of the food supplies around their encampments, they moved on in search of more. Around 10,000 years ago, humankind made profound discoveries that changed that way of life forever.

Around this time, humans learned how to domesticate animals. The first animal they learned to tame was undoubtedly the dog. It helped humans hunt, but it also served as an emergency food supply when no game could be found. They also captured animals like goats, cattle, camels, horses and sheep, and learned how to raise them in captivity. They kept these animals for their meat, hides, and milk, but also learned that some of these animals could serve as beasts of burden, like camels, donkeys, and horses. Ancient humans herded these animals from place to place in search of better grazing and water, a lifestyle known as pastoralism.

At the same time, humans also learned how seeds grow into plants, and used this knowledge to plant fields with crops of their own. At first, they most likely planted their fields and moved on, following herds of wild animals or driving their flocks and herds to better grazing elsewhere. When they returned seasons later, they hoped to find that their crops had weathered the preceding seasons, literally.

Later, humans began to stay near their fields through the growing season, hoping to watch over them as they grew rather than leave the matter to chance. They planted fields and built small villages near them. They stayed near the fields to tend them, removing weeds, watering them, and chasing away pests that fed on them in the hopes that they would coax a greater bounty from the harvest. They continued to grow crops on the land until the soil became exhausted of all nutrients. Then, they picked up and moved to other lands with fresh fields that would support them anew. Often these ancient farmers cleared forests to make room for their fields using slash-and-burn techniques.

Finally, they began to settle down in permanent towns and villages. One of these villages, the large town of Catal Huyuk in modern-day Turkey, was built seven to eight thousand years ago and encompassed some thirty-two acres. The people there had a rich material culture, weaving baskets, making pottery, and producing textiles. This settlement had no walls to protect it, but it had no exterior gates or doorways, either. People entered the town through trapdoors in the roofs, undoubtedly to protect the town from marauders. Jericho, in the valley of the Jordan River, was another permanent settlement built at the beginning of the Agricultural Revolution in the Middle East. The city sheltered some 2,000 residents by 8000 BC. Unlike Catal Huyuk, its inhabitants built a large wall with towers around the town to protect it from outsiders. Within these walls, archaeologists found evidence of granaries that stored barley as a means of safeguarding the future of the community.

This time of change was known as the Agricultural Revolution. During this time, people ended their lives as hunter-gatherers who roamed from place to place looking for food. Rather, they fed themselves through agriculture, growing crops and raising animals to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves. For the first time in history, humans possessed the technology to control their food supply. This knowledge would have profound effects on the human race, making civilization and our modern world possible in the ages to come.

Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level 9.5

For Further Reading


1. For most of their history, how did humans live? ________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________
2. How does a hunter-gatherer band live? ________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________
3. What two discoveries did humans make around 10,000 years ago? __________
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_________________________________________________________________________________
4. What is pastoralism? ________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________
5. Humans began growing crops around 10,000 years ago. How did their lifestyle as
hunter-gatherers change because of this development? __________
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_________________________________________________________________________________
6. Catal Huyuk and Jericho were towns built at the beginning of the Agricultural
Revolution. How were they different? ________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________________
7. What changes did humans go through during the Agricultural Revolution? ______
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_________________________________________________________________________________
8. What is agriculture? ________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
9. What did the technology of agriculture allow human beings to control for the first
time in history? ________________________________
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