6th Grade Social Studies Glossary

A
absolute monarch a hereditary ruler with nearly unlimited power who claimed to derive his or her authority from God
acropolis (uh-KRAH-puh-luhs) a high hill upon which a Greek fortress was built.
acupuncture (AK-yoo-punk-cher) the Chinese practice of inserting fine needles through the skin at specific points to cure disease or relieve pain.
afterlife life after death, much of Egyptian religion focused on the afterlife
Age of Metals a period of history, beginning about 5,000 years ago in which human beings learned to make wide use of metal for tools and weapons
agriculture farming and the raising of animals
alliance an agreement to work together
alloy a mixture of two or more metals
anarchy a state of lawlessness, confusion or disorder
animism the belief that bodies of water, animals, trees and other natural objects have spirits.
aqueduct (A-kwuh-duhkt) a human-made raised channel that carries water from distant places
archaeology the study of the past based on what people left behind
aristocrat (uh-RIS-tuh-krat) a rich landowner or noble
artifact an object created and used by humans

B
bard a Celtic person especially trained to memorize and recite poems about great events and the deeds of heroes
Black Death a deadly plague that swept through Europe between 1347 and 1351.
bronze a metal produced by mixing copper and tin
Buddhism a religion based on the teachings of the Buddha that developed in India in the 500s BC
bureaucracy a body of unelected government officials.
Bushido (BOOH-shi-doh) the code of honor followed by the samurai in Japan, emphasizing loyalty and valuing honor above life
Byzantine Empire the society that developed in the eastern Roman Empire after the fall of the western Roman Empire

C
caliph (KAY-luhf) a title that Muslims use for the highest leader in Islam
calligraphy decorative writing
canal a human-made waterway
canon law the body of laws governing the Roman Catholic Church
caravan a group of traders that travel together
caste system the division of Indian society into groups based on rank, wealth, or occupation
cataracts rapids along a river, such as those along the Nile in Egypt
causeway a raised road across water or wet ground
cavalry a unit of soldiers who ride horses
chariot a wheeled, horse-drawn cart used in battle
checks and balances a system that balances the distribution of power in a government
chivalry (SHIV-uhl-ree) the code of honorable behavior for medieval knights
Christian humanism the combination of humanist and religious ideas
Christianity a religion based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth that developed in Judaea at the beginning of the first century
circumnavigate to go all the way around
citizen a person who has the right to participate in government
city-state an independent city governing itself and the territory surrounding it
civil law a legal system based on a written code of laws
civil service service as a government official
civilization a way of life that has reached an advanced stage of social development
classical an age marked by great achievements
clergy church officials
climate the average weather conditions in a certain area over a long period of time
common law the body of law developed in England primarily from judicial decisions based on custom and precedent
coniferous referring to evergreen trees that have their seeds in cones
Confucianism a philosophy based on the ideas of Confucius that focuses on morality, family order, social harmony, and government
conquistadors (kahn-kees-uh-DOHRS) Spanish soldiers
consul (KAHN-suhlz) the two most powerful officials in Rome
corruption the decay of people’s values
Counter-Reformation the reform movement in the Roman Catholic Church following the Reformation; also called the Catholic Reformation
court a group of nobles who live near and serve or advise a ruler
Crusades a long series of wars between Christians and Muslims in Southwest Asia fought for control of the Holy Land from 1096 to 1291
culture the knowledge, beliefs, customs and values of a group of people
cultural diffusion the spread of ideas from one culture to another
cuneiform (kyoo-NEE-uh-fohrm) the world’s first system of writing; developed in Sumer
czar the title used by the rulers of Russia beginning in 1547
D

daimyo (DY-mee-oh) large landowners of feudal Japan
Daoism (DOW-ih-zum) a philosophy that developed in China and stressed the belief that one should live in harmony with the Dao, the guiding force of all reality
deciduous trees that lose their leaves in the fall
delta a triangle-shaped area of land made from soil deposited by a river
democracy a type of government in which people rule themselves
Diaspora (dy-AS-pruh) the dispersal of the Jews outside of Judah after the Babylonian Captivity
dictator in ancient Rome a man chosen by the consuls to rule in times of emergency
diffusion the spread of ideas from one culture to another
direct democracy a system of government in which the citizens themselves, not their representatives, participate in making major decisions
division of labor an arrangement in which each worker specialized in a particular task or job
domestication the process of changing plants or animals to make them more useful to humans
druid a Celtic priest or learned man
dynasty a series of rulers from the same family

E

elite (AY-leet) people of wealth and power
emir a Muslim prince
empire land with different territories and people under a single ruler
ephor one of five officials who exercised the greatest power in the government of ancient Sparta
epics long poems that tell the stories of heroes
equestrian a member of the middle class of business people in ancient Rome
Estates General a legislative assembly of clergy, nobility, and commoners in France
ethic moral values
excommunicate to cast out from the church
Exodus the journey of the Israelites, led by Moses, from Egypt to Canaan after they were freed from slavery
exports items sent to other regions for trade
extended family a family group that includes the father, mother, children, and close relative

Five Pillars of Islam five acts of worship required of all Muslims
Forum a Roman public meeting place
fossil a part or imprint of something that was once alive
frier a member of a religious order who lived and worked among the public

G

geography the study of Earth’s physical and cultural features
Grand Canal a canal linking northern and southern China
Greco-Roman formed by the blending of ancient Greek and Roman cultural elements
Great Wall a barrier made of walls across China’s northern frontier
Griot a West African storyteller

H

Hammurabi’s Code a set of 282 laws governing daily life in Babylon; the earliest known collection of written laws
Hellenistic Greek-like; heavily influenced by Greek ideas
Hellenistic Age the period in ancient Greek history between 336 BC and 30 BC
Helot a slave in ancient Sparta
heresy (HER-uh-see) religious ideas that oppose accepted church teachings
hieroglyphics (hy-ruh-GLIH-fiks) the ancient Egyptian writing system that used picture symbols
Hindu-Arabic numerals the number system we use today; it was created by Indian scholars during the Gupta dynasty
Hinduism the main religion of India; it teaches that everything is part of a universal spirit called Brahman
Holy Land the region on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea where Jesus lived, preached, and died
humanism the study of history, literature, public speaking, and art that led to a new way of thinking in Europe in the late 1300s
Hundred Years’ War a long conflict between England and France that lasted from 1337 to 1453
hunter-gatherers people who hunt animals and gather wild plants, seeds, fruits, and nuts to survive

I

ice ages long periods of freezing weather
imam a Muslim who leads the faithful in prayer in mosques
imports goods brought in from other regions
indulgence the entire or partial remission of punishment for one’s sins either in this world or in purgatory
irrigation a way of supplying water to an area of land
Islam a religion based on the messages Muhammad is believed to have received from God
isolationism a policy of avoiding contact with other countries
J
Jainism  an Indian religion based on the teachings of Mahavira that teaches all life is sacred
Janissary  an Ottoman slave soldier
Jesuits  members of a Catholic religious order created to serve the pope and the church
jihad (ji-HAH-DEE) to make an effort or to struggle; has also been interpreted to mean holy war
Judaism  (JOH-DEE-i-zuhm) the religion of the Hebrews and Israelites (practiced by Jews today); the oldest monotheistic religion

K
ka  the word meaning “soul” in ancient Egypt
karma  in Buddhism and Hinduism, the effects that good or bad actions have on a person’s soul
Kente  a hand-woven, brightly colored West African fabric
knight  a warrior in medieval Europe who fought on horseback

L
landbridge  a strip of land connecting two continents
Latin  the language of the Romans
Legalism  the Chinese belief that people were bad by nature and needed to be controlled
legion (LEE-juhn) a group of up to 6,000 Roman soldiers
lord  a person of high rank who owned land but owed loyalty to his king

M
magistrate (MAHJUH-strayt) an elected official in Rome
Magna Carta  a document signed in 1215 by King John of England that required the king to honor certain rights
manor  a large estate owned by a knight or lord
medieval  (mee-DEE-vuhl) referring to the Middle Ages
meditation  deep, continued thought that focuses the mind on spiritual ideas
megalith  a huge stone monument
Mesolithic Era  the middle part of the Stone Age; marked by the creation of smaller and more complex tools.
mercenary  a soldier hired by a foreign country to fight in its army
metallurgy  (MET-uhl-uhhr-je) the science of working with metals
Middle Ages  a period that lasted from about 500 to 1500 in Europe
middle class  the social class of business people that grew up in towns in Europe in the Middle Ages
Middle Kingdom  the period of Egyptian history from about 2050 to 1750 BC and marked by order and stability
migrate  to move to a new place
minaret  a narrow tower from which Muslims are called to prayer
missionary  someone who works to spread religious beliefs
mita  labor tax system in the Incan Empire
moat  a deep, wide ditch, usually filled with water, around the walls of a castle
monarch  (MAH-nahrk) a ruler of a kingdom or empire
monarchy  an area, such as a country or a city-state, ruled over by a king or queen; absolute rule by a single person
monastery  a community of monks
monk  a religious man who lived apart from society in an isolated community
monotheism  the belief in only one God
monsoon  a seasonal wind pattern that causes wet and dry seasons
mosque  a building for Muslim prayer
mummy  a specially treated body wrapped cloth for preservation
mummification  the art by which ancient Egyptian priests preserved dead bodies
Muslim  a follower of Islam
mythology  stories about gods and heroes that try to explain how the world works

N
nation-states  self-governing countries made up of people with a common cultural background
Neanderthal  a early human who lived in parts of Europe, Asia and Africa from about 150,000 years ago to about 35,000 years ago
Neolithic Era  the New Stone Age; when people learned to make fire and tools such as saws and drills
Neolithic Revolution  the changes brought about in the lives of early people by many new ideas and inventions during the New Stone Age
nepotism  favoritism shown to a relative (as by giving an appointive job) on the basis of relationship
New Kingdom  the period from about 1550 to 1050 BC in Egyptian history when Egypt reached the height of its power and glory
nirvana  in Buddhism, a state of perfect peace
noble  a rich and powerful person
nomad  a person who has no fixed home but wanders from place to place in search of food and other necessities of life

O
oasis  a wet, fertile area within a desert
obelisk (AH-buh-lishk) a tall, pointed, four-sided pillar in ancient Egypt
observatories  building used to study astronomy; Mayan priests watched the stars from these buildings
Old Kingdom  the period from about 2700 to 2200 BC in Egyptian history that began shortly after Egypt was unified
oligarchy  (AH-luh-gar-kee) a government in which only a few people have power
oracle  a prediction by a wise person, or a person who makes a prediction
oral history  a spoken record of past events
Paleolithic Era (pay-lee-uh-U-thik) the first part of the Stone Age; when people first used stone tools

papyrus (puh-PY-ruhs) a long-lasting paper like material made from reeds that the ancient Egyptians used to write on

pariah a person, also called an untouchable, excluded from the caste system of India

Parliament (PAH-ruh-muhnt) the lawmaking body that governs England

patricians (puh-TRI-shunz) the nobility in Roman society

taxon a sponsor

Pax Romana Roman Peace; a period of general peace and prosperity in the Roman Empire that lasted from 27 BC to AD 180

peasant a farmer with a small farm

Peloponnesian War a war between Athens and Sparta in the 400s BC

Period of Disunion the time of disorder following the collapse of the Han Dynasty

permafrost permanently frozen lower layers of soil found in the tundra and subarctic climate zones

Persian Wars a series of wars between Persia and Greece in the 400s BC

phalanx (FAY-langks) a group of Greek warriors who stood close together in a square formation

pharaoh (FEHR-ob) the title used by the rulers of Egypt

philosopher a person who seeks truth and wisdom

pictograph a picture symbol

pilgrimage a journey to a sacred place

plebeians (pli-BEE-uhnzs) the common people of ancient Rome

polis (PAH-luhs) the Greek word for a city-state

polytheism the worship of many gods

porcelain a thin, beautiful pottery invented in China

priest a person who performs religious ceremonies

primary source an account of an event by someone who took part in or witnessed the event

prophet someone who is said to receive messages from God to be taught to others

Protestant a Christian who protested against the Catholic Church

purgatory in the teachings of the Roman Catholic church an intermediate state after death in which the souls of those who die in God’s grace are purified by suffering

Punic Wars a series of wars between Rome and Carthage in the 200s and 100s BC

pyramid a huge triangular tomb built by the Egyptians and other peoples

Quechua (KE-chuh-wuh) the language of the Inca

Qur’an (kuh-RAN) the holy book of Islam

rabb (RAB-eye) a Jewish religious leader and teacher

Reconquista (re-kuhn-KEES-tuh) the effort of Christian kingdoms in northern Spain to retake land from the Moors during the Middle Ages

Reformation (re-fuhr-MAY-shun) a reform movement against the Roman Catholic Church that began in 1517; it resulted in the creation of Protestant churches

regent a person who rules a country for someone who is unable to rule alone

reincarnation a Hindu and Buddhist belief that souls are born and reborn many times, each time into a new body

Renaissance (re-nuh-SAHNS) the period of “rebirth” and creativity that followed Europe’s Middle Ages

republic a political system in which people elect leaders to govern them

rift valley area of low relief flanked by highland regions that is formed by the moving apart of two of the Earth’s tectonic plates

Roman Senate a council of wealthy and powerful citizens who advised Rome’s leaders

Romance languages languages that developed from Latin, such as Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian

rural a countryside area

saga a story of heroic deeds

Sahel (sah-HEL) a semi-arid region in Africa just south of the Sahara that separates the desert from wetter areas

samurai (SA-muh-rye) a trained professional warrior in feudal Japan

Sanskrit the most important language of ancient India

scholar-official an educated member of the government

satrap the governor of a province in ancient Persia

Scientific Revolution a series of events that led to the birth of modern science; it lasted from about 1540 to 1700

secondary source information gathered by someone who did not take part in or witness an event

secular non-religious

Senate in ancient Rome, the law-making government body that had the most power

seppuku a type of suicide sometimes practiced by the Japanese samurai

serf a worker in medieval Europe who was tied to the land on which he or she lived

Shia (SHEE-ah) a member of the second-largest branch of Islam

Shinto the traditional religion of Japan

shogun a general who ruled Japan in the emperor’s name

Sikhism a monotheistic religion that developed in India in the 1400s

silent barter a process in which people exchange goods without contracting each other directly

Silk Road a network of trade routes that stretched across Asia from China to the Mediterranean Sea

social hierarchy the division of society by rank or class

Spanish Armada a large fleet of Spanish ships that was defeated by England in 1588
Spanish Inquisition  an organization of priests in Spain that looked for and punished anyone suspected of secretly practicing their old religion
sphinx  an imaginary creature with a human head and the body of a lion that was often shown on Egyptian statues
subcontinent  large landmass that is smaller than a continent, such as India
sub-Saharan Africa  Africa south of the Sahara
Sufism (SOO-fi-ahm) a movement in Islam that taught people they can find God’s love by having a personal relationship with God
sultan  a leader of the Ottoman Turks
Sunnah  a collection of writing about the way Muhammad lived that provides a model for Muslims to follow
Sunni  a member of the largest branch of Islam
surplus  more of something than is needed
synagogue (SI-nuh-gawg) a Jewish house of worship

T
taiga  large coniferous forests
terrace  step-like structure built on a mountainside to allow for farming
tolerance  acceptance
tournament  a contest of skill and courage between armored knights with blunted lances or swords
trade network  a system of people in different lands who trade goods back and forth
trade route  a path followed by traders
tribune  a Roman official with the function of protecting the plebeians from arbitrary actions by patrician magistrates
tribute  goods, services or money paid to a ruler or nation as a kind of tax
typhoon  a tropical cyclone occurring in the Pacific Ocean
tyrant  an ancient Greek leader who held power through the use of force

U
urban  a city area

V
vassal  a knight who promised to support a lord in exchange for land in medieval Europe
veto (VEE-toh) to reject or prohibit actions and laws of other government officials
Viking  one of the Norse raiders who plundered the coasts of Europe from the 8th to 10th centuries

W
X,Y,Z
Zealots (ZE-luhhts) radical Jews who supported rebellion against the Romans
Zen  a form of Buddhism that emphasized meditation
ziggurat  a pyramid-shaped temple in Sumer