

The Americas: A Separate World**Section 1****The Earliest Americans****Terms and Names****Beringia** Land bridge between Asia and the Americas**Ice Age** Time when sheets of ice covered large portions of North America**maize** Corn; the most important crop of the Americas**Before You Read**

In the last chapter, you read about African civilizations.

In this section, you will read about the Americas' first inhabitants.

As You Read

Use a chart to list causes and effects of the development of the Americas.

A LAND BRIDGE (Pages 235–236)**How did the earliest people come to the Americas?**

North and South America form a single stretch of land. It stretches from the Arctic Circle in the north to the waters around Antarctica in the south. The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans separate the Americas from Africa, Asia, and Europe.

But that was not always the case. From around 1.6 million years ago until about 10,000 years ago, the earth went through an **Ice Age**. During this time, huge sheets of ice called glaciers spread south from the Arctic Circle. The level of the world's oceans went down. The lowered oceans exposed land that is today again covered by water.

One strip of land, called **Beringia**, connected Asia and North America. Wild animals crossed this rocky land bridge and entered North America for the first time. Some of the Asian people who hunted these animals followed them. The people became the first Americans.

No one knows for sure when these first people arrived. Some scholars say the

people came to the Americas as long ago as 40,000 B.C. Others say as late as 12,000 B.C. A discovery in Chile suggests that people were well-settled in that part of the Americas by 10,500 B.C. Since Chile lies far south of the land bridge, some experts say that people needed many thousands of years to travel that far. For this reason, they think that the first people must have crossed the land bridge in about 20,000 B.C.

1. Where did the first Americans come from?

HUNTERS AND GATHERERS**(Page 236)****How did early Americans live?**

These first Americans lived as hunters. One of their favorite hunting targets was the huge mammoth. Over time, however, all the mammoths died. People were forced to look for other food. They began to hunt smaller animals and to fish.

Section 1, *continued*

They also began to gather plants and fruits to eat. They no longer had to roam over large areas to search for the mammoth, so they settled for part of the year in one spot.

Between 12,000 and 10,000 B.C., the climate changed. The Ice Age ended, and the world warmed up again. The huge sheets of ice melted, and the oceans rose again to cover the land bridge that connected Asia to the Americas. By this time, though, people lived from north to south in the Americas. They lived in many different environments and found ways of life suited to the place where they lived.

2. What kinds of prey did the first Americans hunt?

AGRICULTURE CREATES A NEW WAY OF LIFE (Page 238–239)
How did agriculture change ways of life?

About 7000 B.C., the people living in central Mexico started a quiet revolution—farming. It was the same kind of radical change that had happened in several spots in Asia and Africa. By 3400 B.C., they had several foods that they grew, including squashes, beans, chilies,

and the most important one—**maize**, or corn. Corn grew so well that a family of three could, in four months, grow enough corn to feed it for two years.

Over many centuries, farming spread throughout the Americas. In what is now the eastern United States and in the region of the Andes, people may have discovered the idea of farming on their own. In central Mexico, farmers became so skilled at growing corn that they could enjoy three harvests each year.

Farming had the same results in the Americas that it did in Asia and Africa. Growing food gave people a larger and more reliable food supply. As more people could be fed, they were healthier and lived longer. As a result, the population grew.

Because farmers produced so much food, some people could concentrate on other ways of making a living. They began to work in different arts and crafts and learned new skills. Some people became rich. They owned more than others and enjoyed a higher position in society. Some people became rulers. Others became their subjects.

3. Why was maize so important?

Section 1, *continued*

As you read about the earliest Americans, take notes to answer questions about their way of life.

The earliest Americans lived as hunters and gatherers.

1. According to most experts, when and how did the first Americans arrive in North America?	2. As large animals became extinct, how did hunters adapt to this change in their environment?
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The earliest Americans began to experiment with simple methods of farming.

3. How did farming develop in what is now central Mexico?	4. What crops grew well in the tropical climate of Mexico?
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Agriculture dramatically changed peoples' way of life.

5. How did farming affect where people lived?	6. How did farming affect the structure of society?
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