Assur was once one of the greatest cities in the world. About 30,000 people lived there. A huge temple tower, or ziggurat, stood about 200 feet above the city streets. Assur (or Ashur) was one of the leading cities of Assyria, the center of a great empire.


A Dry Land

Assur is located in what is now Iraq, a country in the Middle East. Many parts of Iraq are covered by desert. Water is hard to find in the desert areas. To increase the amount of water, Iraqi officials are building a dam on the river Tigris.

The dam will trap the river's water. As the water rises, it might flood Assur and many other nearby ancient ruins.

Scientists worry that floodwaters will destroy artifacts hidden beneath the desert sand. Assur has already been the site of some amazing discoveries.

A Rich Past

Scientists recently discovered four hidden tombs at Assur. They found ancient coffins, gold, jewelry, and gems. They also dug up the remains of two ancient Assurian queens.
Scientists used modern medical equipment to study the queens' bodies. They learned about some of the medical problems the ancient queens suffered from. The bodies showed evidence of dental cavities, sinus infections, and poor nutrition.

Michael Müller-Karpe, a scientist who studies ancient Assyria, said, "The Assyrian queens have just begun to speak to us, and we are looking forward to more answers."

**Preserving the Past**

Müller-Karpe and other scientists worry that the new dam may keep them from getting more answers. Even if the new dam doesn't flood Assur, the rising water could damage the ancient city. Moisture could cause the artifacts to crumble.

"You can't save Assur if it's [near] a dam," said scientist Peter Miglus. The soil beneath the ancient city would soak up water like a sponge. The water in the soil would destroy what's left of ancient Assur.

For now, scientists are scrambling to uncover the secrets hidden for centuries in Assur and other nearby communities. Meanwhile, some people are looking for ways to save the ancient cities. "We don't want the slightest damage to Assur," one Iraqi official said.
1. Why do scientists think a dam near Assur is a bad idea?
   A  Rising water could damage the desert.
   B  Rising water could damage the ancient city.
   C  The people of Iraq do not want a new dam.
   D  Dams are dangerous.

2. Which is not a possible effect of a new dam?
   A  Waters will destroy artifacts.
   B  The amount of water will be increased.
   C  Scientists will learn about an ancient city.
   D  The ancient city will be flooded.

3. The great city of Assur became mostly covered by sand
   A  because of a hurricane
   B  because of a flood
   C  as hundreds of years went by
   D  so scientists could dig for treasure

4. Read the following sentence: “Scientists worry that floodwaters will destroy artifacts hidden beneath the desert sand.”

The word artifacts most nearly means
   A  very old objects
   B  gold, jewelry, and gems
   C  huge temple towers
   D  secrets

5. What is the main idea of this passage?
   A  The dam being built on the river Tigris will bring water to the people.
   B  Assur is an ancient city in the desert with a rich past that scientists are trying to quickly uncover
   C  The ancient Queens of Assur had many health issues which likely lead to their death
   D  The water from the dam could destroy the artifacts that are yet to be discovered in the ancient city of Assur.
6. What did Scientists learn about the ancient queens of Assur?

_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________

7. Why would a dam make it harder to make more discoveries in Assur?

_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Assur was once a major city _________ now it is in ruins.

A  but
B  because
C  so
D  before

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Scientists in Iraq used modern equipment to study the Assurian queens’ bodies and learn about their medical problems.

Who? scientists
(did) What? __________________________________________________________
Why? ________________________________________________________________
Where? ________________________________________________________________
Questions: Looking for Ancient Treasure

**Directions:** Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: **ancient** (an · cient): very, very old.

**10a.** Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word **ancient**.

1. Dinosaur fossils are ancient because many fossils are millions of years old.
2. The ancient tree was still standing and had grown to hundreds of feet high.
3. We went to the museum and saw ancient African art.
4. The ancient man was over one hundred years old.
5. Our TV is so ancient it can only get three channels.

**10b.** Which image looks ancient?

![Image 1](image1.png)  ![Image 2](image2.png)

**11.** Are your old clothes ancient? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

Featured text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: The passage describes the ancient and wealthy city of Assur located in present day Iraq. It describes the ancient remains and artifacts scientists have been able to uncover and what they tell us about the old city.

1. Why do scientists think a dam near Assur is a bad idea?
   A. Rising water could damage the desert.
   B. **Rising water could damage the ancient city.**
   C. The people of Iraq do not want a new dam.
   D. Dams are dangerous.

2. Which is not a possible effect of a new dam?
   A. Waters will destroy artifacts.
   B. The amount of water will be increased.
   C. **Scientists will learn about an ancient city.**
   D. The ancient city will be flooded.

3. The great city of Assur became mostly covered by sand
   A. because of a hurricane
   B. because of a flood
   C. **as hundreds of years went by**
   D. so scientists could dig for treasure

4. Read the following sentence: “Scientists worry that floodwaters will destroy artifacts hidden beneath the desert sand.”

The word **artifacts** most nearly means
   A. very old objects
   B. gold, jewelry, and gems
   C. huge temple towers
   D. secrets

5. What is the main idea of this passage?
   A. The dam being built on the river Tigris will bring water to the people.
   B. Assur is an ancient city in the desert with a rich past that scientists are trying to quickly uncover
   C. The ancient Queens of Assur had many health issues which likely lead to their death
   D. **The water from the dam could destroy the artifacts that are yet to be discovered in the ancient city of Assur.**
6. What did Scientists learn about the ancient queens of Assur?

**Suggested answer:** The ancient queens had gold and jewelry and gems. In addition, the queens suffered from dental cavities, sinus infections and poor nutrition. [paragraphs 6,7]

7. Why would a dam make it harder to make more discoveries in Assur?

**Suggested answer:** A dam could make it harder for scientists to make more discoveries for a number of reasons. First the water from the Tigris River will be rerouted and could flood Assur and many nearby ruins. Even if there is no flooding the water could cause the artifacts to crumble. The soil beneath the city will soak up the water and will destroy all that is yet to be discovered. [paragraphs 5, 9, 10]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word below that best completes the sentence.

Assur was once a major city ________ now it is in ruins.

A but  
B because  
C so  
D before

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Scientists in Iraq used modern equipment to study the Assurian queens’ bodies and learn about their medical problems.

Who? scientists  
(did) What? **used modern equipment**  
Why? **to study the Assurian queens’ bodies and learn about their medical problems**  
Where? in Iraq

**To the Teacher:** ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary Word: **ancient** (an · cient): very, very old.

**Step 1:** Introduce the word

a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (an · cient)

b. Teacher says: “This word is ancient. What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “ancient.”]

**Step 2:** Provide a child-friendly definition

a. Teacher says: If something is ancient, it is very, very old.”
b. Teacher says: “In the passage, the city of Assur is described as being ancient because it is 3,500 years old. While today it is in ruins and covered by desert sand, scientists have recently discovered four hidden tombs and the remains of two ancient queens in Assur from long ago.”

c. Teacher says: “What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “ancient.”]

Step 3: Practice the word

Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the first sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

Directions: Read the vocabulary word and definition below to complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: ancient (an•cient): very, very old.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline all forms of the word ancient.

1. Dinosaur fossils are ancient because many fossils are millions of years old.

2. The ancient tree was still standing and had grown to hundreds of feet high.

3. We went to the museum and saw ancient African art.

4. The ancient man was over one hundred years old.

5. Our TV is so ancient it can only get three channels.

10b. Which image looks ancient?

11. Are your old clothes ancient? Why or why not?

Suggested answer: No, because they are not extremely old. They are relatively new and not from a time that existed long, long ago.