



FUN FACTS

1. Writing was invented in Mesopotamia over 5000 years ago. The Sumerians (people living in the southern part of Mesopotamia) wrote on clay tablets. We call their script cuneiform. The Sumerian writing system uses almost 1000 symbols. People are working every day to try to understand their written language. The Penn Museum has a team of archaeologists writing a Sumerian dictionary. It took them almost ten years to complete the letter “B”! Why do you think it took them so long? Ask your guide for more information on cuneiform.
2. School lasted from sunrise to sunset for Mesopotamian scholars and the teachers were very strict! If students talked or made too many mistakes in class, the teacher was allowed to beat them. If you were a student in Mesopotamia and you complained that your teacher did not like you, your parents might invite him to the house for dinner and beg him to give you another chance. What do your parents say or do today if you complain to them about a teacher?
3. The Sumerians wrote on clay tablets. They also had envelopes for the tablets. What do you think the envelopes were made of? Ask your guide to show you some ancient envelopes.
4. Thousands of clay tablets have survived all these years, because they do not decompose the way paper or other organic material does when buried for hundreds or thousands of years. Museum scientists bake the clay before studying the tablets, which makes them so hard that it is almost impossible to completely destroy them. Look around your school or home – how many things do you see that you think will last 5,000 years?
5. Sumerian laws required that every business arrangement be written down and signed. Each person carried his or her own cylinder seal, which had a personal engraving used as a signature. The seal would be rolled on soft clay and the imprint of the design was transferred to the tablet. If you had to design a seal to represent you, what image would you choose to carve? Why?

6. Surgeon's fees were set by law and they earned a lot of money. However, if a surgeon operated on the eye of a wealthy person who then lost his sight, the surgeon would lose one hand. Would you want to be a surgeon in ancient Mesopotamia?
7. Check out the Museum's web page (www.penn.museum/iraq) to find out more about *Iraq's Ancient Past*.
8. While you're looking at the Museum's website, search for "cuneiform" so you can create and print out your monogram in cuneiform.

Words to Learn

carnelian
ceremonial
cuneiform
cylinder seal
lapis lazuli
lyre
stamp seal
stylus