***Middle East***

Physical Characteristics notes 2

**Location**

*      Crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia; Middle East consists primarily of Southwest Asia and Northern Africa

*      Turkey also owns a small strip of land in Europe where part of the city of Istanbul is located

**Desert and semiarid climates**

Sahara

*      largest hot desert in the world; roughly the same size as the United States

*      stretches across countries of northern Africa, especially Algeria and Libya

Sahel

*      mostly savanna (semi-arid grasslands)

*      hot and dry; vegetation is limited to grasses, thorns/weeds

*      desertification is a major problem; occurs because of overgrazing of the land

*      stretches across northern Africa below the Sahara Desert, especially in Mali, Niger, and Chad

**Mountains**

Atlas Mountains

*      northwest Africa in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia

*      Rock of Gibraltar is part of this mountain range

*      between Sahara Desert and Atlantic/Mediterranean coast

*      formed when Africa and America collided millions of years ago

Taurus Mountains

*      Eastern Turkey

*      source of Euphrates River that flows southeast through Syria and Iraq

Zagros Mountains

*      extend throughout western Iran along the border with Iraq and in the ethnic region of Kurdistan

*      range ends at the Strait of Hormuz that separates the Persian Gulf from the Arabian Sea

Mount Ararat

*      part of Caucasus Mountains; Eastern Turkey

*      tallest mountain peak in Turkey

*      many believe that Noah’s Ark came to rest here

**Rivers**

*      Seasonal flooding deposits alluvial soils (silt and other deposits) on shorelines and riverbeds

*      Delta regions:  area where rivers spread out and drain into a larger body of water; creates fertile soil

        --deltas of the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates are fertile areas

*      Oasis:  isolated area of vegetation in a desert; surrounding a spring or other water source

        --necessary for trade via caravan routes, military advantages

*      Wadis:  dry riverbeds that contain water only after heavy rains; underground water available (wells)

        --populations centered around wadis in primarily desert countries

Nile River

*      longest river in the world, flows north into the Mediterranean Sea

*      city of Cairo grew on fertile land of the Nile Delta

*      Khartoum, Sudan grew at confluence of Blue and White Nile

*      White Nile begins at Lake Victoria

*      Blue Nile begins in the Ethiopian Highlands

*      frequent flooding before construction of Aswan High Dam

        --controls flooding, but blocks silt

        --Lake Nassar formed by dam

*      ancient Egyptian civilizations grew on fertile land near the river

Tigris River

*      Northeastern member of a pair of rivers that define Mesopotamia (along with the Euphrates)

*      Flows from Taurus Mountains in Turkey past Baghdad, Iraq into the Persian Gulf

*      Turkish dams have been a source of controversy

*      Used for irrigation in a primarily desert country

*      Navigable only as far as Baghdad

Euphrates River

*      Southwestern member of a pair of rivers that define Mesopotamia (along with the Tigris)

*      Flows from mountains in Turkey through Syria and Iraq into the Persian Gulf

*      Combines with the Tigris before emptying into the gulf

*      Turkish dams cause controversy; very limited navigability

Jordan River

*      Flows south through the Sea of Galilee into the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth

*      Much of the river forms the border between Jordan and Israel

*      Water heavily used for human purposes (irrigation, etc.), causing the Dead Sea to shrink

*      Frequently mentioned in the Christian Bible; Jesus baptized in it

**Other Water Features**

Mediterranean Sea

*      Divides S. Europe, N. Africa, and S.W. Asia

Red Sea

*      Gulf of the Indian Ocean between Asia and Africa (Egypt and Saudi Arabia)

*      Connected to Mediterranean Sea by Suez Canal

Black Sea

*      Between Europe and Asia; important for trade; Turkish straits allows access to Mediterranean

Arabian Sea

*      Northwestern part of the Indian Ocean; touches western India and the Arabian Peninsula

Persian/Arabian Gulf

*      Gulf of the Indian Ocean between Iran and Saudi Arabia; connected to ocean by Strait of Hormuz

*      Also touches many other small oil-rich countries; richest oil-producing region in the world

*      Site of recent wars (Iran v. Iraq; Iraq v. Kuwait & US, etc.); many oil tankers sunk in the gulf

*      Tigris/Euphrates River flows into it

Strait of Hormuz

*      Narrow strip of Indian Ocean that connects the Persian/Arabian Gulf to the Arabian Sea

*      Very important shipping route for oil coming from the Persian Gulf countries

Bosporus Strait

*      Small strip of water that allows shipping between the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea

*      Separates Europe from Asia

*      Sea of Marmara below leads to Mediterranean

*      Straddled by strategically important Turkish city of Istanbul (formerly Constantinople, Byzantium)

        --Historically important for military and trade

Dardanelles Strait

*      Southernmost of two important Turkish straits (Bosporus is the other one) that control access from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea

*      Connects the Aegean Sea (part of Mediterranean) to the Sea of Marmara