

Why Salt?

Valuable Little Cubes

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WORDS TO KNOW

As you read, look inside, around, and beyond these words to figure out what they mean.

- **role**
- **regulated**
- **access**



The *Via Salaria*, shown in yellow, led from the sea coast to Rome, an important center of trade.

- 1 Today, salt is given out freely in shakers and packets at our favorite restaurants. We can buy it cheaply at any grocery store. But it hasn't always been so easy to get salt. This tiny crystal cube has played a much more important role in history than just flavoring our fries. Around the world, cities were founded, roads were built, wars were fought, and trade routes were established, all for one reason: humans can't live without salt. Literally. Because of this simple fact, salt became a valuable item a long time ago. People who controlled salt had power. Around 2,000 years ago, some of the people with salt—and power—were the Romans.
- 2 One way Rome controlled salt was by building villages along the Mediterranean coast. This gave them access to the sea where they could harvest salt. One of the first great roads built by Romans . . . is called *Via Salaria*, or "Salt Road." It is the oldest road in Italy today. As you might have guessed, it was built to transport salt.
- 3 As Rome grew, it became a great trading center, and salt was one of the main items traded there. Salt was so important in the daily lives of the Romans that soldiers were paid in blocks of salt. This pay was called *salarium argentums* or "salt money," giving us our word *salary*. In fact, the word *soldier* comes from the Latin *sol dare*, meaning "to give salt."



- 4 Throughout history and around the world, governments have regulated and taxed salt. . . . Salt played a role in the history of our country, too. In both the Revolutionary and Civil wars, keeping enough salt for the soldiers was important. In these and other wars, enemies have tried to keep salt away from each other. The history of the world is overflowing with stories of salt.

What's So Important About Salt?

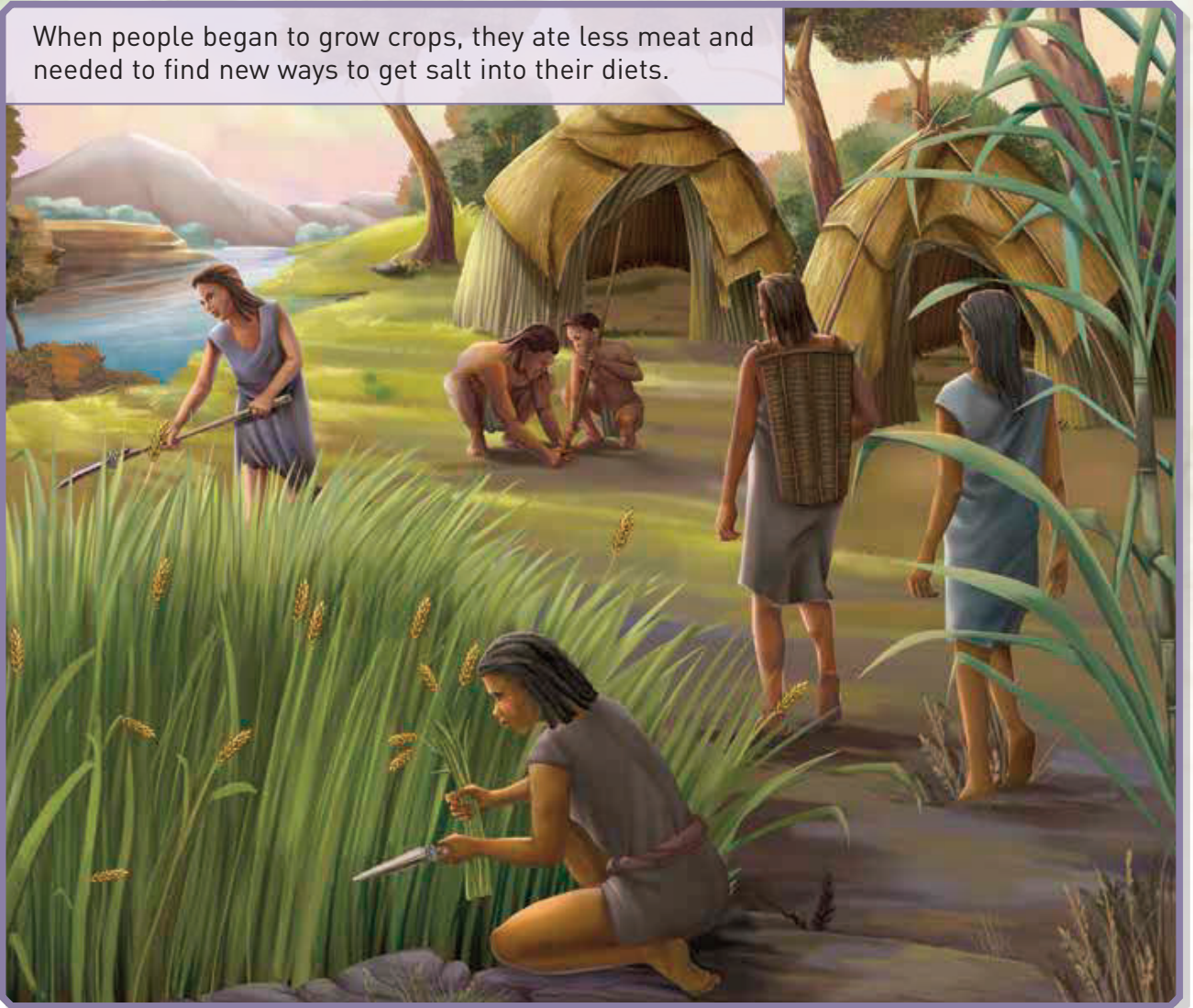
- 5 Human beings can't live without salt. It is a basic ingredient in our bodies. Salt is in our tears, sweat, saliva, blood, and even in our urine. Without this mineral our cells, nerves, and muscles can't do their jobs properly. However, too much salt can cause kidneys to work overtime, blood vessels to swell, and blood pressure to go dangerously high.




Roman soldiers were paid in *salarium argentum* or "salt money."

- 6 Our health depends on having the right amount of salt in our bodies. Generally, the human body is very good at keeping our salt levels balanced. But sometimes that balance can be thrown off. Our diets, for example, might contain extremely low or extremely high amounts of salt. If this goes on for too long, there could be serious consequences—even death.
- 7 When early humans survived on the meat they hunted, their bodies got enough salt from the animals they ate. As people learned to grow their vegetables and grains and began to eat less meat, salt became more important. And it was often hard to find. The need for salt and the limited supply of it made salt very valuable!

When people began to grow crops, they ate less meat and needed to find new ways to get salt into their diets.



 **Think and Write** Use what you learned from reading the history article to respond to the following questions.

- 1** Which sentence from “Why Salt?” **best** helps you understand what the authors mean by saying that salt “played a role” in history?
- A** “. . . cities were founded, roads were built, wars were fought, and trade routes were established, all for one reason. . . .” (paragraph 1)
 - B** “In fact, the word *soldier* comes from the Latin *sol dare* meaning “to give salt.” (paragraph 3)
 - C** “In both the Revolutionary and Civil wars, keeping enough salt for the soldiers was important.” (paragraph 4)
 - D** “Without this mineral our cells, nerves, and muscles can’t do their jobs properly.” (paragraph 5)
- 2** What inference can you make based on the information in paragraph 3 of the article?
- A** Roman soldiers used blocks of salt as payment so they could travel along the Salt Road.
 - B** Salt was so valued by Romans that it was used as a form of pay.
 - C** Roman soldiers did not have a healthy diet, so they were paid in blocks of salt.
 - D** The Roman government ran out of gold, so it paid soldiers in blocks of salt.
- 3** Which statement **best** explains why salt became valuable?
- A** The salt trade was often controlled by powerful governments.
 - B** Armies required large amounts of salt to keep their troops healthy.
 - C** Early peoples got salt from the animals they hunted and ate.
 - D** Everyone needed salt, but it was hard to find in some places.

4 Which statement **best** describes the connection between salt and the power of ancient Rome?

- A Salt provided the Romans with funds to build villages along the Mediterranean coast.
- B With easy access to sea salt, Rome became a center of the salt trade and could control its price.
- C By selling the salt it harvested, Rome earned enough money to add new roads in other parts of the country.
- D Gaining more and more “salt money” allowed Rome to hire soldiers who brought home riches from the wars.

5 What does the word overflowing mean as it is used in paragraph 4?

- A wide and vast
- B overly full of
- C covered completely
- D in short supply

6 **Short Response** According to the section “What’s So Important About Salt?,” why is it important for people to keep their salt levels balanced? Use **two** details from the article to support your response.

7 Short Response How is the value of salt different today than it was in ancient Roman times? Include **two** details from the article to support your response.



Learning Target

In this lesson, you learned to use text details and what you know to make inferences. Now explain how this can help you develop a deeper understanding of informational texts.

A graphic of a white sheet of paper with a perforated top edge, resembling a page from a binder. It contains five horizontal blue lines for writing.
