

Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Culture



Introduction to Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Culture

Daily Life in Ancient Egypt

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Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.



We learn about the past by looking at the **evidence** left behind. The people who search for and study this evidence are called **archaeologists**.

This evidence can take several different forms including:

- objects, such as pots and jewelry – we call these **artifacts**
- drawings or written accounts.



This image of a tomb painting shows the embalming process.





When studying these artifacts, archaeologists ask a number of questions including:

- What is it made from?
- What is it for?
- Who might have used it?



Can you answer these questions for this vase?

What other types of artifact do you think might tell us about daily life in Ancient Egypt?





An archaeological find





Ancient Egyptian life was centered around the **River Nile**. Villages and cities sprang up in the land around the river, rather than in the vast desert areas.

The Nile:

- provided drinking water
- gave poorer people somewhere to bathe
- made the land fertile, helping crops to grow
- was the main method of travel and transportation.



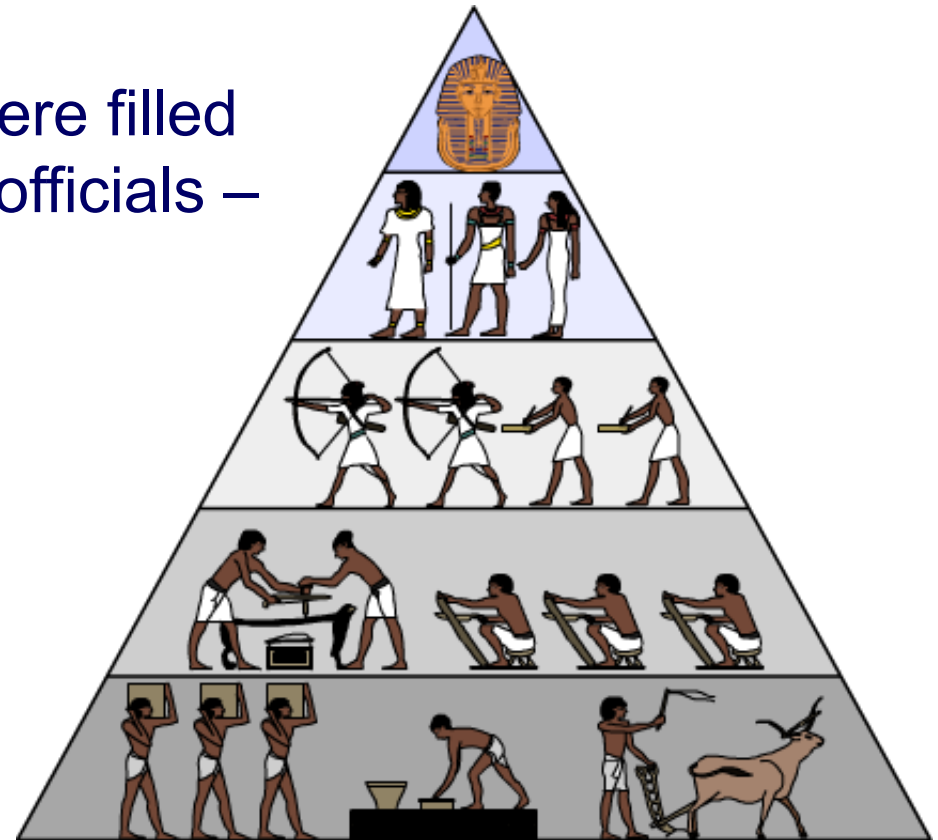


Ancient Egyptian society was **hierarchical** (ordered according to rank). The pharaoh and gods sat at the top of the hierarchy.

The upper levels of society were filled by government and religious officials – nobles and priests.

They were followed by the skilled workers – scribes, soldiers and artisans.

At the lower levels were the unskilled workers, such as peasant farmers and slaves.



What do you think life was like for each group?



After **Menes** united the Upper and Lower Kingdoms of Egypt in 3100 BC, Egypt was ruled by a **pharaoh**. The pharaoh was both king and the representative of the gods on Earth.

The pharaoh had the responsibility to:

- pass laws and maintain order
- keep the gods happy, perform rituals and build temples
- lead armies
- collect taxes (in this case, grain).





The pharaoh could not govern alone. Both nobles and priests helped the pharaoh to rule.

The pharaoh's chief overseer was called the **vizier**. The vizier supervised the day-to-day running of the country and presided over the High Court. Lower officials reported to the vizier and the vizier reported to the pharaoh.

Other important officials included:

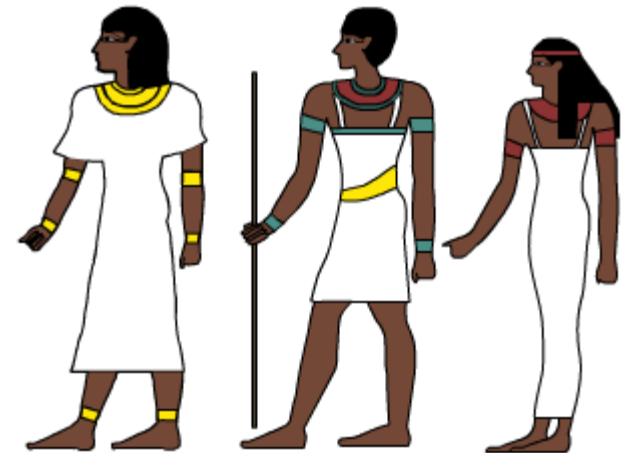
- the **chief treasurer** who was responsible for the kingdom's finances and tax collection
- the **general of the armies**, a military commander who advised the pharaoh on military matters.





Nobles known as **nomarchs** governed administrative districts called **nomes**. This position was often **hereditary**. They were responsible for maintaining local law and order.

Dividing the kingdom into districts helped the pharaoh govern a large amount of land. However, nomarchs could build up their own power bases in the localities and threaten the power and control of the pharaoh.



The consequences of a nomarch gaining too much power could be severe. The Old Kingdom collapsed as nomarchs challenged the rule of the pharaoh.

What do you think happened after the collapse of the Old Kingdom?



The Ancient Egyptians were **polytheistic** (believed in many gods). They worshiped a huge number of gods, both local and national.

One of the most famous gods was Amun. During the New Kingdom he was combined with the sun god Ra and became **Amun-Ra**, King of the Gods.

Temples were built as houses for the gods. Here, priests performed rituals and held festivals to celebrate the gods.

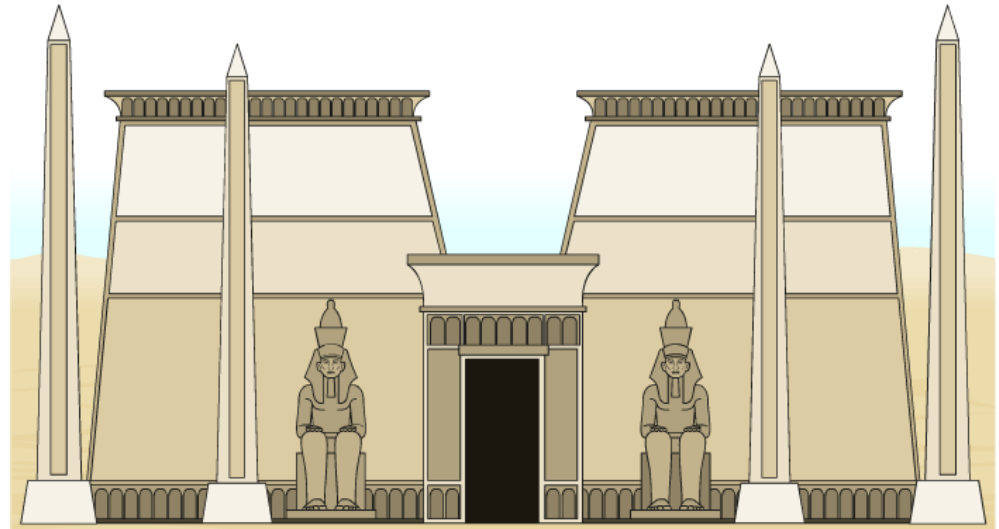


Can you name any other Egyptian gods?



Priests and priestesses had a very important role in Ancient Egyptian society. They cared for the needs of the gods.

The statue of the god of a temple was kept in the inner sanctuary. Only the priest could enter this area to care for the statue and perform rituals.



It was essential that priests fulfilled their duties and the gods were well cared for. The gods worked together to maintain harmony across Egypt. Pleasing the gods provided protection from their wrath and ensured life continued peacefully.



The Egyptians also believed in life after death. They thought that the spirit needed the body in the afterlife, so they **mummified** their dead.

Priests would first **embalm** the body. They removed the lungs, stomach, liver and intestines and dried them with a special salt. These were placed in **canopic jars**.

After mummification the body could be buried. Pharaohs were buried in a pyramid or the Valley of the Kings.

Where were ordinary people buried?



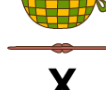
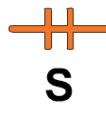


The Ancient Egyptians found it important to record data and information, so they developed different writing systems.

The **hieroglyphic** writing system was made up of over 700 symbols which represented different sounds. They were mainly used to make inscriptions on temple and tomb walls.



The **Hieratic** script developed alongside hieroglyphics and was initially used for everyday and official purposes on papyrus paper. However, **demotic** script, which developed from hieratic, later replaced it as the main script for common writing. By the end of the empire, hieratic was restricted to more formal or religious documents.





When hieroglyphics were first discovered, archaeologists could not understand them.

In 1799, some French soldiers discovered the **Rosetta Stone** which had been carved in 196 BC. It has copies of the same text in three different languages.



What might scholars have used the Rosetta Stone for?



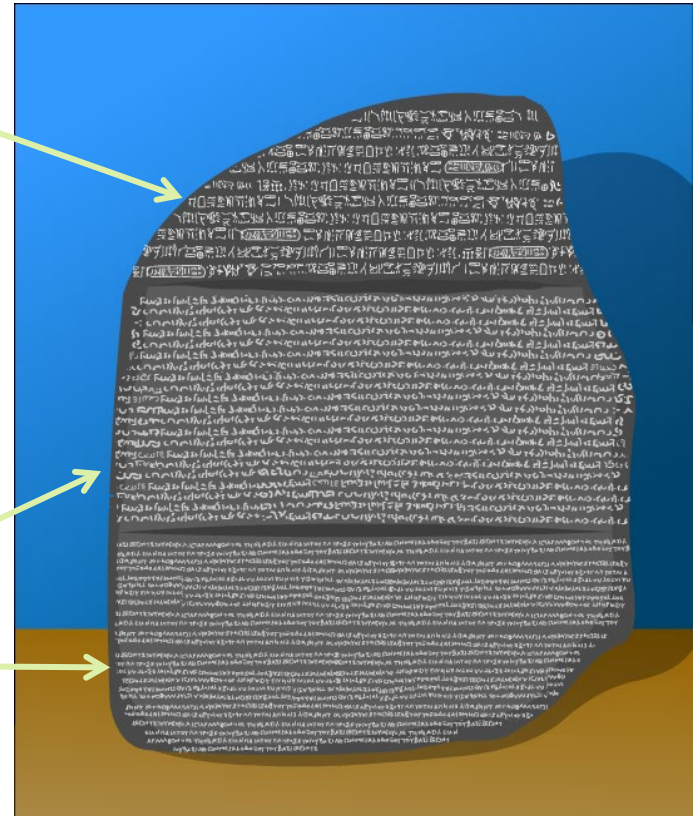
Thomas Young saw that the Ancient Greek writing was about Pharaoh Ptolemy. Using this information he was able to work out what the hieroglyphics with an oval shape, or **cartouche**, around them said.

Hieroglyphics

Jean-Paul Champillon was then able to use Young's discovery to work out the entire alphabet!

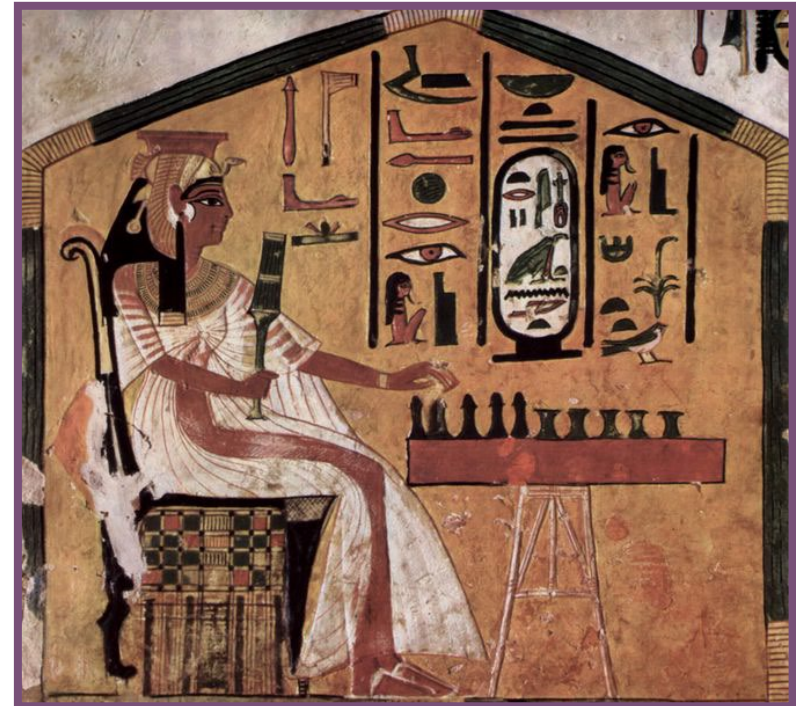
Demotic

Ancient Greek



The Egyptians made sure they had plenty of time for **entertainment** activities. These included:

- river activities, such as fishing, swimming, river boat outings and hunting crocodiles and hippopotamuses
- playing sports, including hockey, rowing and archery
- holding festivals in honor of the gods
- dancing.



What does this tomb painting tell us about Egyptian leisure activities?

1. Which of these is not a form of evidence we now use to learn about the Ancient Egyptians?



artifacts

tomb drawings

interviews ✓

2. Which group made up the lowest level of society?

nobles

skilled workers

unskilled workers ✓

3. Why did the Egyptians mummify the body?



because it was needed in the afterlife ✓ to experiment

4. Which of these was not an ancient Egyptian leisure activity?



archery

video games ✓

dancing



