

Early Peoples Activity Sheet:
Ancient Egyptians

1. Physical Features

a) Describe the environment along the Nile.

The river Nile ran through Egypt for 1000 kilometres. The banks of the river were lush and green, thanks to the water supply. The Nile Valley was rich in birds, animals and fish. Beyond the river was desert.

b) During ancient times, the Nile flooded the Valley every summer. When the flood waters subsided, what did this create for farmers?

The floodwaters left behind a layer of rich black silt, carried down from the highlands. The silt created a fertile strip of land, which averaged about 10 kilometres in width on each side of the river. Crops grew well here, especially in the sun of the following winter and spring.

c) Why did Early Egyptians settle in the Nile Valley?

The climate in the region became hotter and drier over time. The whole region gradually turned to desert, except for the Nile Valley. People were forced to move to the fertile strip along the river. The early settlements in ancient Egypt grew into villages and towns and communities formed in different areas.

2. Kingdoms

a) Ancient Egyptian history is broken into a three kingdoms. Name these three kingdoms and provide the dates.

Old Kingdom (2650 B.C. – 2150 B.C.), Middle Kingdom (1975 B.C. – 1640 B.C.) and New Kingdom (1539 B.C. – 1075 B.C.).

b) You will notice that there is a space in time between each Kingdom. What is this period generally referred to as?

An Intermediate Period. There were 2 intermediate periods. One between Old and Middle Kingdom known as the First Intermediate Period and one between the Middle and New Kingdom known as the Second Intermediate Period.

c) What contributed to the end of the Old Kingdom?

A long period of drought, when the Nile failed to rise high enough to flood the lands, meant that crops did not grow and that many people starved. The royal family began to lose control which resulted in an invasion from Nubia.

3. Roles of key groups in ancient Egypt

a) The rise of the nomarchs after the collapse of the Old Kingdom resulted in tighter control by the new rulers of the Middle Kingdom. How did the nomarchs influence the law during the early years of the Middle Kingdom?

Under the changes of the Middle Kingdom, the nomarchs were forced to pay heavy taxes and provide troops for the Egyptian army. The kings of the Middle Kingdom closed the nomarchs courts and took away many of their privileges. The position lost its

hereditary status and local rulers were again appointed by, and therefore more loyal, to the king.

b) There were many important people and groups involved in the running of ancient Egypt.

Describe the role of each of these people and groups?

i) The King/Pharaoh

The pharaoh was the supreme ruler of ancient Egypt. He or she was the head of the government, the chief priest, and the country's leader in war. The pharaoh became a living god from the moment he or she was crowned.

ii) The Vizier

The Viziers were the most important of the government officials. The main work of a vizier was to make daily reports to the pharaoh, to issue instructions to the various government departments, and to appoint other officials. The vizier was also the chief of tax and the chief justice and made judgements in important criminal cases.

iii) Nomarchs

Nomarchs ruled the 42 provinces called nomes, which Egypt was divided into. Nomarchs held great power in their own region – they were in control of everything within their nome, from tax collection to overseeing the temples.

c) What brought the Middle Kingdom to an end?

A group of settlers, called the Hyksos seized power and brought the Middle Kingdom to an end.

d) Who were the Hyksos and what influences did they bring with them to Egypt?

Hyksos were a group of settlers who moved to the region toward the end of the Middle Kingdom. With them, they brought many new developments such as chariots and other weapons and technology.

e) How did the kings of Upper Egypt reclaim power over the Hyksos?

The kings of Upper Egypt began a war of liberation against the Hyksos. After a long struggle, they drove the Hyksos out of the country.

f) The next phase of ancient Egyptian history is considered the greatest in Ancient Egyptian history. What is the next phase in history called?

The New Kingdom.

g) Look at the map showing the extent of lands held by Egypt during the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms on Page 11. During what period was Egypt's Empire the largest?

During the New Kingdom.

h) What does the size of Egypt's Empire in the New Kingdom tell us?

The size of Egypt's Empire during the New Kingdom tells us that this was when Egypt was at the height of its power and it was the greatest period of ancient Egyptian history.

4. Warfare

a) During the New Kingdom, the Egyptian army was organised into four divisions. What were these four divisions and what were they named after?

The four divisions were named after the four most important gods – Amun, Re, Ptah and Seth.

b) In the New Kingdom, archers adopted the composite bow over the long bow. In what ways was the composite bow better than the longbow?

The composite bow was much more accurate than the longbow and could shoot arrows about twice as far.

c) What was the Egyptian army's battle formation?

In battle, the army's archers sent volleys of arrows into the enemy ranks. More archers were carried forward on chariots, driven by expert horseman, to fire at the enemy. Behind them came the infantry, armed with spears, maces, battle-axes, or bronze swords.

d) What was life like for a soldier in the Egyptian army?

Life could be very hard for a soldier. They had to march long distances over harsh desert, carrying his weapons and supplies. Food and water was gathered from the land. However, there were also big rewards where soldiers could share in enemy possessions, cattle, weapons and clothing after a victory.

e) Who held the topmost ranks of the army?

Only noblemen or well-educated commoners held the topmost ranks of the army. Kings often appointed their own sons to command the army divisions.

5. Everyday life

a) What was life like for women in ancient Egypt?

Ancient Egyptian women lived much more freely than women in many other parts of the ancient world. Under the law, women had many of the same rights as men. They could buy property, sign contracts, and bring lawsuits against other people. Married women could also divorce their husbands.

b) What was the daily routine of a commoner family in ancient Egypt?

The men usually went to work in the fields or workshops. At harvest time, women often helped their husbands bring in the crops. Women also had domestic duties. They would grind grain, make bread and beer and look after the children. They also needed to keep the house clean because there was no drainage in commoner's houses.

c) On average, how many children did Egyptian families have?

Four or more children.

d) What were houses of common people made of?

Egyptians generally constructed their homes out of sun-dried mud bricks. They used the trunks of palm trees to support the flat roofs.

e) What features did the houses of the rich in ancient Egypt have?

Nobles and wealthy officials could afford to have large homes with as many as 70 rooms, often ornately decorated and richly furnished. Outside there was space for large gardens and outbuildings, including a pool or fishpond and a family shrine.

- f) What features did Egyptian houses have to help keep families cool?**
Egyptian houses featured small windows set high in the wall to help keep out the sun. They had a staircase to the roof where people climbed up to sleep on very hot nights. The cooking was done outside and away from the house to keep it cool.
- g) Look at the clay model of the Egyptian house made in 1900 BC on page 44. What does it tell us about houses in ancient Egypt?**
The house had a centre arch at the entrance. The archway to the left led to stairs or a ramp to the roof. There was a small window held up by a column.
- h) What were ancient Egyptians clothes made out of?**
Egyptians generally dressed in clothes made of white linen.
- i) What did men wear?**
In hot weather, men wore little more than a short, skirt-like garment wrapped round the waist.
- j) What did women wear?**
Women wore simple robes or dresses with shoulder straps.
- k) What were the main foods consumed by people in ancient Egypt?**
Egyptians used wheat to make bread, which was their main food, and barley to make beer. Among other daily foods consumed by ordinary people were beans, lentils and onions.
- l) How often did people eat?**
Most Egyptians ate three regular meals a day. One early in the morning, one at midday and the other in the evening with the family.
- m) How was food prepared and who was it prepared by?**
Women did most of the food preparation. They baked breads on the hearth. Many houses had tall mud-brick ovens outside to make meals. Meat was boiled and or sometimes roasted over an outdoor fire.
- n) What were two common drinks you would find in ancient Egypt?**
Beer and wine.
- o) Did children go to school in ancient Egypt?**
Only children from wealthy families went to school. The most common type of education was the kind given to scribes. Very few boys and girls from poorer families went to school in ancient Egypt. From the age of 5, most children were expected to learn the life skills they needed by helping their parents.
- p) What kind of activities did ancient Egyptians enjoy in their leisure time?**
Banquets, festivals, dancing, playing music, playing games e.g. board games and marbles as well as sports such as swimming, fishing or sailing small boats. There were also wrestling matches which people enjoyed watching during a banquet or festival.

- q) **How do we know what leisure activities ancient Egyptians enjoyed? Give an example of one piece of evidence that tells us this.**

Many leisure activities are shown in painting on tomb walls. For example a tomb wall painting featured on page 50, shows a group of female musicians playing a harp, a lute, a double reed, and a lyre, while a child dances.

6. Trade

- a) **How do historians know that foreign traders came to Egypt to sell their goods?**

Middle Kingdom tomb paintings show, for instance, bearded merchants from the region along the eastern Mediterranean and from other parts of the Middle East bringing cosmetics, metal weapons, and leather products.

- b) **Why was trade important for ancient Egyptians?**

Egypt lacked some of the raw materials that were vital for building or for making tools and other goods.

- c) **Why would rulers sometimes send soldiers on expeditions abroad?**

Rulers sent expeditions abroad to obtain needed raw materials. Soldiers were sometimes sent abroad to conquer regions where needed materials were found to ensure Egypt's access to them.

7. Death and Funerary customs

- a) **When a person died, ancient Egyptians believed they met with the god of the underworld, Osiris, who judged the dead and decided their fate in the afterlife. Summarise in one sentence what is happening in the image from the *Book of the Dead* depicted on page 29.**

Osiris is shown on his throne, sitting in judgement, while the heart of the dead person is weighed on scales.

- b) **How did Osiris judge who could enter the underworld?**

Osiris weighed the dead person's heart on a set of scales against a feather from the goddess of truth. If the heart weighed less than the feather, the deceased could enter the underworld.

- c) **According to the *Book of the Dead*, what did it mean if the dead person's heart weighed more than the feather?**

If the heart weighed more than the feather it meant it was weighted down with wrongdoing. The heart would then be devoured by the monster Ammit and the person was believed to be either then punished for eternity or cease existence completely.

- d) **Why did ancient Egyptians mummify their dead?**

Ancient Egyptians believed that when a person died, his or her spirit was released from the body. In order to have a good afterlife, the spirit needed to come back to its body. Mummification was developed as a way to preserve the dead body well.

- e) **What influence did the environment have on ancient Egyptian burial customs?**

Before around 3000 B.C. most people in ancient Egypt were buried in the ground when they died. In the hot, dry conditions, bodies remained well preserved and were often naturally mummified. When the wealthy began to be buried in mastabas (tombs) their bodies began

to decay so the Egyptians began to invent ways to preserve bodies like they had been in the ground.

f) How does mummification preserve the body?

Egyptians embalmed and dried corpses to stop them from decaying. They would remove key organs and dry them with natural salt. The organs were then stored in stone jars (canopic jars). The body was then dried for 40 days. Once dry, the body was stuffed with straw, linen or moss to provide a lifelike shape. It was then wrapped in layers of linen strips.

g) Ancient Egyptians believed that something in the tomb representing an object could magically become the object itself in the afterlife. What kind of things could you find in the tomb of a deceased person from ancient Egypt?

Reserve heads made from wood or stone, a statue of a human figure, model servants, elaborate paintings on the walls, weapons.

h) What was the opening of the mouth ritual?

Ancient Egyptians believed that a dead person's soul needed food and drink to survive in the afterlife, priests at a burial performed a special Opening of the Mouth ritual. They believed this would allow the dead body to receive nourishment. Special tools and spells were used.

i) What were the pyramids built for?

The pyramids were built as tombs for kings. Smaller pyramids held remains of favoured members of the royal family or nobility.

j) In what period were Kings buried in the pyramids?

- Old Kingdom
- Middle Kingdom
- New Kingdom

k) Following the use of pyramids, where were members of the royal family buried and why did they no longer bury them in pyramids?

After 1700 B.C. members of the royal family were entombed inside chambers within the cliffs at such sites as the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens, near Thebes. They no longer used pyramids as a burial place because of tomb robbers. Valleys were easier to guard against tomb robbers.

8. End of the New Kingdom

a) What weakened Egyptian power?

There was a bitter struggle for control between the nobles and the priests, and the royal rulers were too weak to take charge. The country broke up into small states, which fought against each other in several civil wars. This made Egypt vulnerable to foreign invaders.

b) Look at the *Timeline of Later Egyptian History* on page 55. Arrange the events in chronological order and put the dates beside each.

Assyrians invade Egypt and sack Thebes

The end of Dynasty XX; renewed civil war and extensive political and social change in Egypt.

Persians drive out the Assyrians and take control

Alexander defeats the Persians; beginning of Greek rule

Death of Cleopatra and Antony; Egypt becomes a province of Rome.

Libyan king Shoshenq I founds Dynasty XXII and restores control briefly

Death of Alexander; Ptolemy fights to rule Egypt

Nubian king Plankhy builds empire in southern Egypt

Cleopatra VII becomes ruler of Egypt

Answer:

Around 1075 B.C. The end of Dynasty XX; renewed civil war and extensive political and social change in Egypt.

Around 900 B.C. Libyan king Shoshenq I founds Dynasty XXII and restores control briefly

Around 730 B.C. Nubian king Plankhy builds empire in southern Egypt

Around 665 B.C. Assyrians invade Egypt and sack Thebes

525 B.C. Persians drive out the Assyrians and take control

332 B.C. Alexander defeats the Persians; beginning of Greek rule

323 B.C. Death of Alexander; Ptolemy fights to rule Egypt

51 B.C. Cleopatra VII becomes ruler of Egypt

31 B.C. Death of Cleopatra and Antony; Egypt becomes a province of Rome.