Ancient Egypt and Kush

- Sphinx and pyramid in Giza, Egypt

3500 B.C. | 2500 B.C. | 1500 B.C. | 500 B.C.
---|---|---|---
C. 3100 B.C. Narmer unites Egypt | C. 2540 B.C. Great Pyramid at Giza built | C. 1500 B.C. Queen Hatshepsut reigns | 728 B.C. Piye of Kush defeats Egyptians
The Nile Valley

Physical geography plays a role in how civilizations develop and decline. The fertile land along the great Nile River supported the Egyptian civilization.

Egypt’s Old Kingdom

Religion shapes how culture develops, just as culture shapes how religion develops. During the Old Kingdom period, Egypt built a strong kingdom in which religion was deeply woven into Egyptian culture.

The Egyptian Empire

All civilizations depend upon leadership for survival. Many changes occurred during Egypt’s Middle and New Kingdoms. When strong leaders ruled the country, it expanded into a great empire as arts, literature, and architecture blossomed.

The Civilization of Kush

As different societies interact, they often bring about change in each other. South of Egypt a new civilization arose called Kush. Kushites adopted Egyptian ways and eventually conquered Egypt itself.

View the Chapter 2 video in the Glencoe Video Program.
Good readers naturally summarize while they read to make sure they understand the text. Summarizing helps you organize information and focus on main ideas. By restating the important facts in a short summary, you can reduce the amount of information to remember.

A summary of a longer selection may be a short sentence or paragraph, which includes the main ideas. When summarizing, be brief and do not include many supporting details. Try to restate the text in a way that makes sense to you and will help you remember. Read the passage in Section 1 labeled *Egypt's Social Classes* on pages 163–164. Then look at the main ideas below from that passage and read the summary.

**Summary:** Egyptian society was divided into social groups based on wealth and power.

**Main Idea:** Egypt's upper class was made up of nobles, priests, and other rich Egyptians who worked as the government officials.

**Main Idea:** Egypt's middle class included traders, merchants, artisans, and makers of goods.

**Main Idea:** Farmers were the largest group of early Egyptians, while many of Egypt's city dwellers were unskilled laborers.
Read about The Middle Kingdom on pages 179–180. With a partner, summarize the main points. One person should summarize what he or she read while the other listens. Then the second person should summarize again, adding details that the partner may have left out.

When you are finished reading, look at the following list to see if you included all the important ideas.

- The Middle Kingdom was a golden age of peace and prosperity in Egypt.
- During the Middle Kingdom, Egypt expanded its territory with new lands.
- During the Middle Kingdom, the arts, literature, and architecture thrived.
- The Hyksos took control of Egypt for 150 years, ending the Middle Kingdom, until Ahmose led an uprising that drove them out.

Read to Write

After reading Section 2, write a paragraph that summarizes what you remember about Egyptian leaders, religion, and way of life in the Old Kingdom.

Apply It!

As you read this chapter, practice summarizing. Stop after each section and write a brief summary.
The Nile Valley

Looking Back, Looking Ahead
In Chapter 1, you learned about early civilizations in Mesopotamia. At about the same time, another civilization was forming near the Nile River. We call this civilization ancient Egypt.

Focusing on the Main Ideas
- The Egyptian civilization began in the fertile Nile River valley, where natural barriers discouraged invasions. (page 157)
- The Egyptians depended on the Nile’s floods to grow their crops. (page 159)
- Around 3100 B.C., Egypt’s two major kingdoms, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, were combined into one. (page 161)
- Egyptian society was divided into social groups based on wealth and power. (page 163)

Locating Places
Egypt (EE • jihpt)
Nile River (NYL)
Sahara (suh • HAR • uh)

Content Vocabulary
- cataract (KA • tuh • RAKT)
- delta (DEHL • tuh)
- papyrus (puh • PY • ruhs)
- hieroglyphics (HY • ruh • GLIH • fihks)
- dynasty (DY • nuh • stee)

Academic Vocabulary
- feature (FEE • chuhr)
- technology (tehk • NAH • luh • jee)
- labor (LAY • buhr)

Reading Strategy
Organizing Information Create a diagram to describe Egyptian irrigation systems.

Where & When?

5000 B.C. 4000 B.C. 3000 B.C.
c. 5000 B.C. c. 4000 B.C. c. 3100 B.C.
Agriculture begins along Nile River Egypt is made up of two kingdoms Narmer unites Egypt

History
Social Science Standards
WH6.2 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush.
Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush.

WH6.2.1 Locate and describe the major river systems and discuss the physical settings that supported permanent settlement and early civilizations.

### Settling the Nile

Main Idea: The Egyptian civilization began in the fertile Nile River valley, where natural barriers discouraged invasions.

Reading Connection: Did you know that the Nile River is longer than the Amazon, the Mississippi, and every other river in the world? Read on to learn when ancient peoples first moved to its fertile banks.

Between 6000 B.C. and 5000 B.C., hunters and food gatherers moved into the green Nile River valley from less fertile areas of Africa and southwest Asia. They settled down, farmed the land, and created several dozen villages along the riverbanks. These people became the earliest Egyptians.

A Mighty River: Although Egypt (EE•jhpt) was warm and sunny, the land received little rainfall. For water, the Egyptians had to rely on the Nile River (NYL). They drank from it, bathed in it, and used it for farming, cooking, and cleaning. The river provided fish and supported plants and animals. To the Egyptians, the Nile was a precious gift. They praised it in a song: “Hail O Nile, who comes from the earth, who comes to give life to the people of Egypt.”

Even today, the Nile inspires awe. It is the world’s longest river, flowing north from mountains in the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean Sea. This is a distance of some 4,000 miles (6,437 km). Traveling the length of the Nile would be like going from Georgia to California, and then back again.

The Nile begins as two separate rivers. One river, the Blue Nile, has its source in the mountains of eastern Africa. The other, the White Nile, starts in marshes in central Africa. The two rivers meet and form the Nile just south of Egypt. There, narrow cliffs and boulders in the Nile form wild rapids called cataracts (KA•tuh•RAKTS). Because of the cataracts, large ships can use the Nile only for its last 650 miles (1,046 km), where it flows through Egypt.

A Sheltered Land: In Egypt, the Nile runs through a narrow, green valley. Look at the map below. You can see that the Nile looks like the long stem of a flower. Shortly before the Nile reaches the Mediterranean Sea, it divides into different branches that look like the flower’s blossom. These branches fan out over an area of fertile soil called a delta (DEHL•tuh).

[Map of Ancient Egypt c. 3100 B.C.]
On both sides of the Nile Valley and its delta, deserts unfold as far as the eye can see. To the west is a vast desert that forms part of the Sahara (su•HAR•uh), the largest desert in the world. To the east, stretching to the Red Sea, is the Eastern Desert. In some places, the change from green land to barren sand is so abrupt that a person can stand with one foot in each.

The ancient Egyptians called the deserts “the Red Land” because of their burning heat. Although these vast expanses could not support farming or human life, they did serve a useful purpose: they kept outside armies away from Egypt’s territory.

Other geographic features also protected the Egyptians. To the far south, the Nile’s dangerous cataracts blocked enemy boats from reaching Egypt. In the north, the delta marshes offered no harbors for invaders approaching from the sea. In this regard, the Egyptians were luckier than the people of Mesopotamia. In that region, few natural barriers protected the cities. The Mesopotamians constantly had to fight off attackers, but Egypt rarely faced threats. As a result, Egyptian civilization was able to grow and prosper.

Despite their isolation, the Egyptians were not completely closed to the outside world. The Mediterranean Sea bordered Egypt to the north, and the Red Sea lay beyond the desert to the east. These bodies of water gave the Egyptians a way to trade with people outside Egypt.

Within Egypt, people used the Nile for trade and transportation. Winds from the north pushed sailboats south. The flow of the Nile carried them north. Egyptian villages thus had frequent, friendly contact with one another, unlike the hostile relations between the Mesopotamian city-states.

**Reading Check** Summarize Describe the physical environment in Egypt.
The River People

Main Idea The Egyptians depended on the Nile’s floods to grow their crops.

Reading Connection When you hear about floods, do you picture terrible damage and loss of life? Read on to learn why the Egyptians welcomed, rather than feared, the flooding of the Nile.

In Chapter 1, you learned that the people of Mesopotamia had to tame the floods of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in order to farm. They learned to do so, but the unpredictable rivers remained a constant threat.

Regular Flooding Like the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians also had to cope with river floods. However, the Nile floods were much more consistent and gentle than those of the Tigris and the Euphrates. As a result, the Egyptians were able to farm and live securely. They did not worry that sudden, heavy overflows would destroy their homes and crops, or that too little flooding would leave their fields parched.

Every spring, heavy rains from central Africa and melting snows from the highlands of East Africa added to the waters of the Nile as it flowed north. From July to October, the Nile spilled over its banks. When the waters went down, they left behind a layer of dark, fertile silt, or mud. Because of these deposits, the Egyptians called their land Kemet (KEH•meht), “the Black Land.”

How Did the Egyptians Use the Nile? The Egyptians took advantage of the Nile’s floods to become successful farmers. They planted wheat, barley, and flax seeds in the wet, rich soil. Over time, they grew more than enough food to feed themselves and the animals they raised.

One reason for their success was the wise use of irrigation. Egyptian farmers first dug basins, or bowl-shaped holes, in the earth to trap the floodwaters. The farmers then dug canals to carry water from the basins to fields beyond the river’s reach. The Egyptians also built dikes, or earthen banks, to strengthen the basin walls.

In time, Egyptian farmers developed other technology to help them in their work. For example, they used a shadoof (shuh•DOOF), a bucket attached to a long pole, to lift water from the Nile to the basins. Many Egyptian farmers still use this device today.

Primary Source “Hymn to the Nile”

This passage is part of a hymn written around 2100 B.C. It shows how important the Nile River was to the people of ancient Egypt.

“You create the grain, you bring forth the barley, assuring perpetuity [survival] to the temples. If you cease your toil and your work, then all that exists is in anguish.”

—author unknown, “Hymn to the Nile”

How does this hymn show that the ancient Egyptians thought of the Nile as sacred?
Early Egyptians also developed geometry to survey, or measure, land. When floods washed away boundary markers dividing one field from the next, the Egyptians surveyed the fields again to see where one began and the other ended.

Egyptians used papyrus (puh•PY•ruhs), a reed plant that grew along the Nile, to make baskets, sandals, and river rafts. Later, they used papyrus for papermaking. They did this by cutting strips from the stalks of the plant. Then they soaked them in water, pounded them flat, dried them, and then joined them together to make paper.

What Were Hieroglyphics? The Egyptians used their papyrus rolls as writing paper. Like the people of Mesopotamia, the Egyptians developed their own system of writing. Originally, it was made up of thousands of picture symbols. Some symbols stood for objects and ideas. To communicate the idea of a boat, for example, a scribe would draw a boat. Later, Egyptians created symbols that stood for sounds, just as the letters of our alphabet do. Combining both picture symbols and sound symbols created a complex writing system that was later called hieroglyphics (HY•ruh•GLIH•fihs).

In ancient Egypt, few people could read and write. Some Egyptian men, however, went to special schools located at Egyptian temples to study reading and writing and learn to become scribes. Scribes kept records and worked for the rulers, priests, and traders. Scribes also painstakingly carved hieroglyphics onto stone walls and monuments. For everyday purposes, scribes invented a simpler script and wrote or painted on papyrus.

Reading Check Explain How did living on the banks of the Nile help farmers?
A United Egypt

Main Idea Around 3100 B.C., Egypt's two major kingdoms, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, were combined into one.

Reading Connection What types of services does your local government provide? Read on to find out about the government in ancient Egypt.

In Egypt, as in Mesopotamia, skillful farming led to surpluses—extra amounts—of food. This freed some people to work as artisans instead of farmers. They wove cloth, made pottery, carved statues, or shaped copper into weapons and tools.

As more goods became available, Egyptians traded with each other. Before long, Egyptian traders were carrying goods beyond Egypt’s borders to Mesopotamia. There they may have picked up ideas about writing and government.

The Rise of Government The advances in farming, crafts, and trade created a need for government in Egypt. Irrigation systems had to be built and maintained, and surplus grain had to be stored and passed out in times of need. In addition, disputes over land ownership had to be settled. Gradually, government emerged to plan and to direct such activities.

The earliest rulers were village chiefs. Over time, a few strong chiefs united groups of villages into small kingdoms. The strongest of these kingdoms eventually overpowered the weaker ones. By 4000 B.C., Egypt was made up of two large kingdoms. In the Nile delta was Lower Egypt. To the south, upriver, lay Upper Egypt. About 3100 B.C., Narmer (NAR•muhr), the king of Upper Egypt, led his armies north and took control of Lower Egypt. The two kingdoms became unified.

Turning grain into bread was a long process. Women ground the grain into flour, then men pounded it until it became very fine. For the wealthy, seeds, honey, fruit, nuts, and herbs were added to the dough for flavor. Unfortunately, it was almost impossible to keep small stones and sand out of the flour. As a result, many Egyptians developed tooth decay as these particles wore down their tooth enamel.

Connecting to the Past
1. How did the government ensure that enough people were available to harvest the wheat?
2. Why do you think seeds, fruit, and other additives were reserved for the wealthy?
Egypt’s Ruling Families  Narmer ruled from Memphis, a city he built on the border between the two kingdoms. Memphis developed into a center of culture and power along the Nile.

To symbolize the kingdom’s unity, Narmer wore a double crown. The helmet-like white crown represented Upper Egypt, and the open red crown represented Lower Egypt.

Narmer’s united kingdom held together long after his death. Members of his family passed the ruling power from father to son to grandson. Such a line of rulers from one family is called a dynasty (DY•nuh•stee). When one dynasty lost control of the kingdom, another took its place.

Over time, ancient Egypt would be ruled by 31 dynasties, which together lasted an estimated 2,800 years. Historians group Egypt’s dynasties into three main time periods called kingdoms. The earliest period, the Old Kingdom, was followed by the Middle Kingdom and then the New Kingdom. Each marked a long period of strong leadership and stability.

Reading Check  Explain How were the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt combined?
Early Egyptian Life

Main Idea  Egyptian society was divided into social groups based on wealth and power.

Reading Connection  Did you play with dolls or balls when you were young? Egyptian children did too. Keep reading for more details about the Egyptians’ daily life.

If you made a diagram of the different social groups or classes in ancient Egypt, you would find that they make a pyramid shape. At the top was the king and his family. Beneath that level was a small upper class of priests, army commanders, and nobles. Next came a larger base of skilled middle-class people, such as scribes, traders, and artisans. At the bottom was the largest group—unskilled workers and farmers.

Egypt’s Social Classes  Egypt’s upper class was made up of nobles, priests, and other wealthy Egyptians who worked as the government officials. They lived in cities and on large estates along the Nile River. They had elegant homes made of wood and mud bricks, with beautiful gardens and pools filled with fish and water lilies. Wealthy families had servants to wait on them and to perform household tasks. The men and women dressed in white linen clothes and wore heavy eye makeup and jewelry.

Egypt’s middle class included people who ran businesses or produced goods. They lived in much smaller homes and dressed more simply. Artisans formed an important group within the middle class. They produced linen cloth, jewelry, pottery, and metal goods.
Farmers were part of the largest group of early Egyptians. Some rented their land from their ruler, paying him with a large portion of their crops. Most worked the land of wealthy nobles. They lived in villages along the Nile, in one-room huts with roofs made of palm leaves. They had a simple diet of bread, beer, vegetables, and fruit.

Many of Egypt’s city dwellers were unskilled workers who did physical labor. Some unloaded cargo from boats and carried it to markets. Others made and stacked mud bricks for buildings. Workers lived in crowded city neighborhoods. They had small mud-brick homes with hard-packed dirt floors and a courtyard for the family’s animals. On the flat rooftops, families talked, played games, and slept. Women worked on the rooftops, drying fruit, making bread, and weaving cloth.

Family Life In ancient Egypt, the father headed the family. However, Egyptian women had more rights than females in most other early civilizations. In Egypt, women could own and pass on property. They could buy and sell goods, make wills, and obtain divorces. Upper-class women were in charge of temples and could perform religious ceremonies.

Few Egyptians sent their children to school. Mothers taught their daughters to sew, cook, and run a household. Boys learned farming or skilled trades from their fathers. Egyptian children had time for fun, as well. They played with board games, dolls, spinning tops, and stuffed leather balls.

Identify How was Egyptian society organized?

What Did You Learn?
1. What is papyrus and how did the Egyptians use it?
2. What rights did women have in ancient Egypt?
3. Cause and Effect Draw a diagram to show three things that led to the growth of government in ancient Egypt.
4. The Big Ideas How did the geography of the Nile River valley lead to the growth of a civilization there?
5. Draw Conclusions How do Egyptian hieroglyphics help us learn about their society and culture?
6. Analyze What was the significance of Narmer’s double crown?
7. Summarizing Using what you have learned in this section, summarize the yearly cycle of the Nile River. Be sure to describe how this cycle affected farmers in ancient Egypt.