

Ancient Egypt and Kush

Lesson 1 The Nile River

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does geography influence the way people live?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *Why was the Nile River important to the ancient Egyptians?*
2. *How did the ancient Egyptians depend on the Nile River to grow their crops?*
3. *How did Egypt become united?*

Terms to Know

cataracts dangerous, fast-moving waters

delta a fan-shaped area of marshy land near where a river flows into the sea

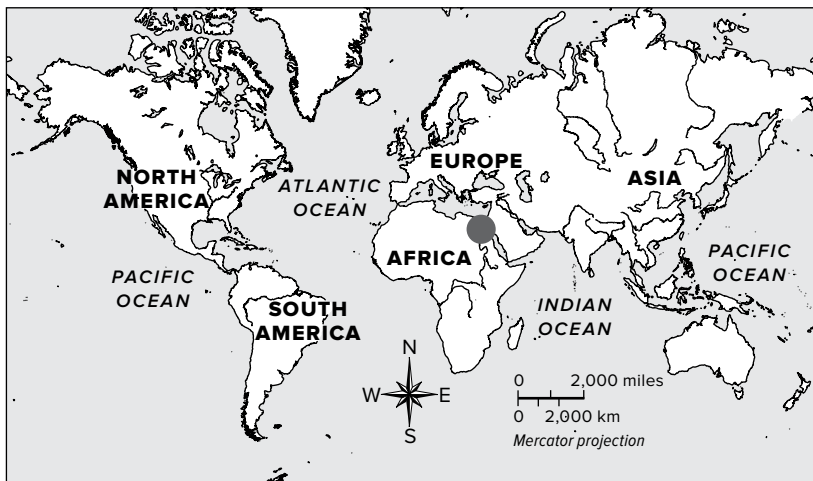
shadoof a bucket attached to a long pole, used to move water for irrigation

papyrus a reed plant that grows along the Nile River

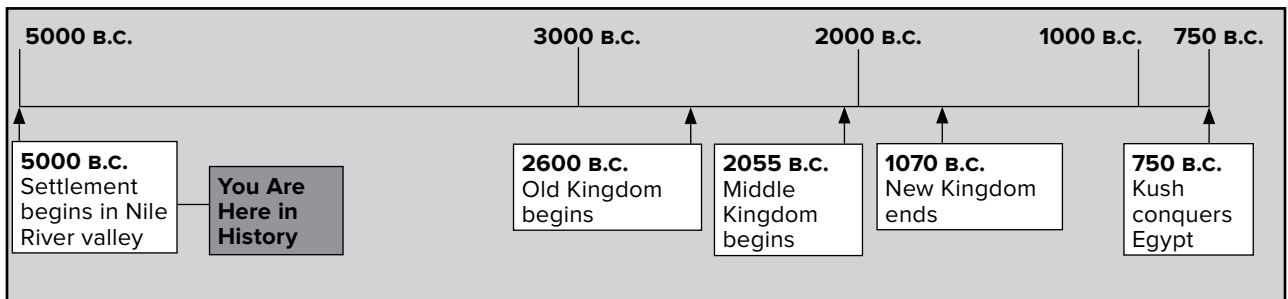
hieroglyphics a writing system made up of picture and sound symbols

dynasty a line of rulers from one family

Where in the world?



When did it happen?



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Lesson 1 The Nile River, *Continued*

The Nile River Valley

By 5000 B.C., hunters and gatherers had moved into the Nile River valley. They settled there, farmed the land, and built villages. These people became the earliest Egyptians.

Because Egypt gets little rainfall, Egyptians relied on the Nile River for water. They used its water for fishing, farming, cooking, and cleaning. The Nile River flows north from the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean Sea, about 4,000 miles. Two rivers meet to form the Nile. They are the Blue Nile in eastern Africa and the White Nile in central Africa. The water forms rapids where the rivers meet. These are called **cataracts**. Large ships cannot sail through the cataracts.

In Egypt, the Nile runs through a narrow valley. Just before it reaches the Mediterranean Sea, it divides into many branches. These branches spread out over an area of rich soil. This area is called a **delta**. Deserts lie on both sides of the Nile River valley. Because the deserts were so hot, the ancient Egyptians called them “the Red Land.” These areas kept outside armies away from Egypt. To the south, dangerous cataracts blocked enemy boats. In the north, the delta marshes kept enemies from sailing into Egypt.

The geography of Mesopotamia did not protect people in the same way. The deserts and the rivers did not keep out invaders. Mesopotamians constantly fought off attackers. Egypt rarely faced such threats. As a result, Egyptian civilization grew and prospered.

How the Nile River Helped the Egyptians

- River provided water for drinking and growing crops
- Cataracts kept out invaders
- Marshy delta kept out enemies

The deserts and Nile rapids did not completely close Egypt to the outside world. The Mediterranean Sea was to the north. Beyond the desert to the east was the Red Sea. These waters allowed Egyptians to trade with others. 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. This made Egypt different from Mesopotamia. There, city-states constantly fought each other. Egyptian villages, however, had friendly contact.



Marking the Text

1. Underline the reason the Egyptians had to rely on the Nile River for water.



Defining

2. What are *cataracts*?
What is a *delta*?



Contrasting

3. How were the Egyptians different from the Mesopotamians?



Reading Check

4. How were the Egyptians protected by their physical environment?

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Lesson 1 The Nile River, *Continued***Contrasting**

5. Why was irrigation easier for Egyptians than for Mesopotamians?

**Marking the Text**

6. Circle the items papyrus was used to make.

**Reading Check**

7. What kind of writing system did the Egyptians develop?

**Critical Thinking**

8. Why was it important for Egyptians to develop a system of writing?

People of the River

Farmers in Mesopotamia never knew when the nearby rivers would overflow or if flooding would be bad. This made it difficult to farm there. In Egypt, the Nile River also flooded, but its floods were regular. Farmers did not have to worry that floods would destroy crops or farms. Water came to the Nile from rain and melted snow. Then, during the summer, the Nile spilled over its banks. When the waters went down, they left a layer of dark, rich mud.

The Egyptians became successful farmers. They planted wheat, barley, and flax seeds. They grew enough food to feed themselves and their animals. They used irrigation when the weather was dry. To trap floodwaters, Egyptian farmers first dug basins, or bowl-shaped holes, in the earth. Then they dug canals to carry water from the basins to the fields. They used a **shadoof**, a bucket on a long pole. It could lift water from the river into the basins.



Egyptians also developed ways to use **papyrus**. This was a reed plant that grew along the shores of the Nile. They harvested papyrus to make baskets, sandals, and river rafts. The Egyptians also used papyrus for making writing paper. Like the Mesopotamians, Egyptians developed their own system of writing called **hieroglyphics**. It was made up of thousands of picture and sound symbols. Some symbols stood for objects and ideas. For example, to communicate the idea of a boat, a scribe would draw a tiny boat. Other symbols stood for sounds, like the letters of our own alphabet.

In ancient Egypt, few people could read and write. Some Egyptian men went to special schools to study reading and writing. They learned to become scribes, or record keepers for the rulers, priests, and traders. Some hieroglyphics conveyed public messages. Scribes carved these into stone walls and monuments. For everyday use, scribes invented a simpler script and wrote on papyrus.

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Lesson 1 The Nile River, *Continued*

Uniting Egypt

Skillful farming led to more food than was needed, or a surplus. This freed some people to work as artisans instead of farmers. Artisans wove cloth, made pottery, and carved statues. They also shaped copper into weapons and tools. Now Egyptians had goods to trade. First, they traded with each other. Then they traveled to Mesopotamia to trade. There they may have learned new ideas about writing and government.

Irrigation systems needed to be built and maintained. Grain had to be stored. Disputes over land needed to be settled. Over time, a government formed in Egypt. By 4000 B.C., Egypt was made up of two large kingdoms. Lower Egypt was in the north in the Nile delta. Upper Egypt was in the south along the Nile River.

About 3100 B.C., Narmer was king of Upper Egypt. He led his armies north and took control of Lower Egypt. Narmer's kingdom stayed together long after his death. His family passed power from father to son to grandson. This is called a **dynasty**. Over time, ancient Egypt would be ruled by 30 dynasties over a period of about 2,800 years. Historians group Egypt's dynasties into three main eras—the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. Each kingdom had a long period of strong leadership and safety.

Check for Understanding

List three ways that the Egyptians used the Nile River.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List two ways Narmer changed Egypt.

4. _____
5. _____



Explaining

9. Why did Egypt need an organized government?



Reading Check

10. How did the separate kingdoms of Egypt unite?



11. Place a three-tab Foldable on the dotted line to cover the Check for Understanding. Label the anchor tab *Ancient Egyptians*. Label the three tabs—*Agriculture*, *Writing System*, and *Dynasties*.

On the front of the tabs, write a sentence based on something you remember about the importance of each title. Use your sentences to help you complete the list under the tabs.