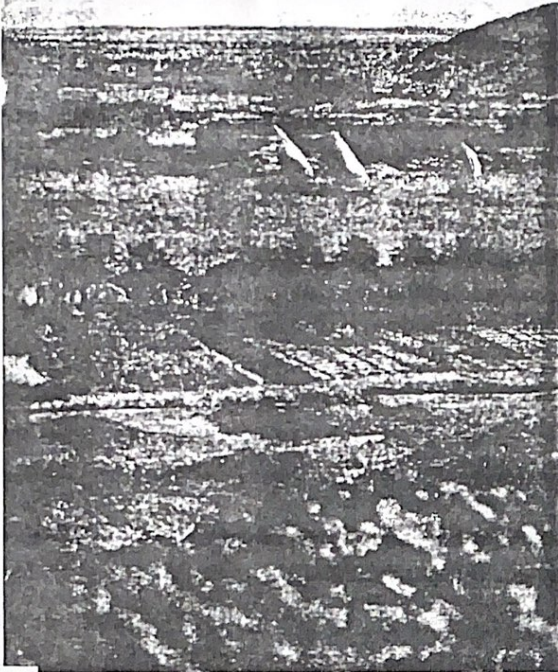


Ancient Egypt



The civilization of ancient Egypt lasted over 3000 years—longer than any other ancient civilization.

- Where was ancient Egypt located?
- Why was the Nile River important to the ancient Egyptians?
- What was life like in ancient Egypt?
- What contributions did the Egyptians make to later civilizations?

Key Words You will be using these words in this chapter.

Architecture

Central government

kingdom

rebellion

The Land and Climate of Egypt

Ancient Egypt lay in northeastern Africa, where the modern country of Egypt is today. Like modern Egypt, the climate of ancient Egypt was hot and dry. Most of ancient Egypt was desert land. But running through the desert was the **Nile River**. The waters of the Nile created a narrow valley of fertile farmland. During the New Stone Age, people began to settle in the valley.

The Gift of the Nile

The Nile River is over 4000 miles long. It begins in the mountains of central Africa. From there, it flows north through the desert to the Mediterranean Sea.

Every year heavy rains fell on the mountains where the Nile begins. Black soil from the hills washed into the river. The river rose and flooded the valley. When the flooding ended, a layer of rich black soil was left behind.

Egyptian farmers raised wheat, barley, grapes, and other crops in the fertile soil brought by the river. Boats carried people and goods up and down the river. The river provided the people with water to drink and fish to eat. The Egyptians hunted birds and game along the river's banks.

Without the Nile River, the Egyptians could not have survived. Egypt became known as the "Gift of the Nile."

Looking Back

1. Where was ancient Egypt located?
2. Describe the climate and land of ancient Egypt.
3. Why was the Nile River important to the Egyptians?

A River of Life: The Nile River

1 One of the most fascinating places on the planet is the Nile River basin in Egypt. The Nile flows thousands of miles up the continent of Africa, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea. As the river descends from the mountains of Ethiopia, it brings much-needed water into the desert plateaus of Egypt. Without the Nile River, Egypt would be more like the moon! The Nile River brings life to this arid, rocky region. It has helped **nourish** many civilizations throughout the past 5,000 years.

2 Farms are not something you think of in a desert climate. But the Nile River allows farms to **flourish** at the edges of the Sahara Desert. If you were walking east in the Sahara Desert, the oasis of the river might seem like a mirage. The Nile creates a narrow river valley through the desert before widening north of Cairo into the Nile Delta. The **delta** is the heart of farming in Egypt, and farming is the heart of civilization.

3 You may not think of agriculture as **vitaly** important in an area surrounded mostly by desert, but it was because most ancient Egyptians supported themselves through farming. Before agriculture, people moved in groups of hunters and gatherers. **Domesticating** animals and crops allowed people to form permanent settlements. In Egypt, people grew surplus, or extra, food. This surplus of food allowed the population to grow larger which led to cities developing along the rivers. With a **stable** food source in place, people were able to **diversify** their roles in society. When not all members of the society needed to focus on finding the next meal, people were able to develop governments, art, and philosophy. This is what allowed them to more fully develop their culture.

4 Just as people today are affected by different seasons, the civilizations of the Nile basin were affected by seasonal changes. The rise and fall of the Nile established the three agricultural seasons for ancient farmers in Egypt. The seasons were called *Akhet* (in the fall), *Peret* (in winter), and *Shemu* (in summer). During Akhet, river levels increased with water from monsoons and snowmelt. The banks and delta were flooded. When the water receded, a thick layer of nutrient-rich **silt** was left behind. This made the area prime for farming. Peret began when the river receded, and the black soil was ready for planting.

5 Egyptians like other ancient cultures, modified and adapted to their environment to meet their needs. One way they modified their environment was by building irrigation ditches to bring water from the Nile to their fields. Another way they adapted was by developing light plows to turn the loose soil. These plows weighed much less than heavy European plows, which often had to move large rocks embedded in the soil. Egyptians were also able to use clay from the river to make bricks to use for building. When they built their homes, they built them with the windows high up from the ground to help them stay cool during the day. In addition, the Egyptians took advantage of the flood cycles of the Nile, which allowed them to grow larger amounts of these grains to sell or store for later use.

6 The river usually followed the same seasonal pattern. If it varied one year, all of Egypt was affected. Egyptian farmers worked for their food, and a bad harvest meant hungry times. The soil remained fertile due to

the annual flooding, which renewed the nutrients in the soil. It may seem strange that the farmers prayed for the river to overflow and their farms to flood, but remember that Egypt has a dry climate. Very little rain falls on the deserts for most of the year. As well as bringing nutrients to the soil, the Nile River is the main source of irrigation for farms.

7 In ancient times farmers dug canals from the river to their fields to help irrigate their crops. Farmers had to water their fields daily to make sure their crops survived the hot, dry conditions. Farmers developed a tool called a **shaduf** to help bring water up from the river. A shaduf is a weighted pole balanced on a plank. It has a rope and bucket on one end. A farmer would drop the bucket into the water, and the weight on the other end would help bring a full bucket up. This lessened the physical work the farmer had to do. Using the shaduf was much easier than hauling the heavy buckets up from the river by hand. The shaduf could even be swung around and dumped into a smaller irrigation canal that went directly into the farmer's field.

8 Tools like the shaduf allowed farmers to grow a surplus of food. This surplus was then used as **currency** in trade markets. Farmers could trade their crops for tools, clothes, or other items. Without the reliable waters of the Nile, agriculture would not have been possible. Without agriculture, ancient Egyptian civilization would not have **flourished**.

9 History shows that the Nile was not always reliable! Periods of low water levels during the regular flood seasons brought times of **famine**, or extreme food shortages. This repeated regularly for thousands of years. This cycle of famine in Egypt only ended when the second Aswan Dam was constructed in the 1960s. Today, people can control the river, and Egyptians are no longer dependent on the seasonal flood cycle. The fact that there is any agriculture in Egypt is still astonishing, given the harsh climate of the region. Without the influence of the Nile River, ancient Egypt civilization would have developed much differently.

6. What is a shaduf and how was it beneficial to ancient Egyptian farmers?

7. Explain the following statement: Without agriculture, ancient Egyptian civilization would not have flourished.

8. What is a famine?

9. How did the people of Egypt benefit from the Aswan Dam?

Name:

Questions River of Life: The Nile River

There are 9 questions. Answer in complete sentences and “flip it”. Be sure to include text evidence in your answers

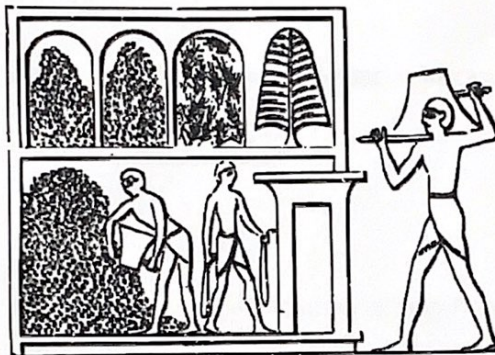
1. What type of land is most of the area surrounding the Nile River?
2. How has the Nile River nourished civilizations? Be specific and cite evidence from the text.
3. Why was farming vital to the Ancient Egyptians?
4. What led to the development of cities along the river?
5. List the adaptations from paragraph 5 made by the Ancient Egyptians to meet their needs.
6. What is a shaduf and how was it beneficial to Ancient Egyptian farmers?
7. Explain the following statement from the text: Without agriculture, ancient Egyptian civilization would not have flourished.
8. What is a famine?
9. How did the people of Egypt finally bring the famines to an end?

Name _____ **Ancient Egypt**

Agriculture in Ancient Egypt

Agriculture was an important aspect of ancient Egyptian economy, and most people of the time were farmers. They grew wheat, barley, and vegetables; fruits like figs, melons, and pomegranates; and flax to be made into linen for cloth. Their staple crop was grain, which was used to make bread, porridge, and beer. Ancient Egyptian agriculture revolved around the cycles of the Nile River, and their year had three seasons.

Akhet, known as the inundation or the flooding season, lasted from June to



September. During this time, the Nile overran its banks and flooded the farmers' fields. Nothing could be planted during this time. Farmers would do construction work for the pharaoh, look after their animals, and ready their tools for the coming planting season.

Peret, from October to February, was the growing season. Crops were grown along the banks of the Nile River, where

the receded flood waters left behind a rich black soil called kemet. Grain was planted in this rich soil. Then, after the grain was harvested, vegetables like onions, leeks, cabbages, beans, cucumbers, and lettuce were planted in its place.

Shemu, from March to May, was the Harvest Season. During Shemu, reservoirs and canals to trap floodwater which could later be used for watering the fields were also prepared for the next upcoming Akhet.

Ancient Egyptians had simple farming tools like hoes, rakes, and sickles made out of wood and stone. They had both hand plows and plows pulled by oxen. They used a tool called a shaduf to move water from a lower place to a higher place. They also kept animals like cattle, goats, pigs, ducks, and geese. Animals also performed important functions like trampling in seeds, pulling plows, and providing food.

Name _____ **Ancient Egypt**

QUESTIONS: Agriculture in Ancient Egypt

*Answer in complete sentences +
use text evidence*

1. What did the ancient Egyptians grow?
2. What did ancient Egyptian agriculture revolve around?
3. What were the three seasons in ancient Egypt?
4. Why were crops planted along the banks of the Nile?
5. Why did the ancient Egyptians create reservoirs and canals during the harvest season?
6. What kinds of farming tools did ancient Egyptians have?