Pyramids on the Nile

**BEFORE YOU READ**

In the last section, you read about the city-states that arose in Mesopotamia. In this section, you will learn about early civilization along the Nile.

**AS YOU READ**

Use the web below to show how Egypt was unified, what its culture was like, and how it fell.

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**The Geography of Egypt (pages 35-37)**

**What** was the key feature of early Egypt’s geography?

Another civilization arose along the banks of the Nile River of East Africa. The Nile flows to the North, toward the Mediterranean Sea. It, too, floods each year. The waters leave rich soil on the river banks. There the people of ancient Egypt grew food and began to build their own culture. They worshiped the Nile as a life-giving god.

For many centuries, the people of Egypt lived in two kingdoms, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Upper Egypt extended north from the Nile’s first area of rapids, or cataracts, to the Nile delta. The delta is a broad, marshy, triangular area of rich land. Lower Egypt began here and continued north to the Mediterranean, just 100 miles away.
1. How did the Nile create boundaries?

Egypt Unites into a Kingdom
(pages 37–38)

Who ruled the kingdom?

About 3000 B.C., the king of Upper Egypt, Narmer, united the two kingdoms. In the years between 2660 and 2180 B.C., the basic marks of the culture of Egypt arose. Ruling over the land was the pharaoh. He was not only a king but was also seen as a god. A government in which a ruler is seen as a divine figure is a theocracy.

Pharaohs believed they would rule the land after their death. So these kings built themselves magnificent tombs. The tombs were huge pyramids made out of massive limestone blocks.

2. Why did pharaohs build pyramids?

Egyptian Culture; Invaders Control Egypt (pages 38–41)

What were the features of Egyptian culture?

Egyptians believed in many gods and in an afterlife. One god, they thought, weighed the hearts of each dead person. Hearts judged heavy with sin were eaten by a beast. Good people, with feather-weight hearts, would live forever in a beautiful Other World. To prepare for this, Egyptians preserved a dead person's body by mummification. This kept the body from decaying.

The pharaoh and his family were at the top of Egyptian society. Below them were people of wealth who owned large amounts of land, the priests, and members of the government and army. Then came the middle class—merchants and people who worked in crafts. At the bottom were the peasants. In later times, the Egyptians had slaves. People could move from one rank of society to another. Those who could read and write held important positions.

The Egyptians, like the Sumerians, developed a way of writing. In their writing system, hieroglyphics, pictures stood for sounds or ideas. The pictures could be put together to make words and sentences. At first they wrote on stone. Later they began to make a kind of paper from the papyrus plant. The Egyptians invented a system of written numbers and a calendar. Their calendar had 12 months, each of which had 30 days. They were famous in the ancient world for their ideas in medicine.

After 2180 B.C., the pharaohs lost power. Egypt went through a time of troubles. Then strong rulers once again took control. They ruled for four centuries until a group of Asians called the Hyksos arrived in horse-drawn chariots. The land fell to these invaders in 1640 B.C.

3. How was Egyptian society organized?