**Nile (Egypt) River Civilization**

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**Ohio Content Standard (2002)**

**Grade**: 6

**Benchmark**: History; Early Civilizations

**Grade Level Indicator**: 4. Compare the geographic, political, economic and social characteristics of the river civilizations in the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia), Nile (Egypt), Huang Ho and Indus valleys before 1000 B.C. including:

1. Location;
2. Government;
3. Religion;
4. Agriculture;
5. Cultural and scientific contributions.

**Ohio Content Standard (Revised)**

**Grade**: 6

**History Strand**

**Early Civilizations**: The eight features of civilizations include cities, well-organized central governments, complex religions, job specializations, social classes, arts and architecture, public works and writing. Early peoples developed unique civilizations. Several civilizations established empires with legacies influencing later peoples.

**Content Statement #2**: Early civilizations (India, Egypt, China, and Mesopotamia) with unique governments, economic systems, social structures, religions, technologies and agricultural practices and products flourished as a result of favorable geographic characteristics. The cultural practices and products of these early civilizations can be used to help understand the Eastern Hemisphere today.

**Background**:

Known to many as the home of the Great Pyramids, the Great Sphinx and other marvels of the ancient world, Egypt is not ideally located for advance civilization. Located in the northeastern corner of Africa, west of the Red Sea and bordering the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt is surrounded by tons of sand, which is not exactly conducive to agriculture and other cornerstones of civilization. Egypt consists of two halves, Upper and Lower Egypt, which were unified under the first Egyptian dynasty around 3100 B.C. The Ancient Egyptians were very dependent upon the Nile River, which ran south to north, for their livelihood. Every year the Nile River would overflow, casting rich silt across the river banks creating ideal conditions for fertile crop growth. Egypt was ruled by a Pharaoh: a supreme leader who was thought to be a god by Egyptians. Religion played very important guiding role in Egyptian life and the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians are possibly best known for their ability to create a modern, technologically advanced society. On top of several agricultural inventions (i.e. aqueducts, dams, plows, etc.) Egyptians created a written form of communication and record keeping (hieroglyphics), developed new building techniques, and even utilized time keeping inventions such as clocks and calendars.

The following are artifacts that represent the Nile River and the Egyptians.

**Artifacts**:

***Location***:

Longest River

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The Nile River is actually 6695 kilometers (4184 miles) long. With such a long length, the Nile River is speculated to be the longest river in the world. The Amazon River runs a very close second, although it has been difficult to determine which is actually longer. *River Nile facts* state it winds from Uganda to Ethiopia, flowing through a total of nine countries. While the Nile River is often associated with Egypt, it actually touches Ethiopia, Zaire, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan, as well as Egypt. It's only recent that the first known navigation team successfully followed the river from beginning to its end.

Route

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The Nile has a long and complex route, winding its way through nine countries­ and a wide range of landscapes, including swamps, savannas, desert, rainforests and mountain highlands. The Nile owes its great length to the union of two main tributaries: the **White Nile** and the **Blue Nile**.

Another interesting characteristic of the Nile's course is the Great Bend, a U-shaped bend in course that takes place between the Nile Delta and the Sudanese border. This bend causes the river to suddenly flow west to east, only to then turn around and go back the other way.

The Nile and its tributaries flow though nine countries. The White Nile flows though Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt. The Blue Nile starts in Ethiopia. Zaire, Kenya, Tanzanian, Rwanda, and Burundi all have tributaries, which flow into the Nile or into Lake Victoria Nyanes.

***Government***:

Pharaoh Mask



In ancient Egypt the system of government used was a theocracy: a form of government in which God or a deity is recognized as the supreme civil ruler, the God's or deity's laws being interpreted by the ecclesiastical authorities. The Pharaoh was the supreme ruler of the Ancient Egyptians and was thought to be a god by his/her people. The other officials who made up the government sector consisted of viziers, army commanders, chief treasurers, the minister of public works, and tax collectors, all of whom worked closely with the pharaoh and existed within a social class all their own. The remainder of the Ancient Egyptian population was made up largely of peasants (who made their living primarily off of agricultural success) and slaves (who worked as servants for wealthy families or as cheap manual laborers).

***Religion***:

Pyramid



Egypt is very well known for a few of its man-made landmarks: the Sphinx and its pyramids. The Ancient Egyptians were polytheistic in their religious beliefs, meaning they believed in worshipping a complex system of numerous gods and goddesses. The pharaoh was believed to be a god or goddess and was able to rule unquestioned. The ancient Egyptian pyramids served a multitude of purposes. Primarily, pyramids were used as the burial tomb of the family, consisting of the pharaoh, his queens/her kings and children. Because the Ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife, these tombs were very intricate and filled with numerous items deemed necessary for survival in the afterlife. Egyptians are also well-known for their mummification processes, something that was done to ensure that in the afterlife, a person’s spirit had a place to dwell.

***Agriculture***:

Crops



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The Nile River provided an endless source of fresh water, fertile soil, and food. For thousands of miles in all directions this part of Africa is covered by the sands of the desert. The lands around the Nile River, however are quite different. Over hundreds of thousands of years, flooding of the river has deposited a thick layer of rich fertile silt across the landscape. The people living in this area dug irrigation ditches which carried the water out from the Nile River to their farms making the area perfect for growing food.

Because of this most Egyptians lived near the Nile as it provided water, food, transportation and excellent soil for growing food.

Seasonal rains in the southern highlands caused the Nile River to overflow its banks. When the floodwaters receded, a layer of rich black topsoil covered the flood plain. This condition enabled the Egyptians to develop a successful farming economy. Ancient Egypt could not have existed without the Nile. Since rainfall is almost non-existent in Egypt, the floods provided the only source of moisture to grow crops. The Nile also gave the Egyptians food. They used spears and nets to catch fish. They would also use the nets to catch birds that flew close to the surface of the water.

During the inundation period, which takes place sometime around July, water would rise and fill canals made by Egyptian laborers. Sometime around the end of October, the river would begin to recede, leaving rich silt deposits.

The water that had been collected in the canals and basins during the inundation period was enough to supply nourishment for the crops for the next year. Crops were harvested in June before the return of the floods. The cycle somewhat reliably repeated every year, although it sometimes produced more water than needed, which had negative effects on the crops.

***Cultural and Scientific Contributions***:

Cats



Although Ancient Egyptians were very respectful towards all the animals that shared their world, the most highly revered animal was the cat. Cats were closely connected to many Egyptian gods and goddesses and are believed to have been considered demi-gods. Cats were loved because they would prey on vermin that got into the Egyptian’s food stores and they would also go hunting with their owners. Because cats were so adored, extremely heavy penalties existed for those who dared to harm a cat. When a cat died, their human family would go into a deep mourning and shave their eyebrows. The dead cat would then be mummified and buried along with items that would help it to survive in the afterlife such as milk, mice, and rats.

Hieroglyphics



The Ancient Egyptians created their own system of writing using a series of images to share and record information called hieroglyphics. It is believed that Egyptians first started developing hieroglyphics around 3000 B.C. Because there are over 700 symbols representing actual words and thousands more that represent individual sounds learning how to write in hieroglyphics was no easy task. Unlike most forms of modern language, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics could be read either from right to left or from left to right**.** To know which direction to begin reading, the scribe would position the figures/images so that they faced in the correct direction. Hieroglyphics were merely used on buildings and tombs at first but were later used to decorate jewelry and, perhaps most importantly, record events on papyrus (a type of paper).

Jewelry





Ancient Egyptian, men and women alike, were lovers of trinkets and constantly adorned themselves with a variety of jewelry including amulets, necklaces, pendants, bracelets, rings, head jewelry, anklets, diadems, collars, collarettes and insignia. Egyptian jewelry was not made solely for decoration. It contained symbols that would provide the wearer, dead or alive, with protection and prosperity. Several pieces of jewelry took the form of amulets designed to ward off the evil eye and protect the wearer from evil forces both natural and supernatural. Lucky charm jewelry was created to resemble gods, magical signs, hieroglyphs and animals. To the men in Ancient Egyptian society, rings were a necessity. Official documents were not signed, but sealed in those days. Therefore, every Egyptian had his own seal which he kept about his person, ready for use if and when required. To Ancient Egyptian women, necklaces were as necessary for daily wear as the men’s rings were to them.

Reeds/Papyrus

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The banks of the Nile River were lined with Papyrus reeds. Large reeds called papyrus grew wild along the Nile. The Egyptians developed a process that turned these reeds into flattened material that could be written on (also called papyrus). In fact, the English word "paper" has its root in the ancient Greek word "papyrus." Among the first things written on papyrus were calendars that tracked time.

Papyrus had many other uses. Boats were constructed by binding the reeds together in bundles. Baskets, mats, rope, and sandals were also fashioned from this multipurpose material.

The stems of the plant could be used for many purposes such as the manufacture of ropes and the caulking of boats to be used for travel along the river. The stems could be tied together to make hunting boats, however they had limited lifespan as the reeds became water logged and the boats sank.

Trade/Transportation

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Another way the Nile helped the ancient Egyptians was in trade. The Nile was the quickest and easiest way to travel from place to place.

When building the pyramids, the Nile was used as a highway to transport the blocks of stone up the river to the construction site. The river was used largely as a means of transporting goods such as spices, cattle, and grains up and down to various merchants.

The ancient Egyptians grew flax, wheat, and many more crops surrounding the Nile and traded them. This trade helped the Egyptians to maintain the diplomatic relationships with other countries and made them to stabilize economically.

The river was the main form of transport, indeed there is no record of any Egyptian roads.

**Resources**:

<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/egypt/nile.htm>

<http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/earth/nileriver.html>

<http://www.ancient-egypt-online.com/river-nile-facts.html>

<http://history.howstuffworks.com/african-history/nile-river1.htm>

<http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/menu.html>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5309.htm>

<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/religion.htm>

<http://www.ancient-egypt-online.com/>

<http://www.king-tut.org.uk/ancient-egyptians/egyptian-jewelry.htm>