

Teacher's Guide: Building the Pyramids of Ancient Egypt

Recommended Grade Level: 5-8

(also applicable to grades 9-12 for students requiring significant support in learning)

Suggested Time: About 50-60 minutes spread over one or more class periods, plus additional time to complete a writing assignment

Goals

Following are the big ideas that students should take away after completing this lesson:

- The pyramids represent a great achievement of the ancient Egyptians.
- The ancient Egyptian government used farmers to build the pyramids.

Vocabulary

(See definitions on page 6.)

- afterlife
- craftsmanship
- historian
- monument
- pharaoh
- pyramid
- society

Key Literacy Strategies

Following are the primary literacy strategies students will use to complete this activity:

- Making inferences (screen 5; writing assignment 2)
- Determining important information (screens 6, 8, 9, and 11)
- Constructing summaries (writing assignment 1)

Note: In addition to the key literacy strategies listed above, students will also use each of these strategies to complete this lesson:

- Monitoring comprehension
- Synthesizing
- Making predictions
- Developing vocabulary
- Connecting prior knowledge to new learning
- Developing a topic in writing
- Identifying and using text features (photographs, captions, diagrams, and/or maps)

Overview

Building the Pyramids of Ancient Egypt is a student-directed learning experience. However, while students are expected to work through the lesson on their own, teachers should be available to keep the lesson on track, organize groupings, facilitate discussions, answer questions, and ensure that students meet all learning goals.

The following is a summary of the lesson screens:

- Screen 1: Students are introduced to the building of the Great Pyramid of Egypt and asked to think about what it can tell them about the people who built it.
- Screen 2: Students read a description of ancient Egyptian civilization and learn about the time frame for pyramid building. They then watch a brief video that asks them to think about why the Egyptians built their pyramids.
- Screen 3: Students learn what the goals are for the lesson, which strategies they will be using to complete the lesson, and the important vocabulary words they will use during the lesson.
- Screen 4: Students read about the changing perception of who built the pyramids and how historians now believe that free people built them, rather than slaves.
- Screen 5: Students read about the pyramid workers, when they worked, and how they signed the pyramids. They learn that the workers were conscripted, and that the signatures they left on the pyramids are called cartouches. They then watch a video that describes the pyramid workers' lives and their pride in their finished work. After watching the video, they write about why the pyramids, built without modern tools, were such a great achievement.
- Screen 6: Students read about how the pyramids looked when they were first completed, and what their builders believed that they did for the pharaohs who were buried in them. Then they watch a video that describes the items that would be buried with a pharaoh. After watching the video, they write about why the pharaohs were buried with statues of their servants.
- Screen 7: Students read about the hierarchical structure of Egyptian society. This includes the role of the pharaoh scribes, soldiers, craftsmen, and average Egyptians, most of whom were farmers. They also read about what the pyramids meant to society as a whole.
- Screen 8: Students answer three multiple-choice questions to show their comprehension of Egyptian society and pyramid building.
- Screen 9: Students read a PDF text describing how the stable Egyptian social structure made building the pyramids possible. They also learn about the process by which the workers honed their craftsmanship, and why their work was so important to all of Egyptian society. Then they write their own description of how the ancient Egyptian social structure was important to pyramid building.
- Screen 10: Students complete an interactive vocabulary activity, and then choose two words from the vocabulary list and write a new sentence for each word. These tasks demonstrate their understanding of the meanings of the words.
- Screen 11: Students use an interactive activity to highlight text that answers two questions about the pyramid builders.
- Final
Assignment: Students select and complete a writing assignment about the lesson topic.

Before the Lesson

- ❑ Go through each screen of the lesson, including all the interactive activities, so that you can experience ahead of time what students will be doing. As you go through each screen, jot down your own expectations for students' responses.
- ❑ Determine if students will be working individually or in pairs on the lesson. Some students may be able to work independently with little or no support. Students who are less familiar with the subject area or who struggle with literacy skills may benefit from working with another student. An effective way to do this is to pair a stronger student with a less able reader. You can also have students work individually on certain tasks and in pairs on others, depending on their experience and needs. If students will be working in pairs on any portion of the lesson, let them know if they will be expected to type in their notes individually or together.
- ❑ Provide instruction on key vocabulary (vocabulary words are defined in the lesson on screen 3, and on page 6 of this guide).
- ❑ Determine what students already know ancient Egypt or the pyramids. (You may want to provide some specific topics to start the discussion: Egyptian society, geography, pharaohs, pyramids, etc.) Record their ideas on a chart, highlighting the words that describe Egypt or the pyramids. This will give you a sense of the background knowledge and possible misconceptions that students have before beginning this lesson. If time allows, return to the chart after students have completed the lesson to add new learning and correct misconceptions. Note: You may want to record their new learning in a different-colored ink so they can see how much they've learned.
- ❑ Arrange computers with Internet access so students can work individually or in pairs.
- ❑ Before students begin, suggest a timeline for completing the lesson, mention the different types of media they will encounter, and let them know how you expect them to submit their work. You may want to provide an outline of this information on a chart, chalkboard, or whiteboard, or as a handout.

Lesson Assessments

The following are descriptions of the lesson features that will be part of the packet of materials that students will submit. Students will use the packet for reference when writing their final assignment. It also serves as a formative assessment tool to monitor students' work as they are progressing through the lesson.

- **Notes** - Students write their ideas in response to a prompt on screens 5, 6, and 9. If time allows, review their notes before students begin their writing assignment.
- **Multiple-choice questions** - Students complete the three questions on screen 8. Walk around to make sure students answer all three questions before they continue. If students click to go to the next page before they finish, their work will not be saved.

- **Match It!** - Students complete an interactive vocabulary activity on screen 10. They begin by dragging the vocabulary terms into the correct sentences. After they finish and save their work, they will be able to check their answers against an answer key. When they are done, they will be asked to choose two vocabulary words and write a new sentence for each word. Sentences should demonstrate a clear understanding of the meaning of each word. An inappropriate response would be “The pharaoh was an Egyptian.” An appropriate response would be “The pharaoh was the leader of ancient Egyptian society.”
- **Highlight It!** -Students complete the comprehension activity Highlight It! on screen 11. Students will read a selection and then highlight specific information that answers two questions about the reading. Students will not be able to check their answers online, so you will need to provide them with correct answers when they are finished with the lesson. You can choose to review the answers as a class or return the corrected packet of materials to students before they begin the final assignment. The following are some of the statements students may select to answer each question:

Question 1: Which jobs must have required great cooperation?

Highlighted information to answer question 1 should include that moving the rocks from the quarry would have called for teamwork and cooperation, since many men would have needed to work together to move the heavy blocks. Pulling the blocks up the ramp to their proper place would have required the same cooperation.

Question 2: Which jobs must have required great craftsmanship?

Highlighted information to answer question 2 should include that cutting the stones at the quarry would have called for skill in knowing where to cut the line of holes and how to work the wedge. Building the roads out of clay and the ramps up the sides of the pyramid would also have required skill.
- **Final Assignment** - Students complete one final writing assignment. You can choose to let students make their own selection or assign one according to your goals for the lesson. Use the rubric on page 7 to assess the writing assignments.

Lesson Aids and Extensions

Use the following suggestions to help students if they are stuck on a particular screen, to prepare students for completing their writing assignments, or as follow-up discussions to reinforce learning.

- **Watching Videos** - Encourage students to watch the videos more than once. After the initial viewing, provide students with a specific content focus to frame their next viewing(s) of the video. This will help them draw connections between the main topic and the information that the videos have to offer.

Key to Names and Places in the Videos:

Screen 5: Building the Pyramids

- o Saqqara (where the first pyramid was built)
- o Djoser (a pharaoh)
- o Imhotep (architect)

- o Sneferu (a pharaoh)

- o Khufu (a pharaoh)

Screen 6: What Were the Pyramids For?

- o Mastabas (tombs around the pyramids)

- o Khafre (pyramid)

- **Participating in Discussions** - Organize class discussions or encourage students to talk about their questions in pairs. You may want to use the following discussion starters:
 - o What was the structure of ancient Egyptian society? Who were the rulers? What were the jobs of people who helped the rulers?
 - o Why did Egyptians build the pyramids? Who built them?
 - o Why do you think the pyramids were so large? Did it have something to do with their purpose?
 - o Why are the pyramids important to us today? What do they tell us about ancient Egyptian society?
 - o What are some monuments in the United States that are famous? What is their purpose?
- **Reading the PDF Text** - Before they read the PDF text on screen 8, ask students to make predictions about what made pyramid building important to all Egyptians.
- **Sharing Student Work** - It may be motivational, and a further learning opportunity, for students to post their final essays so that their classmates, peers, and/or parents can see them. This may also provide an opportunity for students to comment on and discuss each other's essays.

If you do not already have access to an online writing community, Teaching Matters™ provides TeXT, free classroom publishing tools that allow teachers and students to create and publish their own online eZine. More information and a free signup are available at Teaching Matters: TeXT (<http://text.teachingmatters.org>).

- **Reflection and Self-Assessment** - After students have turned in their writing assignments, you can choose to have them assess their learning. Bring students together as a whole class or in small groups to discuss the questions below. You may want to return to the chart of their ideas developed before the lesson and record their new learning. You may also have students respond individually to the questions and then convene the class to discuss the chart.
 - o What did you learn?
 - o What was surprising?
 - o What questions do you still have?
 - o What was the easiest for you to understand and do?
 - o What was the most difficult?

Vocabulary Definitions

pyramid

A building with sides in the shape of triangles. Ancient Egyptians built *pyramids* as tombs, or burying places, for their rulers.

pharaoh

The title for the ancient Egyptian ruler. In England, a ruler was called the king, but in Egypt he was called the pharaoh.

afterlife

The spirit world that some people believe they will go to after they die.

monument

A very large building or structure, such as a statue, that is built to honor or remember something. The ancient Egyptian pyramids were monuments to the pharaohs.

craftsmanship

Skilled work that relies on someone's knowledge of how to make something correctly.

society

A large group of people who live in the same place and share a language, religion, and government.

historian

Someone who studies what has happened in the past and why. *Historical* means something that happened in the past.

Final Assignment Rubric Building the Pyramids of Ancient Egypt

- Describe how the ancient Egyptian society was organized, and how this organization made it possible to build the pyramids. What do the pyramids tell us about ancient Egyptian society?
- Imagine that you are one of the pyramid workers. Write down what your experience is like building a pyramid for your pharaoh, and why you are doing it.

	4	3	2	1
	Provides a clear and accurate response to the question. Ideas are elaborated, with three or more relevant supporting details from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides an adequate response to the question. Topic and ideas are generally well organized, with two relevant supporting details from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides a generally accurate response, with one supporting detail from the reading passage, video, and other materials in the lesson.	Provides an inaccurate response to the question or fails to address the question. May include misinterpretations. Understanding of the topic is not apparent.
	Uses at least three vocabulary words (or a form of the vocabulary words) from the lesson, and uses them all correctly.	Uses two vocabulary words (or a form of the vocabulary words) from the lesson, and uses them both correctly.	Uses one vocabulary word (or a form of the vocabulary word) from the lesson, and uses it correctly.	Does not use any vocabulary words, or uses vocabulary words incorrectly.

Scoring the Rubric

Here are two suggestions for scoring the final assignment rubric. Select the option that best meets your needs or develop your own grading system.

Option 1: This option provides one score for each submitted assignment.

Assign a score of 4 or below for the written response (first row of the rubric) and a score of 4 or below for the use of vocabulary (second row of the rubric), for a total maximum score of 8. The interpretation of scores is as follows:

Score	Grade	Narrative Interpretation
7-8	A	Excellent
5-6	B	Good
4	C	Adequate (Fair)
3 or below	D	Minimal

Option 2: This option provides two scores for each submitted assignment: one for written content and one for the use of key vocabulary. An advantage of separate scores is that you can weight students' comprehension and composition differently than you do their knowledge of vocabulary. It can also help you identify specific needs for future instruction.

Assign a score of 4 or below for the written response (first row of the rubric) and a score of 4 or below for the use of vocabulary (second row of the rubric) and then score them separately. The interpretation of scores is as follows:

Score	Grade	Narrative Interpretation
4	A	Excellent
3	B	Good
2	C	Adequate (Fair)
1	D	Minimal

The final grade may look like this: A/B (A for content and B for vocabulary use).