

Educator's Resource

Pharaoh: King of Ancient Egypt

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Written by Kevin Sweeney, Fourth-Grade Teacher, Hawken School, Lyndhurst, Ohio, with the assistance of Cleveland Museum of Art staff Hajnal Eppley, Assistant Director, School and Teacher Engagement, and Dale Hilton, Director of Teaching and Learning.

Developed in conjunction with the exhibition **Pharaoh: King of Ancient Egypt** (on view through June 12, 2016), this educational resource introduces students to objects produced thousands of years ago for specific functions. By comparing Cleveland Museum of Art works from the exhibition with others from the museum's permanent collection, students can practice skills required by state and national academic standards. In this resource, teachers will find images, selected information, and Common Core-aligned prompts for classroom use.

Pharaoh: King of Ancient Egypt is a collaboration with the British Museum. Presented by Baker Hostetler, with additional support from the Selz Foundation.

Part I: Thinking about Egypt

The Egyptian civilization was the longest lived in the ancient world. It began along the Nile River in northeastern Africa about 3300 BCE¹ and thrived for more than 3,000 years. Seasonal rains in the southern highlands inundated the Nile every year, causing the river to overflow its banks. When the floodwaters receded, a layer of rich black topsoil covered the flood plain. This fertile land enabled the Egyptians to develop a successful farming economy.

Other natural factors contributed to ancient Egypt's rise to prominence. The region's climate produced a relatively cloudless sky with plenty of sunshine for a long growing season. The Nile River served as a transportation highway and offered fresh water that sustained plants, animals, and people. Surrounding natural barriers—a vast desert to the west, seas to the north and east, and the upper rapids or cataracts of the Nile—prevented hostile attacks from the south.

Nome Gods Bearing Offerings (detail).
1961.205

¹ BCE is the abbreviation for “Before the Common (or Current) Era,” a secular alternative to the use of BC in designating the first period of the Gregorian calendar, the era of prehistory and much of antiquity.





A sophisticated and creative society emerged, the only one in the area to endure for thousands of years. The Egyptians developed principles of architecture, mathematics, and construction, and originated many geometry concepts, enabling them to erect large stone buildings as early as about 2700 BCE. They studied medicine and dentistry, and based their calendar on the observation of the sun and stars. The Egyptians' enduring achievements in sculpture, painting, and drawing still captivate today's viewers. From the stalks of the papyrus plant they processed thin paper-like sheets on which they wrote texts using hieroglyphs, symbols used in a form of picture writing. They produced a vast body of written records that included ethical and moral treatises, instructional texts, religious and mythical scrolls, poetry, epic tales, and ribald stories. A major power in the ancient world, Egypt dominated the region for millennia. After Egypt became Christianized under Roman rule in the 4th century CE,² hieroglyphic writing fell into disuse and gradually ceased to be understood.

² CE is the abbreviation for "Common (or Current) Era," a secular alternative to the use of AD in designating the second period of the Gregorian calendar, our current era.

Essential Questions

1. How do a region's topography, climate, and natural resources influence how people live and work?
2. How was the Nile River an essential part of Egyptian culture?
3. Why was the afterlife so important to the Egyptians?
4. What was the relationship between the afterlife and mummification?
5. What role did the pharaohs play in ancient Egyptian society?
6. How do art, technology, and writing inform us about a culture?
7. Was ancient Egypt a civilization?
8. Have we made progress since ancient times?

Key Concepts

1. The topography, climate, and natural resources of a region influence the culture, economy, and lifestyle of its inhabitants.
2. The Nile River was a source of life for the Egyptians.
3. Belief in eternal life strongly influenced Egyptian society.
4. The great pyramids in Egypt illustrate a powerful society.
5. The pharaohs signified the strength of ancient Egypt.



Coffin Case of Bakenmut (detail). 1914.561

Characteristics of Civilization

- Stable food supply: Necessary for a complex society's members to thrive.
- Social structure: The internal relationships within a society, often created by different levels of status.
- Government: A system to guide people's behavior and make life within a society orderly. Earlier civilizations frequently created a connection between rulers and gods, viewing the king as a god on earth.
- Religion: A set of beliefs that can influence everyday life and create a bond in society.
- The arts: Creative forms of expression. Specialization of jobs within a society often gives rise to artists and craftspeople.
- Technology: Inventions and advancements that allow for growth in production of goods.
- Writing: A complex system of recording information about all aspects of a civilization.

Historians divide the history of ancient Egypt into three important periods: the **Old Kingdom**, **Middle Kingdom**, and **New Kingdom**. During each period Egyptian civilization made significant advancements. Before the time of the Old Kingdom, ancient Egypt was divided into two separate kingdoms: Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. During the Old Kingdom (about 2650–2100 BCE), early pharaohs established a strong central government, unifying Upper and Lower Egypt. The Old Kingdom also saw the beginning of the building of the great pyramids as tombs for the powerful pharaohs. The Middle Kingdom (about 2050–1650 BCE) was a period of great advancements in literature, the arts, and architecture. The New Kingdom (about 1550–1100 BCE), often referred to as Egypt's Golden Age, brought an increase in trade and the construction of giant monuments.

Ancient Egypt's rich culture included government, religion, arts, and writing. Government and religion were closely connected, as the pharaoh was the leader of both. Writing was important to conducting the government's business. Scribes, the only people who could read and write, were powerful people in ancient Egypt's social structure.

The pharaohs of Egypt were thought to be living gods who ruled by divine right. **After death, the pharaohs** were often buried in giant pyramids or in secret tombs. Precious objects and other items believed to help them in the afterlife were buried with them. Archeological examination of these artifacts and art treasures help us to learn how the ancient Egyptians lived.



Ostraca: Ramses II Suckled by a Goddess (detail). 1987.156

Part II: Exploring Egypt through CMA Objects

Pharaoh: King of Ancient Egypt contains many artifacts that inform us about life in ancient Egypt. This exhibition features items on loan from the British Museum, augmented by objects from the permanent collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. These works help us to understand the role and perception of rulers in this monumental empire.

An ostraca is a pottery shard or stone fragment upon which something is written or drawn. Ostraca often served as a form of “scrap paper” in ancient Egypt. This piece depicts Ramses II, a great pharaoh who was born around 1303 BCE. His father was Pharaoh Seti I, and his mother Queen Tuya. Named after his grandfather Ramses I, he became pharaoh at age 25 upon the death of his father. Ramses II was known as a great military ruler, leading Egypt in battle against many nations, and for the imposing buildings constructed during his reign.

This image in which Ramses II is seen with a goddess suggests the power of the pharaoh and his close relationships with the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt.

Questions

1. Why was the relationship of the pharaoh to a god or goddess so important?
2. What purpose would this ostraca have served?
3. Can you think of images from current times that serve a similar purpose?



Small shrines were usually kept in individual households, but little information exists about practices related to these domestic shrines. Offerings of food, drink, and incense doubtless were made, but what other forms of rituals took place is unknown. These shrines served as places where people could make specific requests of their gods in prayer.

Questions

1. How do you think domestic shrines would have been used in ancient Egypt?
2. Who in the household do you think would carry the responsibility of tending the shrine?
3. How would a polytheistic religion (a religion honoring many gods) complicate having a household shrine?
4. Do people have household shrines today?

Coffin Case of Bakenmut. 1914.561



Bakenmut, a member of the clergy of Amun at Thebes, was buried in this coffin of gessoed (a mixture of paint and a binder) and painted sycamore. It is decorated with images of gods and goddesses, food offerings, animals, and hieroglyphic inscriptions, including some that identify the deified kings Tuthmosis III and Amenhotep I.

Questions

1. What conclusions can you draw from looking carefully at the images painted inside the coffin?
2. How do these images connect to facts or myths you know about ancient Egypt?
3. Can you identify any of the gods or goddesses represented in the coffin?
4. Can you find images that tell you about Bakenmut's life?



Hathor Jar. 1914.640



Hathor—goddess of love, beauty, music, dance, motherhood, and joy—was one of the most important goddesses of ancient Egypt. Pottery served many purposes and took many forms. This jar was used to store wine.

Questions

1. Does this jar express the qualities attributed to Hathor?
2. For what purpose do you imagine this jar would be used?





Talatat: Portrait of Nefertiti. 1976.4
Fragment of an Inlay Headdress. 1920.1976

A talatat is a small block of sandstone used to construct temples and palaces. These blocks were often carved or painted. Nefertiti was the primary royal wife of the pharaoh Amenhotep IV (also known as Akhenaten) and mother of King Tutankhamen.

Questions

1. How does this piece inform us about Nefertiti's importance in ancient Egyptian society?
2. How do we represent important people in today's society?

This piece of glazed faience (glazed earthenware or pottery) is part of a headdress from an inlay depiction of a queen.

Questions

1. This piece was made with great care and craftsmanship. Why?
2. Why were carved or painted images so important to the ancient Egyptians?



Seated Scribe of Medthu. 1920.2004
Paint Box of Vizier Amenemipet. 1914.680



This limestone sculpture represents a man in a seated position, presumably a scribe. Highly educated, scribes worked in the temples and palaces of ancient Egypt recording business transactions, great works of the pharaohs, and laws. Their writing was done in hieroglyphs on papyrus.

Questions

1. How does this statue show us the importance of the position of scribe?
2. What does the seated man appear to be doing?
3. How are modern statues similar to and different from this statue?

Made from boxwood, this paint set was used by the vizier Amenemipet. The second most powerful person in ancient Egypt, the vizier worked directly for the pharaoh and oversaw most of the country's internal affairs. Lower government officials reported to the vizier.

Questions

1. Why do you think the vizier would have a paint box? Was it part of his governmental duties, or a source of pleasure in his free time?
2. Where might the raw materials for the paints come from?
3. What do you imagine the vizier might choose to paint? Why?





Nome Gods Bearing Offerings (detail). 1961.205



Domestic Shrine (detail). 1920.2002

Part III: Making Connections

Take another look at these objects. Using the prompts provided, think about these objects along with others from the permanent collection to further explore ideas raised in *Pharaoh: King of Ancient Egypt*.

Based on the image of the shrine and the detail of a painted stone panel with shallow carving (known as low relief), what kinds of items in ancient Egypt were considered offerings that would please the gods?



Coffin of Senbi. 1914.716



Coffin Case of Bakenmut (detail). 1914.561

Observe the two coffins pictured here. How do coffins from ancient Egypt compare to each other and contrast with modern coffins?



Hathor Jar. 1914.640

In the space provided here, design your own version of a Hathor jar. How would you express this goddess's connection with beauty, music, and dance?



Talata: Portrait of Nefertiti (detail). 1976.4

The image of Nefertiti provides clues to her importance. Look at this image of a group of women. What can you tell about their position in society? How did you come to your conclusion?

Leaf from a Cocharelli Treatise on the Vices: Accidia and Her Court (detail). 1953.152



Seated Scribe of Medthu. 1920.2004

Man with Drill. 2002.24



The scribe of Medthu is shown with an object he uses in his profession.
What can you tell about the job of the person seen in this print?



Colonel William Leete Stone, 1839. William Page (American, 1811–1885). Oil on canvas; 91.4 x 73.6 cm. Gift of various donors by exchange 1961.171.

The paint box of the vizier Amenemipet shows use. What kinds of materials have been used to write during other periods of history? Find and discuss clues in the painting shown here.

Paint Box of Vizier Amenemipet (detail). 1914.680



Coffin Case of Bakenmut, c. 1000–900 bc. Egypt, Thebes, Third Intermediate Period, late Dynasty 21 to early Dynasty 22. Gessoed and painted sycamore wood; 208 x 68 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1914.561.



Coffin of Senbi, c. 1918–1859 bc. Egypt, Meir, Middle Kingdom, mid-Dynasty 12, reigns of Amenemhat II to Sesostri III. Gessoed and painted cedar; 70 x 55 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1914.716.



Norne Gods Bearing Offerings, c. 1391–1353 bc. Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep III. Painted limestone; h. 66 cm. John L. Severance Fund 1961.205.



Paint Box of Vizier Amennemipet, c. 1427–1401 bc. Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep II. Box-wood with inscription inlaid in Egyptian blue; 21 x 3.6 x 2.2 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1914.680.



Seated Scribe of Medthu, c. 1479–1425 bc. Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Tuthmosis III. Limestone, originally painted; 30.5 x 18.9 x 24.1 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1920.2004.



Domestic Shrine, c. 1479–1425 bc. Egypt, probably Theban region, New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Tuthmosis III. Limestone, originally painted; 42.4 x 27.4 x 9 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1920.2002.



Hathor Jar, 1391–1337 bc. Egypt, probably Malqata, New Kingdom, late Dynasty 18, reigns of Amenhotep III to Akhenaten. Nile silt ware; h. 37.8 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1914.640.



Talat: Portrait of Nefertiti, c. 1353–1347 bc. Egypt, Karnak, New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Amenhotep IV. Painted sandstone; 21.5 x 24.3 cm. Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1976.4.



Fragment of an Inlay Headdress, c. 1353–1295 bc. Egypt, New Kingdom, late Dynasty 18. Lavender blue faience with deep blue overglaze; 6.7 x 7.7 x 2.8 cm. Gift of the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust 1920.1976.



Ostrakon: Ramses II Suckled by a Goddess, c. 1279–1213 bc. Egypt, New Kingdom, Dynasty 19, reign of Ramses II. Painted limestone; 31.2 x 18.2 x 3.3 cm. Given in honor of James N. Sherwin, Trustee 1957–1971 1987.156.



Leaf from a Cocharelli Treatise on the Vices: Accidia and Her Court, c. 1330. Attributed to Cybo, Monk of Hyeres (Italian). Ink, tempera, and gold on vellum; sheet: 16.3 x 10.3 cm. Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1953.152.



Man with Drill, c. 1935. Charles Turzak (American, 1899–1986). Woodcut; sheet: 43 x 33.2 cm. John L. Severance Fund 2002.24.



Standards

Grade 6: Social Studies: Early Civilizations

Early civilizations (such as Egypt) 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.

All grades: ELA: Speaking and Listening

All grades: Visual Arts: Perceiving/Knowing; Responding/Reflecting

Dale Hilton

Director of Teaching and Learning
216-707-2491
dhilton@clevelandart.org

The Cleveland Museum of Art

11150 East Blvd.
Cleveland, OH 44106
www.clevelandart.org

Hajnal Eppley

Assistant Director,
School and Teacher Engagement
216-707-6811
heppley@clevelandart.org