

The Importance of the Nile Student Worksheet

Introduction:

Ancient Egyptian civilization was completely dependent on the Nile River. Its annual summer floods deposited rich soil along its banks, making the land very fertile. Egyptians also relied on the Nile for irrigation and transportation. The river was so important to their livelihoods that they often spoke of it in religious terms, referring to it as a god.

Directions:

Here, you'll read the "Hymn to the Nile" to see how the Egyptians viewed the river. You'll also see pictures of a Nilometer, a structure the Egyptians used to measure the height of the river. As you read the text and look at the pictures, think about why the Nile was so important to the Egyptians and why they spoke of it and treated it with such respect.

All Web links for this lesson can be found at:

<http://www.socialstudies.com/ancientlinks.html>

Hymn to the Nile

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/hymn-nile.html>

This text reveals some of the ancient Egyptians' attitudes toward the Nile River. Read the first four paragraphs and the last two paragraphs of this text. Then answer the questions below.

Here are some definitions that will help you read this text:

- manifests: shows
- Re: god of the midday sun; the most important Egyptian god; this god is also known as Ra
- Seb: god of the earth
- Nepera: god of grain (Neper)
- Ptah: god who created Memphis, an ancient Egyptian capital; Ptah was a patron of craftsmen
- inundation: flood
- perpetuity: eternal life, lasting forever
- Nun: the waters from which the god Re first arose
- immolated: sacrificed by burning

1. What are some of the good things the Nile does for the people of Egypt? Name at least four.
2. According to this text, what would happen if the Nile ceased to flow or (presumably) if its water level dropped significantly?
3. What evidence do you see in this passage to indicate that ancient Egyptians viewed the Nile River as a god? List as many examples as you see.

4. What sacrifices were made to the Nile? Why do you think people made these sacrifices?

5. Why do you think this hymn was written? Why do you think ancient Egyptians might have recited this hymn?

Photographs of the Nilometer on Elephantine Island

http://www.briegull.com/egypt/fullimages/nilometer_f.jpg

<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/egypt/egy27-17.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:ElephantineIsland_Egypt.jpg

Look at the different photographs of the Nilometer on Elephantine Island. The ancient Egyptians used this Nilometer to measure the height of the Nile and to forecast how high the river might get. This information helped them plan for the upcoming harvest, including determining how much to charge in taxes.

6. Why would a structure like this one have been useful for the Egyptians?

7. Though not visible in these pictures, there is a statue in the Nilometer. Why do you think the Egyptians would have placed a statue in such a place? (Hint: think about their attitudes toward the Nile, as you learned about in the previous section.)