

YEAR 4 UNIT 1 – THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS: How much did the Ancient Egyptians achieve?

Related units:

Year 3 Unit 1: The Stone Age and Year 3 Unit 2: The Bronze Age and the Iron Age

Unit overview

In this unit, the children will explore who the Ancient Egyptians were, what they did, and discuss whether Ancient Egypt deserves its reputation as one of the most important early civilisations. The National Curriculum Programmes of Study for History require you to study Ancient Egypt in the context of three other early civilisations. These are the Shang Dynasty of Ancient China, Ancient Sumer and the Indus Valley civilisation. The first session introduces all 4 civilisations, and supports the children in understanding where they were located in time and place. It looks at some of the common features that made them so successful. The children could go on to study more about these cultures as part of extension or homework activities. It is also important to make comparisons with what was happening in Britain at the same time, linking back to prior learning in Year 3. This helps the children to understand why the achievements of the Ancient Egyptians should be regarded as so significant.

There is a strong focus on sources of evidence within this unit, and this makes an excellent link to the Big Finish where the children collect their own sources to create a 21st century time capsule. If you plan to bury your time capsule, this is a brilliant opportunity to engage with your local community by inviting them to the ceremony.

Key vocabulary

Ancient, civilisation, fertile, shaduf, irrigation, achievement, hieroglyph, archaeologists, cartouche, antiquities, scribes, society, seals, sarcophagus, excavation, inscription, papyrus, mummification, role, achievement, hierarchy, priest, farmer, agriculture, scribe, pharaoh, archaeobotanical, pyramid, engineering, technology, stonemason, ramp, construction, lever, sphinx, creation, mummification, canopic jar, shabti, time capsule.

Knowledge, skills and concepts

In this unit, the children will:

- study the achievements of the earliest civilisations
- develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understand of British, local and world history
- note connections, contrasts and trends over time
- develop the use of historical terms
- understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources
- address and devise historically valid questions about similarity, difference and significance
- construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection and organisation of relevant historical information.

Cross-curricular links

- **Art:** hieroglyphics – creating your own cartouche
- **DT:** making your own papyrus, investigating pyramid construction, making models of a shaduf
- **English:** researching information, writing a diary or newspaper account
- **Geography:** physical characteristics and climate, using maps, agriculture
- **Maths:** timelines
- **RE:** understanding and comparing beliefs, gods and afterlife
- **Science:** mummification processes – mummifying an object, e.g. an orange

Related books for wider reading

- *The Time Travelling Cat and the Egyptian Goddess* by Julia Jarman
- *The Egyptian Cinderella* by Shirley Climo
- *Secrets of a Sun King* by Emma Carrol
- *Ancient Egypt* by Rachel Minay (*The History Detective Investigates*)
- *Ancient Egypt* by Anita Ganeri (*Writing History*)

Places to visit

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| • British Museum, London | • Archaeology, London |
| • Manchester Museum | • Egypt Centre, Swansea |
| • Ulster Museum, Belfast | • World Museum, Liverpool |
| • National Museum of Scotland | • Many local museums have a good Egyptian collection |
| • Ashmolean Museum, Oxford | |
| • Petrie Museum of Egyptian | |

Assessment

Opportunities for assessment for learning are built in throughout the unit through questioning and activities. The children can both self and peer assess as appropriate using approaches familiar to them. The quiz is intended to be used during week 6, and will review knowledge, skills and concepts acquired during the unit. The Rising Stars Progression Framework assessment focuses on: *constructing the past; develop chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British, local and world history; establish clear narratives within and across periods they study; understand overview and depth.* **The assessment should be undertaken in week 6. Detailed information on the task can be found on the key assessment opportunity sheet.**

Subject knowledge and teaching guidance

Ancient Egypt existed some 5,000 years ago. Although the actual end date is uncertain, it is estimated that it lasted around 3,000 years as the leading nation in the Mediterranean world. It owes much of its success to the River Nile, whose flooding cycle and controlled irrigation allowed for fertile land and prosperous agriculture.

There is a reasonable amount of surviving evidence through structures such as pyramids, temples, artefacts – especially grave goods – as well as writing. The Egyptians had a system of writing called hieroglyphics.

The Egyptians had a well-structured and stratified society with pharaohs at the top, nobles, then scribes and priests, but most were farmers. There were also slaves. The status of women was relatively high in Egyptian society, with some becoming pharaohs. There were many famous pharaohs including Rameses III, Akhenaten, Cleopatra and Tutankhamun.

Religion was very important to the Ancient Egyptians, and they had a strong belief in the afterlife – as evidenced by the often elaborate burial processes.

This topic is an ideal one for a museum visit. Rich Victorians and Edwardians were fascinated by the Egyptian culture and collected Egyptian artefacts to decorate their homes. Many of these artefacts have now found their way into public collections, meaning many of our regional museums have extensive Egyptian collections. The British Museum houses the largest collection of Egyptian artefacts outside Egypt. Many museums offer workshops and some offer loan boxes of genuine or replica artefacts. If you would like to use artefacts, it is also worth asking parents and members of the school community, who may have had a holiday in the area and brought back souvenirs they are happy to loan or donate to your collection.

There are many exciting cross-curricular opportunities resulting from this unit. However, it is important to use time outside your history allocation if, for example, you want to mummify an object or design and create your own shaduf. This unit also provides many opportunities for homework and extension activities.