How did the Nile River influence life in ancient Egypt?

Overview: Ancient Egyptian society lasted almost 3,000 years. It began with the unification of Egypt under the first pharaoh in 2920 BCE and ended when the Romans conquered the kingdom in 30 BCE. Of special interest to us is the mighty Nile, the longest river in the world, which flowed through this rich and vibrant civilization. This ICER explores the importance of the Nile to the people of Ancient Egypt.

What does analyze mean? READ everything!

The Documents:

- Document A: Ancient Egypt (map)
- Document B: The Nile River Flood Cycle (chart)
- Document C: Transport on the Nile (image)
- Document D: Field of Reeds (tomb painting)
- Document E: Hymn to the Nile

F: Background Essay and Map Review for Quiz
How did the Nile River influence life in ancient Egypt?

In today’s society, it is easy to forget the importance of rivers. Ours is a world of highways and airports, of supermarkets and shopping malls. When we travel or want food, we don’t think “river.” When we bathe or get thirsty, we think shower or bottled water.

This has not always been the case. In fact, four of the world’s most important ancient cultures are known by historians as the “river civilizations.” These were Mesopotamia on the Tigris-Euphrates River, China on the Yangtze (“yang-see”), India on the Indus, and Egypt on the Nile. They are called the river civilizations because of the powerful influence a large river system had on the lives of the people. And nowhere was this more true than in the ancient kingdom of Egypt.

Perhaps the most stunning fact about Egypt is its age. The first pharaoh began his rule in 2920 BCE, nearly 5,000 years ago. From this early beginning, Egypt has been a land of contrasts, a place of hot, sunny days and cold nights, of crop-laden fields and empty desert. In its early days, Egypt was two distinct kingdoms. To the south was Upper Egypt, where the Nile flows north out of the mountains. To the north was Lower Egypt where the river spreads into a delta before emptying into the Mediterranean. Egyptians also spoke of the “Black Land” and the “Red Land.” The Black Land hugged the Nile. The Red Land was the desert just beyond. The Black Land represented life. The Red Land meant danger. For Egyptians, the Nile literally meant the difference between life and death.

The source of the Nile was a mystery to the ancient Egyptians. Now we know that one branch, called the Blue Nile, begins in Lake Tana in the highlands of Ethiopia. The other main branch, the White Nile, begins with the waters that flow into and then out of Lake Victoria in Kenya. Every year, when heavy rains fall in central Africa, the tributaries of the Blue and White Nile grow full and flow into the main river. The mother Nile, its waters replenished, then flows north and into Egypt. There, the water spills over its banks and covers the low-lying flood plain. For thousands of years, this flooding cycle has provided a seasonal rhythm for the Egyptian people.

The flooding cycle determined the planting season for farmers. Their main crops were barley and emmer wheat for making bread and beer. People paid their taxes in wheat, and wheat was a main export. Farmers also grew flax for producing fine linen, and harvested papyrus from the marshy areas along the river and in the delta. Irrigation channels from the Nile flowed to smaller gardens where farmers grew vegetables such as onions, beans, and cucumbers. Date, fig, and pomegranate trees were tended along the river.

While fruits, grains, and vegetables might sound like the makings of a healthful diet, one ingredient of Egyptian meals was definitely not good: desert sand. Sand was everywhere, easily settling into the dough for flat bread, a basic food eaten by everyone. Once the ever-present sand ground down a person’s teeth, infection and pain set in. Thus, dental disease became a common medical problem in Ancient Egypt.

Let’s time-travel to this fertile yet hostile land where life revolved around the ebb and flow of a single waterway. On the following pages are five documents that provide a glimpse of Egyptian life thousands of years ago. As you read the documents, think about how the Nile gave rise to a civilization that, all this time later, continues to fascinate. Then answer the question: How did the Nile River influence life in ancient Egypt?
Document A

Source: Map created from various sources.

Egypt around 1500 BCE
Document A Analysis:

1. Why is the delta region to the north called "Lower Egypt" and the southern region called "Upper Egypt"

   Due to the Nile current - it flows North to the Mediterranean Sea. (Think Upper is the beginning of the Nile, and Lower is the end of the Nile.)

2. What makes the Nile River Valley attractive for settlement?

   Fresh water and fertile soil (silt) for farming and livestock. Protection from the deserts. Access to trade using the Nile and seas.

Geography EQ:

How does geography (the Nile River) influence the way people live, move, and define regions?

LIVE: water for survival, fish, sewage system, mud for bricks for homes, water for crop irrigation

MOVE: boats - water highway for trade and travel

DEFINE REGIONS: Upper and Lower Egypt based on the current of the Nile, desert = Red Land / silt (fertile soil) = Black Land
The Nile River Flood Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akhet</td>
<td>Fields in the Nile floodplain covered in water and fertilized by a new batch of silt. Time when many farmers worked off their public-labor tax, doing jobs like canal repair or quarrying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peret</td>
<td>Waters receded but Nile high enough to fill irrigation canals; crops planted and tended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shemu</td>
<td>Crops in the Lower Nile harvested and sent to market.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Average rainfall, historically and today, has remained about the same. The Nile delta receives about four inches per year. The Nile Valley south of Cairo and Giza receives less than one inch. In comparison, Atlanta, Georgia, gets about 50 inches of rain annually and Phoenix, Arizona, about eight inches.

Document B Analysis:

1. How did Egypt's geography affect their farming methods and daily life?
   The Nile seasons told farmers what jobs to do during that part of the year - planting, harvesting, or working for the pharaoh on building projects. It affected every day life because it could bring surplus and happiness or destruction, flooding, and starvation.

2. The population of Egypt was probably about one million, 95% were farmers. According to the chart, when were farmers busiest? When would this large work force of farmers be available to work on government projects, like building palaces and tombs?
   Farmers were busiest during Shemu or harvest. They had time to work for the pharaoh during the flood season or Akhet.

Geography EQ:
How does geography (the Nile River) influence the way people live, move, and define regions?

LIVE: jobs/work, flooding, rainfall, irrigation, food, etc.

MOVE:

DEFINE REGIONS:
Document C


Note: The Nile River flows south to north against a prevailing northerly wind. In ancient times, boats traveling upstream against the Nile current used a sail or rowers or both. Boats traveling down-stream to the north often just floated with the help of steering oars. The Nile current was about four knots (4 mph) during flood season. It slowed to a sluggish one knot (1 mph) during the rest of the year.

Document C Analysis:

1. What technology did ancient Egyptians use to help them move on the Nile? boats/barges

2. How can you travel in both directions on the Nile? with the current to the North or downstream, and with a sail and the wind upstream

3. What role do you think trade played in Egyptian civilization? provided money and contact with other cultures

Geography EQ:
How does geography (the Nile River) influence the way people live, move, and define regions?

LIVE: wealth from trade, need to know how to swim

MOVE: transport stone for building and goods for trade, general travel and trade

DEFINE REGIONS:
Source: Painting from the tomb of a tradesman named Sennedjem, who lived sometime between 1307 and 1196 BCE.

Note: Heaven in Ancient Egypt was a paradise called the Field of Reeds, shown in this tomb painting. Those whose heart had the correct weight at death could, after a long journey, live in the Field of Reeds forever. The Field of Reeds was believed to be somewhere in the east, near the rising sun.

Top:
The sun god, Ra, traveling across the sky in his boat. Baboons are shown worshipping Ra.

Bottom panels:
Date palms and ornamental plants

Border and Channels:
The Nile River and irrigation canals

Middle panels:
Harvesting emmer wheat; harvesting flax to weave into linen cloth
Document D Analysis:

1. The middle panels of this tomb painting show the deceased man and his wife engaged in various activities. What are they doing?
   making wheat and clothes from the crops they harvested

2. What would disappear from this picture of paradise if the Nile weren't present? EVERYTHING in their afterlife! Also, the sun god Ra would not be able to move the sun around or transport things in the Land of the Dead.

Geography EQ:
How does geography (the Nile River) influence the way people live, move, and define regions?

LIVE: it influenced their religion and afterlife as well

MOVE:

DEFINE REGIONS:
Hail to you, oh Nile,
spring from the ground, come to keep the land alive...
who floods the fields that Ra [the sun god] has created
to make all the animals live...
who produces barley and makes wheat grow,
that the temples might be in festival.

If he is sluggish, noses suffocate,
everyone is impoverished....
If he rises, the land is in exultation,
and everyone is in joy.

**Document E Analysis:**

1. What is a hymn? *song of praise, usually to a god (religious)*

2. According to the "Hymn to the Nile," why do the Egyptian people praise the river? *Because of all the blessing it provides them with - food, water for animals, festivals, etc.*

**Geography EQ:**
How does geography (the Nile River) influence the way people live, move, and define regions?

**LIVE:** influenced their religion and gods - prayed to the Nile god and thought it was that important

**MOVE:**

**DEFINE REGIONS:**
**Geography EQ/TDA Writing Prompt: EGYPT**

**QUESTION:** How did the Nile River influence life in ancient Egypt?

Your response should follow ICER format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 1:</strong> LIVED, MOVED, OR DEFINED REGIONS</td>
<td>The answer is strong and clearly explains how geography influences the way people live.</td>
<td>The answer is somewhat strong and/or somewhat explains how geography influences the way people live.</td>
<td>An answer was not referenced, and/or barely explains how geography influences the way people live.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>Evidence that strongly supports the answer is and is cited correctly is provided.</td>
<td>Evidence that somewhat clearly supports the answer and/or is not correctly cited is provided.</td>
<td>Evidence is not provided, or the evidence provided is does not make an accurate connection with the answer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>A clear and detailed explanation that supports the answer is provided; the explanation is on topic and is at least 2-3 sentences in length.</td>
<td>An explanation that somewhat supports the answer is provided. Explanation is somewhat detailed and meets minimum requirements.</td>
<td>An explanation that does not clearly or effectively support the answer and/or does not meet the minimum requirement is provided.</td>
<td>An explanation is not provided, or the explanation provided is off topic and does not make an accurate connection with the answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Answer 2: LIVED, MOVED, OR DEFINED REGIONS | The answer is strong and clearly explains how geography influences the way people move. | The answer is somewhat strong and/or somewhat explains how geography influences the way people move. | An answer was not referenced, and/or barely explains how geography influences the way people move. |  |
| Citation | Evidence that strongly supports the answer is and is cited correctly is provided. | Evidence that somewhat clearly supports the answer and/or is not correctly cited is provided. | Evidence is not provided, or the evidence provided is does not make an accurate connection with the answer. |  |
| Explanation | A clear and detailed explanation that supports the answer is provided; the explanation is on topic and is at least 2-3 sentences in length. | An explanation that somewhat supports the answer is provided. Explanation is somewhat detailed and meets minimum requirements. | An explanation that does not clearly or effectively support the answer and/or does not meet the minimum requirement is provided. | An explanation is not provided, or the explanation provided is off topic and does not make an accurate connection with the answer. |

**Comments**

/20
What type of writing is this? TDA (text dependent analysis)
Where can you find ideas/notes to help you? HERE! all the documents you analyzed
What is the question I need to answer in writing? How did the Nile River influence life in ancient Egypt?
What civilization should my explanations refer to? Egypt

OUTLINE the information you could use here.
Thesis: The Nile River influenced the way people _____ and _____ in ancient Egypt.

LIVE Answer: ____________________________________________________________

Document I will use to support my answer: ___________________________________
Explanation:
•
•
•

MOVE Answer: ____________________________________________________________

Document I will use to support my answer: ___________________________________
Explanation:
•
•
•

DEFINE REGIONS Answer: ________________________________________________

Document I will use to support my answer: ___________________________________
Explanation:
•
•
•
ICER Essay Graphic Organizer for an Essay with Two Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt / Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Answer the question (*re-state entire question!!!!!)

2. Pick two points for thesis (*main topics your essay will cover*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point 1</th>
<th>Point 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Combine step 3 and step 4 to create your thesis. *Remember to include the article title AND author!*

Thesis = Answer + Two Points

**Introductory Paragraph**

3. Thesis (1 sentence)

<p>| |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Write a broad (general) statement about the topic of the essay. Do NOT include the same words from your thesis!

4. Broad statement (1 sentence)

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

**REMEMBER ➔ When you write your introductory paragraph, the order of the sentences is:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Broad statement  2<sup>nd</sup>: Thesis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I – Introduce (Transition + Topic sentence for point 1)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C – Cite (A quote from the text that supports point 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E – Explain (In AT LEAST 3 SENTENCES, explain how/why the quote you just gave supports the answer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R – Re-state (Transition + Wrap-up the paragraph)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I – Introduce</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Transition + Topic sentence for point 2)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C – Cite</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(A quote from the text that supports point 2)</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Transition + Wrap-up the paragraph)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Concluding Paragraph</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SENTENCE 1:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition + Re-state thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **SENTENCE 2:**     |
| Re-state main points |

| **SENTENCE 3+**   |
| Memorable end |
