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.

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
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 Analysis:

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

2. What are the boundaries to settlement in Egypt? (Where can you live and why?)

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

LIVE:

MOVE:

DEFINE REGIONS:
**The Nile River Flood Cycle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akhet (flood season)</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>Mid-June to mid-October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peret (planting &amp; growing season)</td>
<td>Waters receded but Nile high enough to fill irrigation canals; crops planted and tended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-October to mid-February</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shemu (harvest season)</td>
<td>Crops in the Lower Nile harvested and sent to market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-February to mid-June</td>
<td></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. Usually the flood season produced a "good Nile", just the right amount of water. What might be the consequences of a "bad Nile" - too much or too little water?

2. The population of Egypt was probably about one billion, 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?

**Geography EQ:**

How does geography (the Nile River) influence the way people live, move, and define regions?
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 downstream 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 is possibly being transported by the barge (the ship pulled by tugboats)?

2. How can you travel in both directions on the Nile?

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

LIVE:

MOVE:

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.
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?

2. What would disappear from this picture of paradise if the Nile weren't present?

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

LIVE:

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?

2. According to the "Hymn to the Nile," why do the Egyptian people praise the river?

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

LIVE:

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></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><strong>Citation</strong></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><strong>Explanation</strong></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></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer 2:</strong></td>
<td>The answer is strong and clearly explains how geography influences the way people move.</td>
<td>The answer is somewhat strong and/or somewhat explains how geography influences the way people move.</td>
<td>An answer was not referenced, and/or barely explains how geography influences the way people move.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Citation</strong></td>
<td>Evidence that strongly supports the answer is and is cited correctly is provided.</td>
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</table>

**Comments**

/20
What type of writing is this? 

Where can you find ideas/notes to help you? 

What is the question I need to answer in writing? 

What civilization should my explanations refer to? 

**OUTLINE** the information you could use here.

**Thesis:**

**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*)
   - **Point 1**
   - **Point 2**

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)
   - 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)

**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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C – Cite (A quote from the text that supports point 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E – Explain (In AT LEAST 3 SENTENCES, explain how/why the quote you just gave supports the answer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R – Re-state (Transition + Wrap-up the paragraph)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ICER Body Paragraph 2

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **I – Introduce**  
(Transition + Topic sentence for point 2) |   |
| **C – Cite**  
(A quote from the text that supports point 2) |   |
| **E – Explain**  
(In AT LEAST 3 SENTENCES, explain how/why the quote you just gave supports the answer) |   |
| **R – Re-state**  
(Transition + Wrap-up the paragraph) |   |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SENTENCE 1:</strong> Transition + Re-state thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SENTENCE 2:</strong> Re-state main points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SENTENCE 3+</strong> Memorable end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>