

# Life in Ancient Egypt

## *Along the Nile River*

**by Margit E. McGuire, Ph.D.**

Professor of Teacher Education, Seattle University

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### Content Consultant

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—Margit E. McGuire

### Class Test Sites

Lynn Black	Elizabeth Gunning
Lake Washington School District	Midland School District
Kirkland, Washington	Midland, Texas

### Storypath Advisory Panel

The Storypath advisors review each unit prior to publication. We sincerely thank the following advisors for their comments and recommendations regarding *Life in Ancient Egypt*:

Amy Jo Baker	Renko Dempster
San Antonio School District	Seattle School District
San Antonio, Texas	Seattle, Washington
Mark Basehart	Ron Eydenberg
Sweet Home Central School District	Revere Public Schools
Amherst, New York	Revere, Massachusetts
Stephen Bullick	Jane Humphreys
Mt. Lebanon School District	Cypress-Fairbanks School District
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Houston, Texas

**Program Consultants:** Katherine L. Schlick Noe, Ph.D., Professor and Director of Literacy, Seattle University; H. “Sonny” Carreno, B.A. Education, Licensed Instructor, English as a Second/New Language (Texas, Wisconsin, Indiana)

**Program Management:** Morrison BookWorks LLC

**Program Design:** Herman Adler Design

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# ABOUT STORYPATH

## THE STORYPATH STRATEGY

Storypath offers both a structure for organizing the social studies curriculum and an instructional strategy for teaching. The structure is a familiar one: the story. The strategy is grounded in a belief that children learn best when they are active participants in their own learning, and places students' own efforts to understand at the center of the educational enterprise. Together, the structure and the teaching strategy ensure that students feel strongly motivated and have meaningful and memorable learning experiences.

Originally developed in Scotland during the 1960s, Storypath draws support from decades of experience with teachers and students. The approach has its roots in these beliefs about children and learning:

- The world is complex and presents many layers of information. Children know a good deal about how the world works and have a reservoir of knowledge that is often untapped in the classroom.
- When children build on that knowledge through activities such as questioning and researching, new understandings are acquired. Because children construct their own knowledge and understanding of their world, their learning is more meaningful and memorable.
- Problem solving is a natural and powerful human endeavor. When children are engaged in problem-solving, they take ownership for their learning.
- The story form integrates content and skills from many disciplines and provides a context for children to gain a deeper, more complex understanding of major concepts.

## AN INQUIRY APPROACH

Questioning, by both teacher and students, is a key component of Storypath. Through the story structure and the discourse it creates, the teacher guides students in their search for meaning and understanding as they acquire new knowledge and skills. Your questions, and the discussions they engender, cause students to:

- ask their own questions and think critically about what they know;
- use their prior knowledge to make sense of new information;
- connect personally to important social studies concepts.

The story structure and inquiry guided by unit goals provide the framework for students to integrate skills and complex content through problems they encounter. As they do so, their understanding of important concepts is extended and key connections are made.

## THE STORY STRUCTURE

For thousands of years, stories have helped us create order and make connections between events. Storypath's narrative structure helps students understand concepts that they often find difficult to comprehend in the traditional social studies curriculum.

Each Storypath unit centers on a unique and engaging story that provides a concrete context for understanding the social science content. This story may be based on actual historical events, as developed in *Struggle for Independence*. Or the story might instead be based on typical community or business structures, as developed in *Families in Their Neighborhoods* or in *Understanding the Marketplace*. From all of these structures, students develop a meaningful context for developing understanding of the topic.

### Typical structure of a Storypath unit

#### CREATING THE SETTING

Students create the setting by completing a frieze or mural of the place.

#### CREATING THE CHARACTERS

Students create characters for the story whose roles they will play during subsequent episodes.

#### BUILDING CONTEXT

Students are involved in activities such as reading, writing, and research to stimulate them to think more deeply about the people and the place they have created.

#### CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Characters confront problems typical of those faced by people of that time and place.

#### CONCLUDING EVENT

Students plan and participate in an activity that brings closure to the story.

# PLANNING THE UNIT

## LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT ALONG THE NILE RIVER

### MAKE KEY DECISIONS

**Plan the Space for the Storypath.** Plan to have ample wall space to display the frieze of the setting and students' characters. You might have students use the frieze as a backdrop to the actual community. If this is the case, set a table in front of the frieze for three-dimensional homes, farms, and other features to serve as an extension to the frieze. You will need additional space to display various lists, artifacts, and other materials students create. Be sure to showcase these items in the classroom for easy reference rather than out in the hall.

**Create a Time Line.** Before beginning this unit you can have students participate in the construction of an ancient civilizations time line. This time line could include major historical events and help students develop a sense of ancient Egypt in relation to other ancient cultures.

**Organize the Class.** Beginning in Episode 2, students will be organized into groups representing extended families—each student will create one character. Consider how large you want each group to be and how you will facilitate group work. Groups of four to six work well, but you may want to form smaller groups if students have difficulty with group work. At different points throughout the unit, students will work in their family groups to create artifacts related to the community and react to critical incidents.

**Involve Adults in Role-Play.** During the critical incident in Episode 5, students may decide to have a meeting with the pharaoh or his representative. If none of the students has created the pharaoh as a Storypath character, you or another adult can step into this role. If your pharaoh needs to know more to prepare for the role, you can use the Content Slide Sets and Background Information to brief him or her on the role and responsibilities.

**Weave in Historical Information.** During the unit, it is important that students try to “figure out” how the ancient Egyptians lived in their environment. Guide this process by asking key questions as the Storypath develops. When students develop a need to know, provide historical information to move the story forward. Although it may be tempting to simply tell students what they need to know before they begin an episode, doing so will greatly reduce problem solving and critical thinking and jeopardize the impact of this approach on students' learning.

**Connect to Other Storypaths.** If world cultures or a survey of the ancient world are topics of your social studies curriculum, consider using *Exploring World Cultures: The Museum*, which provides a context to learn about places and times by creating museum exhibits. This Storypath allows you to determine the depth and breadth of the study of topics depending on how your students decide to organize the museum. Students become museum staff as they research and design their exhibits.

**Plan a Field Trip.** Many museums have displays about ancient cultures, including that of the Egyptians. Plan your trip as a follow-up to the Storypath activities. This way, students will formulate their own ideas rather than replicate ones they see in a museum.

**Connect to Other Content Areas.** A science unit on “machines and how they work” would be an ideal follow-up to the Storypath after students learn about how the pyramids were built. Students could investigate what construction techniques have survived. A measurement or geometry unit in mathematics can focus on the building of pyramids, thereby providing a context for learning. Episode 4, “The Marketplace,” allows students to apply their understanding of measurement and equivalencies as they plan for the goods to be traded in the marketplace.

**Create a Learning Community.** An open and supportive atmosphere is essential for students to engage in the discourse that is basic to the learning process of the Storypath approach. Students should understand the value of reflective discussion and the importance of collaborative work to deepen their understanding of complex ideas. Consequently, students should be expected to listen carefully and respond thoughtfully and respectfully to one another’s ideas.

## CUSTOMIZE THE UNIT

**Adapt the Unit.** There will likely be many times in this unit when you will want to modify the curriculum to suit your own needs and follow the logical progression of the story. Alternative activities or special arrangements are suggested at various points during the unit to assist you in adapting the unit to meet your unique needs.

Frequently, students will provide an unanticipated twist to the Storypath, or important learning opportunities will arise. The Storypath allows for the accommodation of those special circumstances.

There are times when students will role-play the characters in the story to understand a particular viewpoint. At other times, students will reflect on the events of this unit out of role so that situations can be examined and understood from the students’ own perspectives. These are opportune times to help students connect their own experiences and deepen their understanding of an ancient civilization.

## INVOLVE OTHERS

**Involve Families.** Parents and other family members can serve as excellent resources for you and your students. It is possible that family members have special knowledge about Egypt, having studied the country or traveled there. Parents and other family members can also participate in the concluding celebration. Invite them to play extended family members of the community.

**Invite Experts to Your Classroom.** Consider inviting an Egyptologist or archaeologist to speak or interact through e-mail with your students. These experts can provide a fascinating glimpse into the culture of ancient Egypt and answer your students’ questions as a follow-up to their Storypath experiences.

# EPISODE

## CREATING THE SETTING THE NILE RIVER VALLEY

### INTRODUCING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

page 15

Students listen to and discuss a description of the Nile River Valley environment.

**Materials** Teaching Master 1, *The Nile River Valley*, TH\* p. 49  
World maps or globe

**Grouping** Whole class

**Schedule** Approximately 20 minutes

### CREATING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

page 16

Students create a frieze of the Nile River Valley's physical setting.

**Materials** Portfolio 1, *Frieze Guide*, p. 4  
For the frieze:

- a large bulletin board or wall space, approximately 6' wide and 4' high, covered with tan or brown butcher paper
- various colors of construction and tissue paper, especially earth tones, colored markers, crayons, colored chalk, glue, masking tape, scissors, rulers
- other art material that would add texture and interest to the frieze, such as fabric, wallpaper scraps, aluminum foil, yarn, and cotton balls

**Grouping** Three groups (each one will make a different part of the frieze)

**Schedule** 1–2 hours. The time can be divided over several days, but students will probably want to complete the setting in one session.

### CONCLUDING EPISODE 1

page 17

Students reflect on their experiences, create a word bank, and write with hieroglyphs.

**Materials** Teaching Master 2, *Hieroglyphs*, TH p. 50  
Portfolio 21, *Word Bank*, p. 26  
For the class word bank: markers and 3" x 5" index cards or strips of newsprint  
Paper for writing the hieroglyphs  
Pocket folders or sturdy paper to make folders (one per student)

**Grouping** Small groups for word banks; individuals, pairs, or small groups for the hieroglyph activity

**Schedule** Approximately 1 hour, including time for writing

#### EPISODE OBJECTIVES



- **Geography** *Identify geographic features in the natural environment of Egypt.*
- **Geography** *Consider how the ancient Egyptians used the land and its natural resources.*
- **Social Skills** *Organize, plan, and make decisions while creating a frieze with group members.*
- **Social Skills** *Determine an appropriate course of action with other group members to complete the frieze.*
- **Critical Thinking** *Organize ideas from class discussion in new ways and apply those ideas to the frieze.*
- **Literacy** *Use spoken, written, and visual language to understand the Nile River Valley.*



The country of Egypt is mostly a hot, dry desert. Long ago, the Nile River was the only thing that made it possible for people and animals to live there. The Nile is the longest river in the world, flowing north from deep within Africa. Every year, from July to September, the Nile floods its banks. When the flood waters go down, they leave behind a layer of black silt—rich mud that is ideal for farming.



Beyond the rich land surrounding the Nile are the barren, or dry, sands of the desert.

- 1. Name three key elements of this environment. Explain your thinking.** *(main idea/supporting details)*
- 2. The Nile used to be called “the river of life.” Why would this be a good name for it?** *(making inferences)*



SET 1

SLIDE 2

## Drought

Farmers depended on the annual flooding of the Nile. The flood brought water to irrigate the fields and leave behind rich soil for farming. Sometimes the flood did not come and the area experienced a drought. Without the flood the farmers had less land to farm and much less food. A few times in ancient Egypt, drought caused a famine, a time of starvation.



### Lower Egypt

The land slopes downward into **Lower Egypt**. Here, the Nile divides into a **delta**—small branches that flow into the Mediterranean Sea.

The Egyptians lived on the banks of the Nile, where the land was **fertile**, or ideal for farming.

### Upper Egypt

In the highlands of **Upper Egypt**—located in the south—the Nile passes through a valley.

**3. What challenges did ancient Egyptians face in their environment?**  
(scanning)



## How did ancient Egyptians use the Nile River?

The fertile land around the Nile River was ideal for farming, so the people in Egypt could produce plenty of food. The country was stable and prosperous, or rich. Many people specialized in jobs besides farming.



The **papyrus** that grew along the water was used to make paper, sandals, mats, and boats.

**Irrigation** channels brought water to the fields.

**1. Why was ancient Egypt a “stable and prosperous” society? Explain.**  
*(making inferences, scanning)*

Flax was grown to make linen. Most Egyptian clothes were made from white **linen**, a light fabric that reflects the sun and helps keep the people cool.

## SET 1

### Questions:

1. Name three key elements of this environment described below. Explain your thinking. *(main idea/supporting details)*
2. The Nile used to be called “the river of life.” Why would this be a good name for it? *(making inferences)*
3. What challenges did ancient Egyptians face in their environment? *(scanning)*

#### Slide 1 ◀ What was ancient Egypt like?

The country of Egypt is mostly a hot, dry desert. Long ago, the Nile River was the only thing that made it possible for people and animals to live there. The Nile is the longest river in the world, flowing north from deep within Africa. Every year, from July to September, the Nile floods its banks. When the flood waters go down, they leave behind a layer of black silt—rich mud that is ideal for farming. The ancient Egyptians called their country Kemet (KE-met), which means “black land,” because of the dark soil near the river.

#### Slide 1 ◀



Beyond the rich land surrounding the Nile are the barren, or dry, sands of the desert.

Slide 2

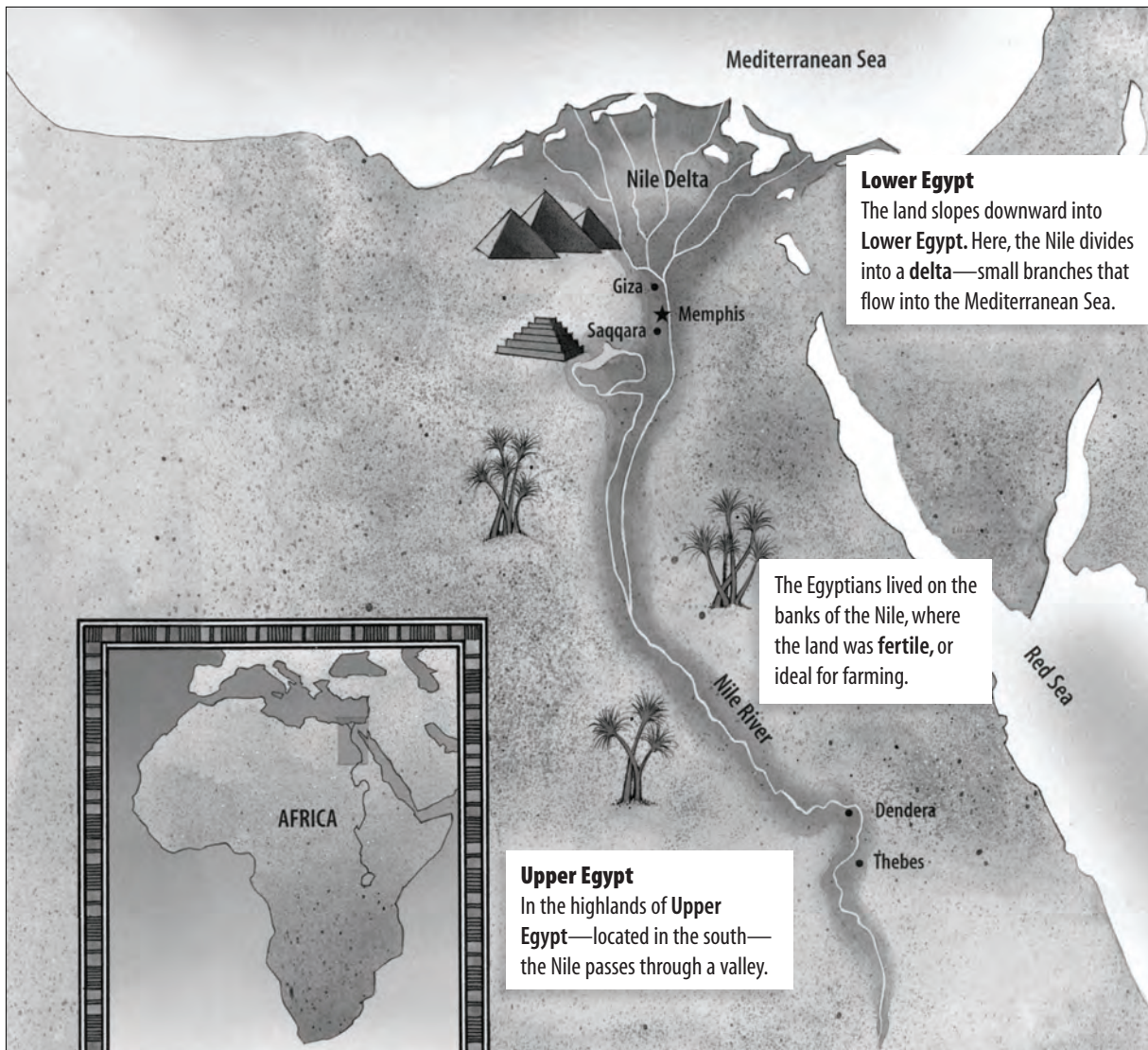


Illustration by Stephanie Pershing

## Drought

Slide 2

Farmers depended on the annual flooding of the Nile. The flood brought water to irrigate the fields and leave behind rich soil for farming. Sometimes the flood did not come and the area experienced a drought. Without the flood the farmers had less land to farm and much less food. A few times in ancient Egypt, drought caused a famine, a time of starvation.

## SET 2

### Questions:

1. Why was ancient Egypt a “stable and prosperous” society? Explain.  
(*making inferences, scanning*)
2. Looking at the illustrations on pages 4 and 5, what natural resources were available to the ancient Egyptians? (*understanding visuals, scanning*)

#### Slides 1, 2

### ◀ How did ancient Egyptians use the Nile River?

The fertile land around the Nile River was ideal for farming, so the people in Egypt could produce plenty of food. The country was stable and prosperous, or rich. Many people specialized in jobs besides farming. Craftspeople, artists, and musicians created things people needed or wanted. Nobles, priests, and army officers made sure that the country ran smoothly and people were safe.

#### Slide 1

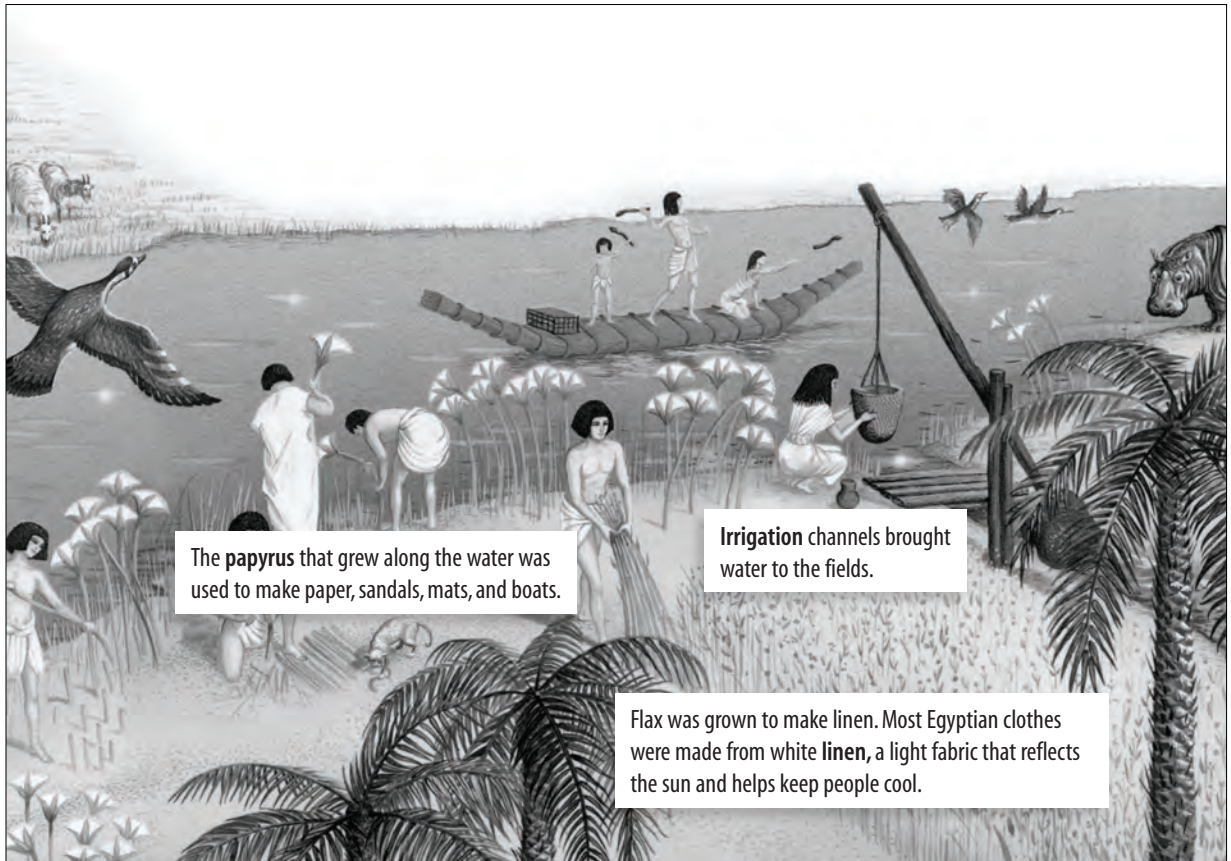


Illustration by Valerie Sokolova

Slide 2

Wheat and barley were used to make bread.  
Farmers used a tool called a sickle to cut the grain.

Crops were measured to find out  
how much tax the farmers owed.

Egyptians used boats to travel up  
and down the Nile.

The river was teeming with wildlife,  
such as fish, birds, hippos, and crocodiles.

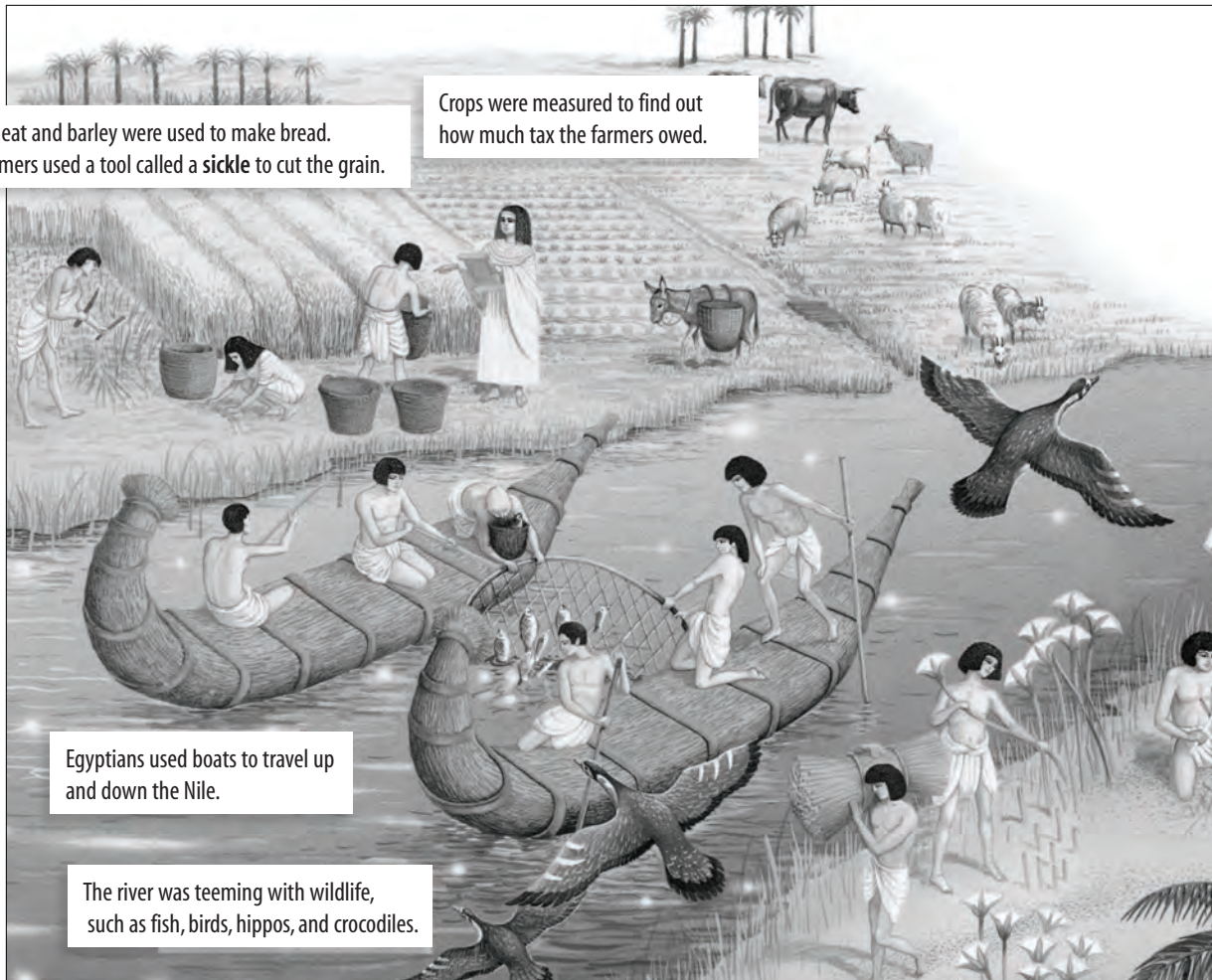


Illustration by Valerie Sokolova

## Irrigation Along the Nile

Irrigation is the process of supplying water to dry areas so that crops can grow. The ancient Egyptians were among the first people to use irrigation for farming. They built ditches and canals that carried water from the Nile River to the farmlands.

This painting from the New Kingdom Period shows a man using a shadoof. A shadoof was a device used in ancient Egypt to lift buckets of water from a canal.



Slide 3

## SET 3

### Questions:

1. Looking at the illustrations on pages 6 and 7, describe some of the differences between poor and rich ancient Egyptians. (*comparing and contrasting*)
2. How were the lives of men and women or boys and girls different? (*comparing and contrasting*)

#### Slide 1 ◀ **What was it like to grow up in ancient Egypt?**

If you lived in ancient Egypt, the kind of life you would have would be decided when you were born. Your way of life would depend on whether you were a boy or a girl and whether you were rich or poor.

#### Slide 2 ◀

Fathers teach young boys how to grow crops.

**Imagine you are born a peasant:** Your mother takes care of the house and children while your father farms. You pay part of the crops as taxes. You do not know how to read or write. You live in an extended family, including grandparents, or aunts and uncles. If you are a man, you might help build pyramids or temples during the flood season.

Mothers teach young girls homemaking skills.

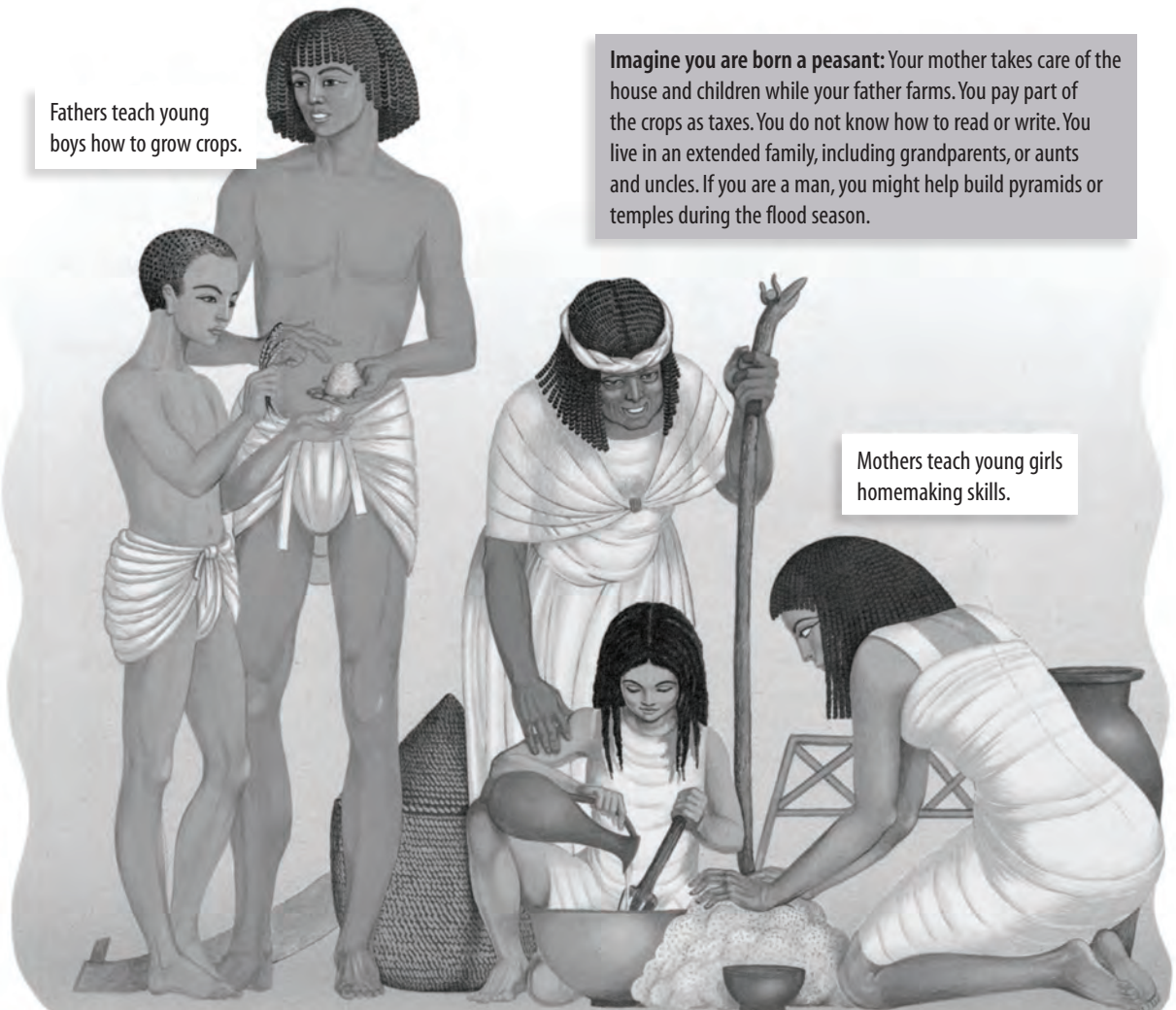


Illustration by Valeria Sokolova