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opening extract from

Insiders Alive: Ancient Egypt

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Welcome to Ancient Egypt

Egypt is a hot, dry land. The Nile, the world's longest river, flows northwards through the whole of the country. Thousands of years ago, people lived along the banks of the river in a civilisation that we now know as ancient Egypt. Every year, the Nile flooded, and water and mud spread over its banks. This mud became soil, where the ancient Egyptians could grow wheat and other crops for food. Away from the river, cemeteries and tombs for the dead were built. Gradually, over many hundreds of years, great cities grew up near the Nile.



Boats on the Nile

For ancient Egyptians, the Nile was crucial for getting around. Boats carried passengers and goods from one end of the country to the other. People rowed these boats with oars, and sailors raised a large sail when the wind blew.



Where on earth?

Egypt is at the far north-east corner of the continent of Africa.

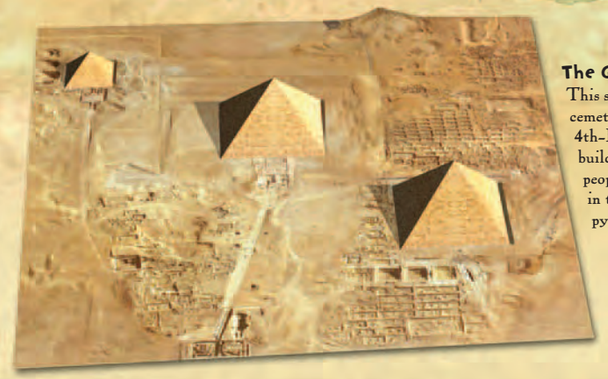
Rhyming riddle

Can you suggest a rhyming word to complete this line?

When the Nile was in flood
it brought lots of _____.



Answer: mud



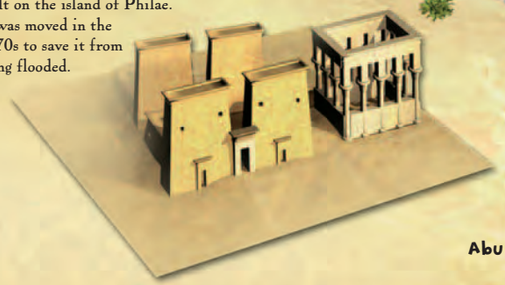
The Giza pyramids
This site was a desert cemetery used by 4th-Dynasty pyramid builders. Many rich people were buried in the tombs and pyramids here.



Dendera temple
Built to honour the goddess Hathor, this temple was built towards the end of the ancient Egyptian empire.

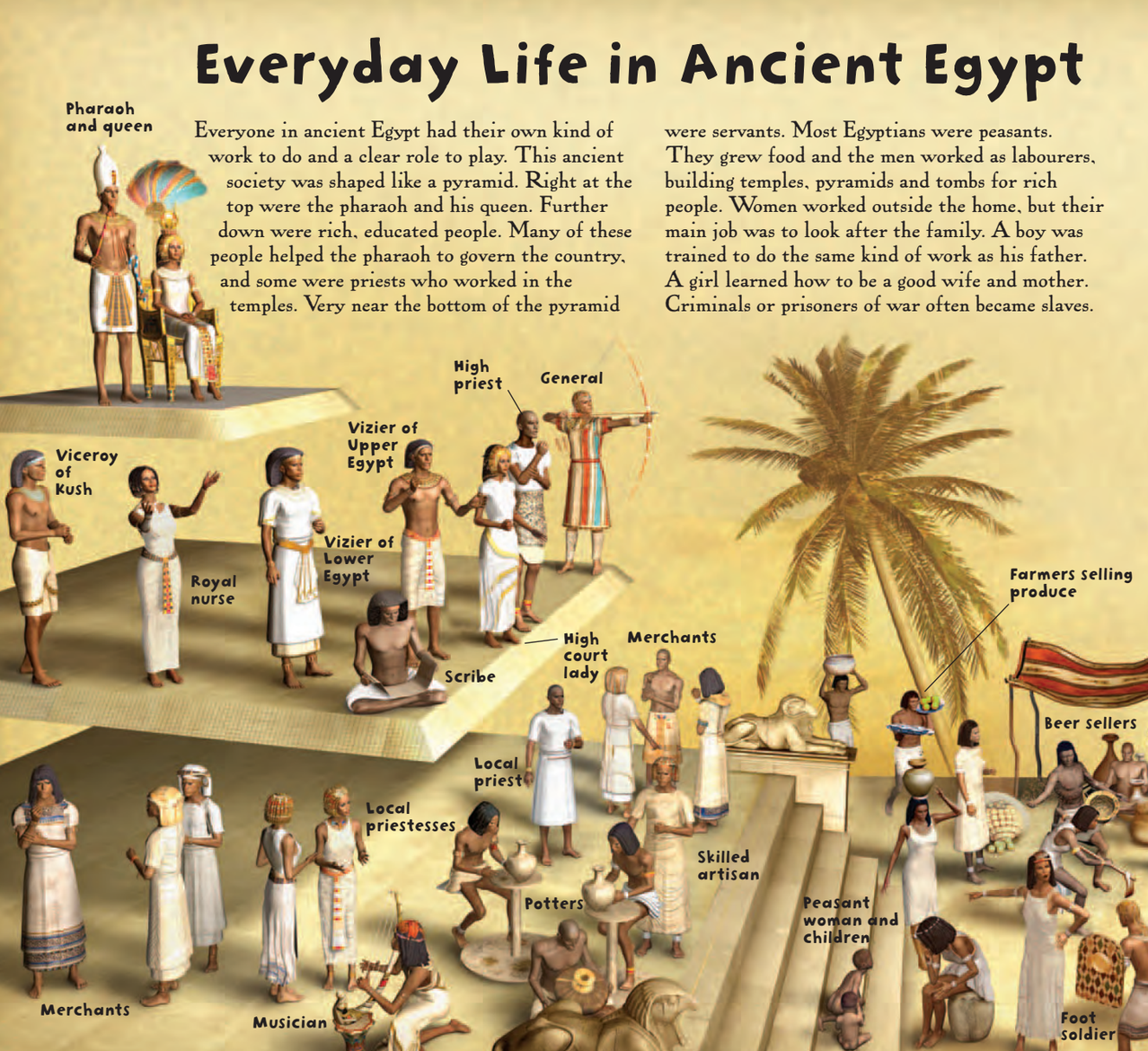
Abu Simbel
There are two grand temples at Abu Simbel. These were built by King Ramesses II.

Temple of Isis
The Temple of Isis was first built on the island of Philae. It was moved in the 1970s to save it from being flooded.



Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt

Everyone in ancient Egypt had their own kind of work to do and a clear role to play. This ancient society was shaped like a pyramid. Right at the top were the pharaoh and his queen. Further down were rich, educated people. Many of these people helped the pharaoh to govern the country, and some were priests who worked in the temples. Very near the bottom of the pyramid were servants. Most Egyptians were peasants. They grew food and the men worked as labourers, building temples, pyramids and tombs for rich people. Women worked outside the home, but their main job was to look after the family. A boy was trained to do the same kind of work as his father. A girl learned how to be a good wife and mother. Criminals or prisoners of war often became slaves.



The farming seasons

Akhet
At this time, the Nile flooded and water covered its banks.

Early Peret
This was the ancient Egyptians' winter when crops were planted.

Late Peret
Late Peret was the season at the end of winter when there was a bountiful harvest.

A nobleman's villa

While the poorer members of society lived in small houses, wealthy, educated Egyptians built luxurious villas like the one below. This villa would probably have been owned by a nobleman.



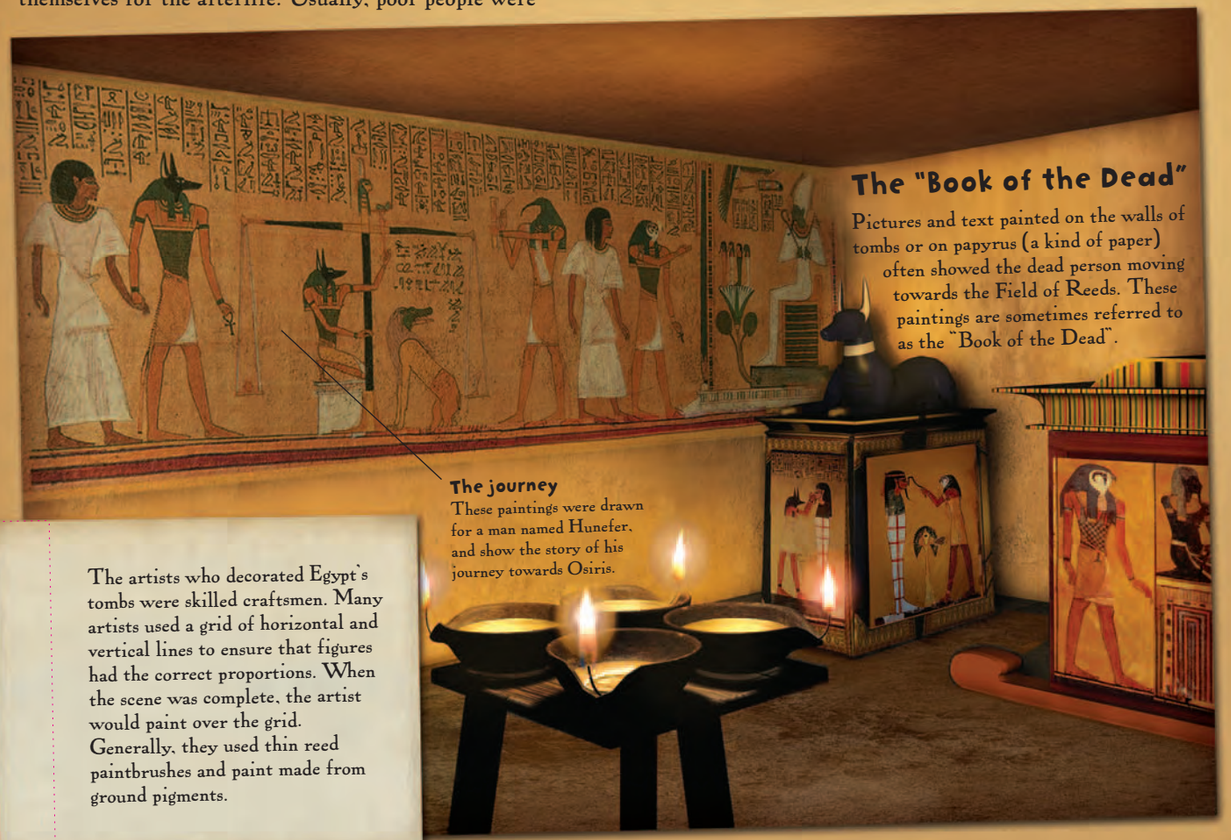
Outside the villa there would have been peaceful, lush gardens and a pool teeming with fish.

From the pharaoh to the slave

The pharaoh was considered to be the most important person in ancient Egypt. Beneath him, in order of importance and wealth, came the queen and her mother; the royal children; the upper middle classes, many of whom were noblemen; the skilled middle classes; and finally, the peasants and slaves.

Journey to the Afterlife

The afterlife, or the "Field of Reeds", was a place where ancient Egyptians believed they would go after death. At first, they thought only the pharaoh could go there to live with Osiris and the other gods. Later on, these views changed, and people from all parts of society prepared themselves for the afterlife. Usually, poor people were buried in the desert, alongside food, tools and simple jewellery, which they believed could be used in the afterlife. Rich people were buried in tombs with treasures and other objects that they could enjoy in the afterlife. The tombs of many pharaohs were inside huge pyramids.



The "Book of the Dead"

Pictures and text painted on the walls of tombs or on papyrus (a kind of paper) often showed the dead person moving towards the Field of Reeds. These paintings are sometimes referred to as the "Book of the Dead".

The journey
These paintings were drawn for a man named Hunefer, and show the story of his journey towards Osiris.

The artists who decorated Egypt's tombs were skilled craftsmen. Many artists used a grid of horizontal and vertical lines to ensure that figures had the correct proportions. When the scene was complete, the artist would paint over the grid. Generally, they used thin reed paintbrushes and paint made from ground pigments.

The making of a mummy

Ancient Egyptians believed that if a person's body did not rot away, his or her spirit could live forever. So that they could be preserved, the bodies of rich people were often mummified. Their inside parts were taken out, their bodies were dried and finally, they were wrapped in linen sheets and placed in coffins.



1. Organ preservation
The intestines, liver, stomach and lungs were removed. These organs were covered in salt to dry them out, then returned to the body or preserved in canopic jars like the ones below.

2. Brainless
Considered to be useless, the brain was removed through the nose and thrown away.

3. Wrapping begins
The head was the first part to be wrapped.

4. What remains?
The heart was believed to be the centre of intelligence, so it was left in the body.

5. Jewellery and charms
Inscribed with spells, jewellery and charms were inserted into the linen wrappings.

6. Finishing touches
The body was wrapped in a linen sheet. Lastly, it was placed in a coffin that protected the body and held the spirit.





Canopic jars

Animal mummies

Some of Egypt's mummies were not human—they were animal! These were not pets, but offerings to the gods. One royal princess made an exception to this rule, sharing a coffin with her mummified pet baboon.



Crocodile and cat mummies

The Valley of the Kings

Many of ancient Egypt's first pharaohs were buried in pyramids. This changed during the New Kingdom, which lasted from 1550 BC to 1070 BC. At this time, the pharaohs lived in Thebes—a city that we now call Luxor. When they died, they were buried in secret tombs, deep in the desert, across the river in a dry valley of southern Egypt. We call this place the Valley of the Kings. The tomb entrances were cut high up into the sides of cliffs. Eventually, grave robbers discovered them and managed to get in and plunder most of the tombs. Some of ancient Egypt's most famous pharaohs were buried in the Valley of the Kings. They include Tutankhamen, Hatshepsut and Ramesses II.



The Valley of the Kings



Locating the valley
The Valley of the Kings is a remote, dry river valley on the west bank of the Nile in southern Egypt.

The tomb of Seti I

The tomb of the 19th-Dynasty king Seti I was wonderfully decorated, and is the longest and deepest of the royal tombs.



Entrance
The tomb was fitted with a wooden door that could be sealed.

Long passageway
This wall was decorated with scenes of the king standing with the sun god Re.

Sarcophagus

Tomb raiders
Seti I's tomb was robbed in ancient times. Thieves took many treasures but left behind the king's sarcophagus.

Stepped passageway
This set of stairs was decorated with religious texts.

The well
This well was designed to protect the tomb from floodwater. It was also a snare for thieves.

Tutankhamen's tomb

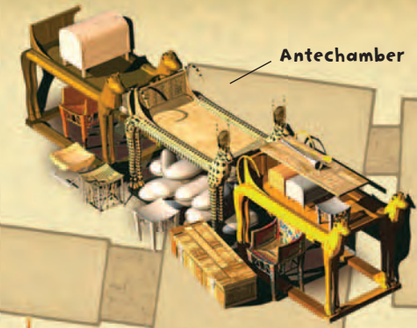
The pharaoh Tutankhamen died in 1323 BC. He was only about 19 years old and had been pharaoh for 11 years. No royal tomb had yet been built for him, so he was buried in a small tomb that was being built for a rich nobleman.

Entrance

Brain-teaser
Can you put these events in the correct order?

1. Robbers found the tombs in the Valley of the Kings.
2. Howard Carter became interested in ancient Egypt.
3. Robbers stole treasures from the tombs in the Valley of the Kings.
4. Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamen.
5. Pharaohs' tombs were built in the Valley of the Kings.
6. Pharaohs began to live in Thebes.

Answer: 6,5,1,3,2,4



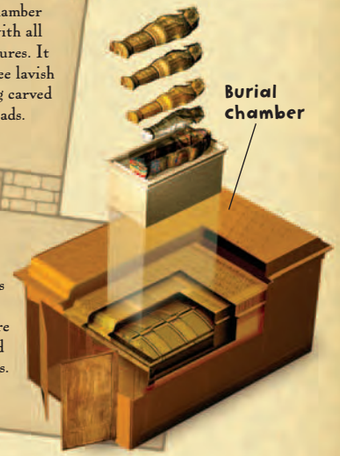
Antechamber

Annex
Like the antechamber, the annex was crowded with objects such as chairs and games.

This antechamber was filled with all sorts of treasures. It contained three lavish beds featuring carved animal heads.



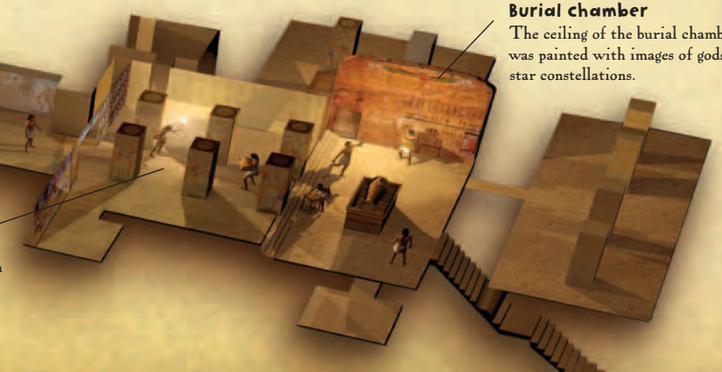
Treasury
The treasury held the most precious objects, such as the canopic chest that contained Tutankhamen's internal organs.



Burial chamber
Four nested shrines filled the burial chamber. They were covered in gold and engraved with spells.

Pillared hall
This hall, held up by strong pillars, was decorated with religious texts.

Antechamber
This hall was decorated with images of the king and the gods of ancient Egypt.



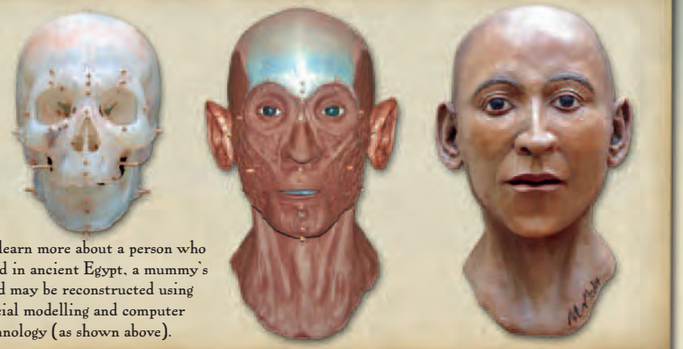
Burial chamber
The ceiling of the burial chamber was painted with images of gods and star constellations.

Discovering Ancient Egypt

In 30 BC, Roman armies invaded Egypt and it became part of the Roman Empire. More than 400 years later in AD 391, Egypt became a Christian country. The old temples were closed down and people no longer made mummies. In AD 640, Arab armies invaded Egypt. For more than 1,000 years after this, people in most parts of the world forgot all about ancient Egyptian society. By this time, almost all of the ancient Egyptian towns and buildings were buried under desert sands. Then, in 1798, French armies led by Napoléon Bonaparte invaded Egypt, and the world began to rediscover this amazing ancient society.

Egyptology today

We now know a lot about ancient Egypt, but new finds are still being made beneath the desert sands, and even below the sea near Egypt's coast. Scientists use modern methods to study these artefacts. They can even work on mummies to find out whether they were male or female, how old they were and when they died.



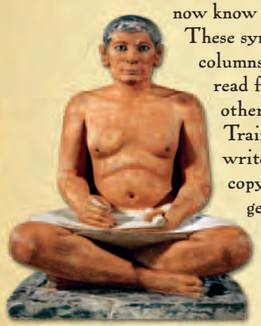
To learn more about a person who lived in ancient Egypt, a mummy's head may be reconstructed using special modelling and computer technology (as shown above).

Foreign excavation, 1816
Soon after Napoléon's invasion, archaeologists began digging in the sands. In 1816, Giovanni Battista Belzoni discovered part of a huge statue of King Ramesses II.

Heavy work
Belzoni employed workmen to drag the head of the giant statue of Ramesses II from Luxor to the banks of the Nile.

The art of writing

In about 3100 BC, elaborate symbols began to appear on tombs. These markings recorded offerings made to the dead, and were the first signs of what we now know as hieroglyphic writing. These symbols were arranged in columns or rows—some could be read from left to right and others from right to left. Trainee scribes learned to write in hieroglyphs by copying letters, stories and general texts, over and over again. The first fictional stories were written in hieroglyphs during the Middle Kingdom.



A scribe at work

A	Vulture / Arm		I	Reed		Q	Hillside		Y	Double reed	
B	Foot		J	Snake		R	Mouth		Z	No "Z"	
C	No "C"		K	Basket		S	Fold of cloth / Door bolt		CH	Ropes	
D	Hand		L	Lion		T	Loaf		KH	Placenta	
E	Reed		M	Owl		U	Quail chick		SH	Lake	
F	Horned cobra		N	Water		V	Horned cobra				
G	Pot stand		O	Lasso		W	Quail chick / Rope coil				
H	Twisted flax / Reed hut		P	Stool		X	No "X"				

The hieroglyphic "alphabet"

You can see from the table that the hieroglyphic script used shapes and pictures for letters. Each picture or shape had its own meaning, and also represented a sound.