

**Week 2 Parent Notes:**

This week, we're reading "[Egyptian Social Structure](#)" by USHistory.org.

In "Egyptian Social Structure," the social structure of ancient Egyptian civilization is explored: from the gods and the godlike pharaoh on top to peasants and slaves on the bottom.

As we read, we will be discussing the themes of [Identity](#) and [Justice, Freedom & Equality](#) as they relate to the text. We are trying to answer these big questions :

"What is fair?" and "Can you change your identity?"

Ways to support your child:

- Ask your child about this informational text at home:
  - What was "[Egyptian Social Structure](#)" About
  - What did you learn about? About [Justice, Freedom & Equality](#)?
- Watch [Nefertiti: Fast Facts](#) at home with your child.

6<sup>th</sup> Grade World History Distance Learning Assignment  
Week 2

**“Egyptian Social Structure”**

**Before Reading**

**Day 1, Activity 1: Journal Response**

What does it mean to be fair?

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**Day 1, Activity 2: Vocabulary in Context**

Step 1: Review the vocabulary word, context sentence, photograph, and definition.

Step 2: Describe how the context sentence and photograph give hints toward the meaning of the word. Be specific; you must include either specific words from the context sentence or details from the photograph in your answer.

1. **famine** (noun) extreme lack of food



The Egyptian gods could make the Nile overflow, cause **famine**, or even bring death.

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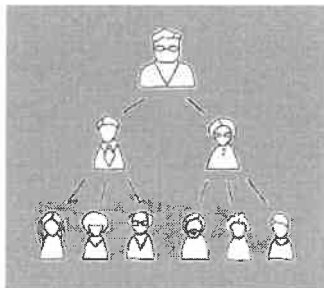
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2. **elevate** (verb) to raise (in height, status, or esteem)



The Egyptians also **elevated** some human beings to gods.

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3. **quell** (verb) to put an end to something, typically by force.



Soldiers fought in wars or **quelled** domestic uprisings.

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**During Reading: Read the information text “Egyptian Social Structure”**

**Day 2**

As you read, underline or highlight the main point in each paragraph

Take notes in the margins that explain the social structure of ancient Egypt.

**Day 3**

**After Reading:** Using your annotations, complete the Text Dependent Questions that are located in your packet.

**Day 4**

**After Reading:** Using your annotations, complete Discussion Questions 1-3 that are located in your packet.

**Day 5**

“Egyptian Social Structure”

On the back of one of the pages in the packet, draw a diagram of what the social structure of ancient Egypt was like based on your reading of the text. Add color if you’d like; just remember to keep it clean, not obscene or mean. 😊

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Egyptian Social Structure

By USHistory.org  
2016

*Ancient Egypt was composed of several social classes, ranging from lives lived in slavery to positions of absolute power. The following text explores the social structure and government of this ancient civilization. As you read, take notes on this social structure of ancient Egypt; draw a diagram of what it was like based on your reading of the text.*

- [1] Egyptian society was structured like a pyramid. At the top were the gods, such as Ra, Osiris, and Isis.<sup>1</sup> Egyptians believed that the gods controlled the universe. Therefore, it was important to keep them happy. They could make the Nile<sup>2</sup> overflow, cause famine,<sup>3</sup> or even bring death.

The Egyptians also elevated<sup>4</sup> some human beings to gods. Their leaders, called pharaohs, were believed to be gods in human form. They had absolute power over their subjects. After pharaohs died, huge stone pyramids were built as their tombs. Pharaohs were buried in chambers within the pyramids.



*"Beautifully decorated columns in Medinet Habu Temple, Luxor, Egypt??????" by inchiki tour is licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

Because the people of Egypt believed that their pharaohs were gods, they entrusted their rulers with many responsibilities. Protection was at the top of the list. The pharaoh directed the army in case of a foreign threat or an internal conflict. All laws were enacted<sup>5</sup> at the discretion<sup>6</sup> of the pharaoh. Each farmer paid taxes in the form of grains, which were stored in the pharaoh's warehouses. This grain was used to feed the people in the event of a famine.

### The Chain of Command

No single person could manage all these duties without assistance. The pharaoh appointed a chief minister called a vizier<sup>7</sup> as a supervisor. The vizier ensured that taxes were collected.

1. Ra was the sun god of ancient Egyptian myth and religion, and was often worshipped as the Creator god. Osiris was the god of resurrection and the dead, as well as ruler of the underworld. Isis, the sister and wife of Osiris, was the goddess of women, fertility, motherhood, and children, as well as protector of the dead.
2. The Nile River, located in northeastern Africa, was an essential part of ancient Egyptian civilization, which mainly formed around this river that provided a source of water, transportation, trade, and farming land.
3. **Famine (noun):** extreme lack of food
4. **Elevate (verb):** to raise (in height, status, or esteem)
5. **Enact (verb):** to make or declare a law
6. **Discretion (noun):** the freedom or duty to decide what should be done in a particular situation

- [5] Working with the vizier were scribes who kept government records. These high-level employees had mastered a rare skill in ancient Egypt — they could read and write.

## Noble Aims

Right below the pharaoh in status were powerful nobles and priests. Only nobles could hold government posts; in these positions they profited from tributes<sup>8</sup> paid to the pharaoh. Priests were responsible for pleasing the gods.

Nobles enjoyed great status and also grew wealthy from donations to the gods. All Egyptians—from pharaohs to farmers—gave gifts to the gods.

## Soldier On

Soldiers fought in wars or quelled<sup>9</sup> domestic<sup>10</sup> uprisings. During long periods of peace, soldiers also supervised the peasants, farmers, and slaves who were involved in building such structures as pyramids and palaces.

Skilled workers such as physicians and craftsmen/women made up the middle class. Craftsmen made and sold jewelry, pottery, papyrus<sup>11</sup> products, tools, and other useful things.

- [10] Naturally, there were people needed to buy goods from artisans and traders. These were the merchants<sup>12</sup> and storekeepers who sold these goods to the public.

## The Bottom of the Heap

At the bottom of the social structure were slaves and farmers. Slavery became the fate of those captured as prisoners of war. In addition to being forced to work on building projects, slaves toiled at the discretion of the pharaoh or nobles.

Farmers tended the fields, raised animals, kept canals<sup>13</sup> and reservoirs<sup>14</sup> in good order, worked in the stone quarries,<sup>15</sup> and built the royal monuments. Farmers paid taxes that could amount to as much as 60% of their yearly harvest—that's a lot of hay!

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7. A vizier was the highest official below the pharaoh. Their responsibilities included supervising the country, gathering information from lower supervisors, managing taxes, recording trade, and advising the pharaoh.
  8. A tribute is an official gift made periodically to a state or ruler, often to show gratitude or as payment for protection/service.
  9. **Quell (verb):** to put an end to something, typically by force
  10. **Domestic (adjective):** existing or occurring inside a particular country, as opposed to outside of it
  11. Papyrus was a material prepared in ancient Egypt that was used in sheets for writing and painting on. It was also used in making rope, sandals, and boats.
  12. **Merchant (noun):** a person who sells or trades goods
  13. A canal is an artificial waterway made to allow the passage of boats and for the irrigation of land.
  14. A reservoir is a large natural or manmade lake used as a source of water supply.
  15. A quarry is a place, typically a deep pit, from which stone and other materials are mined.

Social mobility<sup>16</sup> was not impossible. A small number of peasants and farmers moved up the economic ladder. Families saved money to send their sons to village schools to learn trades.<sup>17</sup> These schools were run by priests or by artisans.<sup>18</sup> Boys who learned to read and write could become scribes, then go on to gain employment in the government. It was possible for a boy born on a farm to work his way up into the higher ranks of the government. Bureaucracy<sup>19</sup> proved lucrative.<sup>20</sup>

*Egyptian Social Structure by USHistory.org is licensed under CC BY 4.0.*

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16. "Social mobility" is a term used to describe the possibility for people to change their class or social status within society during their lifetime.
  17. **Trade (noun):** a skilled job, typically one that requires manual skills and special training
  18. **Artisan (noun):** a worker in a skilled trade, especially one that involves making things by hand
  19. **Bureaucracy (noun):** a system of government in which most of the important decisions are made by state officials rather than elected representatives; pertaining to the administration of a government
  20. **Lucrative (adjective):** producing a great deal of profit; rewarding, successful

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central idea of the text? [RI.2]
  - A. Being a soldier was only a temporary social status in times of conflict or war.
  - B. The middle class was the largest population group in ancient Egyptian civilization and thus held the most influence.
  - C. The social structure of Egypt resembled its famous stone pyramids: smaller, more valued classes at the top and the larger, less valued classes at the base.
  - D. There was almost no way to change one's class; people, especially slaves, were locked in their status for life.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "Egyptian society was structured like a pyramid." (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "During long periods of peace, soldiers also supervised the peasants, farmers, and slaves who were involved in building such structures as pyramids and palaces." (Paragraph 8)
  - C. "Skilled workers such as physicians and craftsmen/women made up the middle class." (Paragraph 9)
  - D. "Slavery became the fate of those captured as prisoners of war." (Paragraph 11)
  
3. PART A: What does the word "toil" most likely mean as used in paragraph 11? [RI.4]
  - A. To entertain
  - B. To worship strongly
  - C. To work extremely hard
  - D. To become exhausted
  
4. PART B: Which of the following phrases best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "At the bottom of the social structure" (Paragraph 11)
  - B. "captured as prisoners of war" (Paragraph 11)
  - C. "being forced to work on building projects" (Paragraph 11)
  - D. "at the discretion of the pharaoh or nobles" (Paragraph 11)

5. In complete sentences, summarize the structure of the ancient Egyptian system [RI.3] [RI.2] of government. How were different social classes involved in this government? Cite evidence from the text.

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