





A Day in the Life of an Egyptian

Overview:


Students will learn about the daily lives of ancient Egyptians, the structure of their social hierarchy, and how life varied dramatically based on a person's social class.

Objectives:











At the end of the lesson students will be able to:

-  List the different social classes in ancient Egypt and describe their roles in society.
-  Participate in a role play that illustrates what daily life was like in ancient Egypt and how life was different for each social class.

Preparation:

-  Using the Teacher Supplement: "Egyptian Social Classes," print and cut up slips of paper listing each Egyptian social class.










Vocabulary:

- | | |
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|  social class |  artisans |
|  hierarchy |  peasants |
|  Pharaoh |  social mobility |
|  Vizier |  government official |
|  priests | |
|  scribes | |



Learning Activities:

- I. Warm-Up (10 min.)
 - A. Ask students to define the term *social class*: a group in a society based on social and economic status (such as income level).


Materials:

-  Teacher Supplement: "Egyptian Social Classes"
-  Teacher Supplement: "Social Hierarchy Pyramid"
-  Scotch tape
-  An umbrella
-  Glasses to serve water
-  Garden beds that need weeding
-  Paper and colored pencils for the artisans and scribes
-  A statue, perfume, flowers, and serving tray for the priests to perform a ritual
-  Optional: Costumes for the students (e.g., curtains or pieces of fabric that the pharaoh and his/her servants can wear, sheets torn into strips for mummification simulation)

On the Board:

-  An unlabeled social hierarchy pyramid with seven rows
-  Student Reflection Questions

Suggested Snack:

-  An Egyptian peasant's meal: whole wheat pita bread, butter, cucumber and onion slices, and smoked salmon.

- B. Ask students what factors they think determine a person's social class, the ability to move from one class to another, and what their opinions are about societies that sort people by social class.
- In Egypt, *social mobility* 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. These schools were run by priests or artisans. Boys who learned to read and write could become scribes and 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.
- C. Tell students that social classes have been part of society since ancient times, and in Egypt there were very specific classes of people. Tell students they might be surprised to discover that there are similarities between the ancient Egyptian class system and the way people end up in different social classes today.
2. Presentation: Egypt's Social Hierarchy (20 min.)
- A. Show students the unlabeled social hierarchy pyramid on the board. Explain that the small section on top is made up of the smallest, highest class. The section on the bottom is made up of the largest, lowest class.
- B. Define *hierarchy*: an arrangement of items (objects, names, values, people, etc.) in which the items are represented as being "above," "below," or "at the same level as" one another. A social hierarchy is a representation of how different social classes stand in relation to each another.
- C. Have students volunteer to take a card one at a time. Each card will have the name of a social class and a description of that class written on it. Have students read the cards aloud to the class.
- *Pharaoh*: the highest leader, like a God.
 - *Government Officials*: This was the highest social class after the pharaoh. It included the Vizier (the highest ranking official after the pharaoh who made sure that taxes were collected), the Chief Treasurer and the General of the Armies. They ate lavish meals with meat, goat, sheep, dates, figs, melons, many different kinds of bread, butter, cheese, and wine.
 - *Priests*: Priests were different from religious officials today. They were responsible for pleasing the gods, not for serving as spiritual advisors.
 - *Soldiers*: Soldiers fought in wars or quelled domestic uprisings. During long periods of peace, soldiers also supervised the peasants, farmers, and slaves who built such structures as pyramids and palaces.
 - *Scribes*: A respected class. They were almost always male and were among the few people who knew how to read and write. They were responsible for recording information. Their job included writing letters for fellow villagers who couldn't write, recording the amount of crops harvested,

calculating the amount of food needed to feed various workers and keeping accounts and ordering supplies for temples and the Egyptian army.

- *Artisans*: Craftspersons made up the middle class. They made and sold jewelry, pottery, papyrus products, tools, and other useful things.
 - *Peasants/Farmers/Slaves*: This was the largest and lowest social class. 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 and reservoirs in working order, worked in the stone quarries, and built the royal monuments. Farmers paid taxes that could be as high as 60 percent of their yearly harvest. They ate bread, beer, vegetables and pickled and salted fish.
3. Garden Activity: A Day in the Life an Egyptian Role Play (10 min.)
 - A. Bring students into the garden and tell them they will create a role-play based on a day in the life of the ancient Egyptians.
 - B. Give each student a role/task card:
 - One pharaoh and several government officials, who will get to sit under the shade of an umbrella held by a servant.
 - Several priests, who should perform a ritual, like cleaning and anointing a statue and serving the gods an offering.
 - Several soldiers, who should monitor the slaves and farmers and make sure they are doing their jobs.
 - Several artisans, who should sit and draw a picture of the garden. Or, they can sing and dance for the pharaoh and government officials.
 - Several scribes, who should sit and write and take notes about what the other citizens are doing.
 - Several servants, one to hold an umbrella over the pharaoh and several to serve water to the government officials, artisans, and scribes.
 - Several peasants/slaves, who should engage in a garden task such as planting or harvesting food in the garden beds.
 - C. Bring students back together in the classroom, and ask them what they thought of the role play and what it was like to play their assigned part.
 4. Snack: Serve a typical Egyptian peasant's meal. (5 min.)
 5. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

Student Reflection Questions:

1. If you could be a member of any Egyptian social class, except the pharaoh, which would you choose and why?
2. Do you think you would enjoy living off a peasant's diet?
3. Are diets different for people of different incomes or classes today? If so, why?
4. Was every job available to all people (like women and people of different social classes)?

Assessment Questions:

1. What was the highest social class in Ancient Egypt?
 - A. Artisan
 - B. Priest
 - C. Pharaoh/Government Officials
 - D. Peasants
2. What was the job of scribes in Ancient Egypt?
 - A. To record important events and daily happenings
 - B. To grow food
 - C. To act as servants to the upper classes
 - D. To care for the needs of the gods/goddesses

Standards:

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Acknowledgements:

“Social Hierarchy Pyramid of Ancient Egypt.” History on the Net.
www.historyonthenet.com



Egyptian Social Classes

Pharaoh

The Pharaoh was considered to be like a God in Ancient Egyptian society.

Government Officials

This was the highest class after pharaoh. It included the vizier (the highest ranking official after the pharaoh who made sure that taxes were collected), the Chief Treasurer and the General of the Armies). They ate lavish meals with meat, goat, sheep, dates, figs, melons, 15 kinds of bread, butter, cheese, and wine.

Priests

Priests were different from religious officials today. They were responsible for pleasing the gods, not for serving as spiritual advisors.

Artisans

Craftspersons made up the middle class. They made and sold jewelry, pottery, papyrus products, tools, and other useful things.

Soldiers

Soldiers fought in wars or quelled domestic 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.

Scribes

Scribes were a highly respected class. They were almost always male and were some of the few people who learned to read and write. They were responsible for recording information. Their job included writing letters for fellow villagers who couldn't write, recording the amount of crops harvested, calculating the amount of food needed to feed the tomb workers and keeping accounts and ordering supplies for temples and the Egyptian army.

Peasants/Farmers/Slaves

This was largest, but lowest social class. 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 and reservoirs in good order, worked in the stone quarries, and built the royal monuments. Farmers paid taxes that could be as much as 60 percent of their yearly harvest. They ate bread, beer, vegetables and pickled and salted fish.

