



Name: _____ Class: _____

Egypt's Pyramids

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Today, the Pyramids of Giza stand as the last remaining of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. But what did the pyramids mean to the ancient Egyptians who constructed them? The following text explores what these amazing landmarks meant to their builders, and why they put such effort into creating these enormous structures in a period when they had little more to rely on than human labor and their own ingenuity. As you read, identify the reasons why the pyramids were built.

- [1] For centuries, they were the tallest structures on the planet. The Pyramids of Giza,¹ built over 4,000 years ago, still stand atop an otherwise flat, sandy landscape.

One of the Seven Wonders of the World, the pyramids defy 21st-century humans to explain their greatest secrets. How could a civilization that lacked bulldozers, forklifts, and trucks build such massive² structures? Why would anyone have spent the time and energy to attempt such a task? What treasures were placed inside these monuments?³



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Only a powerful pharaoh⁴ could marshal⁵ the necessary human resources to build giant pyramids. During the flood seasons, farmers became builders. Huge stone blocks averaging over two tons⁶ in weight were mined in quarries⁷ and transported to the pyramid site.

Egyptologists⁸ theorize that the workers used either rollers⁹ or slippery clay to drag the blocks from the quarries to their eventual placement on the pyramid. Construction of the larger pyramids took decades.

1. Also known as the Great Pyramids. Giza is located on the west bank of the Nile and is the third-largest city in modern Egypt.
2. **Massive (adjective):** large and heavy or solid
3. **Monument (noun):** a statue, building, or other structure built to celebrate a famous or notable person or event
4. The pharaoh was the absolute ruler of ancient ruler, often associated with the gods or considered to be godlike.
5. **Marshal (verb):** to arrange or assemble
6. A ton weighs 2000 pounds.
7. **Quarry (noun):** a place, typically a large, deep pit, from which stone or other materials are mined
8. An Egyptologist is an archaeologist, historian, linguist, or art historian who specializes in the study of ancient Egypt.
9. A roller is a cylinder or group of cylinders that rotates around a central axis and it was used to move things.

Why Pyramids?

- [5] Pyramids were built for religious purposes. The Egyptians were one of the first civilizations to believe in an afterlife. They believed that a second self called the *ka*¹⁰ lived within every human being. When the physical body expired, the *ka* enjoyed eternal¹¹ life. Those fortunate¹² enough to pass the test of Osiris¹³ wanted to be comfortable in their lives beyond earth. The Great Pyramids were simply grand tombs of powerful pharaohs.

Three pyramids were built at Giza, and many smaller pyramids were constructed around the Nile Valley. The tallest of the Great Pyramids reaches nearly 500 feet into the sky and spans an area greater than 13 acres. The Great Sphinx was sculpted nearby to stand watch over the pyramids. It stands 65 feet tall and consists of a human head atop the body of a lion.

Many believe that the Sphinx was a portrait of King Chefren (Khafret),¹⁴ who was placed in the middle Pyramid. The lion symbolized immortality.

You Can Take It with You

Egyptians who ranked high in status often wanted to take their most prized possessions with them in death, so the *ka* could enjoy them in its next life. Gold, silver, and bronze artifacts¹⁵ were loaded into the interiors of the great tombs. Fine linens and artwork adorned the secret chambers.

In the early days, dead nobles were often interned¹⁶ with their living slaves and animals. Because this practice eventually proved too costly, artists instead depicted scenes of human activity on the inside walls. Some pyramids were even equipped with a rest room for the pharaoh.

- [10] Great precautions were taken to protect the tombs from looters.¹⁷ Egyptians believed that a defiler¹⁸ of a pharaoh's resting place would be cursed for eternity.¹⁹ The entrance to the inner chambers was carefully hidden. The pharaoh's mummy was placed in a huge coffin called a sarcophagus,²⁰ which was made of the hardest known stone blocks. But despite such warnings and precautions, tombs were raided over the years by grave robbers.

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10. The *ka* was one of the five parts of the soul, according to the ancient Egyptians. It was the vital spark that distinguishes between a living and a dead person.
 11. **Eternal (adjective):** lasting or existing forever; without end or beginning
 12. **Fortunate (adjective):** lucky
 13. Osiris was the brother and husband of Isis, and the god of resurrection and the dead, as well as ruler of the underworld. The test was daunting; the dead spirit would have their heart weighed against a feather, and if it was deemed lighter than the feather, the spirit could move on to a peaceful afterlife. Ma'at, the goddess of justice, is typically depicted as weighing the heart, but the entire series of trials is referred to as the Judgement of Osiris.
 14. King Chefren (Khafret) was an ancient Egyptian of 4th dynasty during the Old Kingdom. There isn't much known about him.
 15. **Artifact (noun):** an object made by a human being, typically an item of cultural or historical interest
 16. **Intern (verb):** to confine (someone)
 17. **Looter (noun):** a person that steals by force
 18. A "defiler" refers to someone who spoils or ruins something, especially something sacred.
 19. **Eternity (noun):** a state that comes after death and never ends
 20. A "sarcophagus" refers to a stone coffin typically decorated with a sculpture, painting, and or inscription.

The pyramids, however, have stood the test of time. Although their outer limestone layers have long since been stripped or passed into dust, the pyramids still stand. About 80 dot the horizons of modern Egypt. They remain as time capsules cast forward by a once-great civilization.

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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?
 - A. No society except the ancient Egyptians had the resources or authority to build monuments like the pyramids.
 - B. The ancient Egyptians' original goal was to make grand structures; it wasn't until after the first pharaoh died that they later became tombs.
 - C. Preparation for the afterlife was an important part of ancient Egyptians culture, especially for the pharaoh, for whom grand tombs (i.e. pyramids) were built and decorated.
 - D. The ancient Egyptians did not believe in an afterlife; rather, the pharaoh physical body, once entombed with its possessions, would rise again.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Only a powerful pharaoh could marshal the necessary human resources to build giant pyramids." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Pyramids were built for religious purposes. The Egyptians were one of the first civilizations to believe in an afterlife.... The Great Pyramids were simply grand tombs of powerful pharaohs." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "Many believe that the Sphinx was a portrait of King Chefred (Khafret), who was placed in the middle Pyramid. The lion symbolized immortality." (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "Because this practice eventually proved too costly, artists instead depicted scenes of human activity on the inside walls. Some pyramids were even equipped with a rest room for the pharaoh." (Paragraph 9)

3. PART A: What does the word "adorn" most likely mean as used in paragraph 8?
 - A. To cover up entirely
 - B. To like or love
 - C. To decorate
 - D. To clutter

4. PART B: Which of the following phrases from paragraph 8 best supports the answer to PART A?
 - A. "ranked high in status"
 - B. "so the ka could enjoy them"
 - C. "loaded into the interiors of the great tombs"
 - D. "Fine linens and artwork"

5. What purpose does including the concept of ka serve in the author's central ideas? Explain what ka is in your answer.
