

Name: _____
Period: _____

THE PYRAMIDS

The ancient Egyptian people believed the powerful sun and the mysterious Nile River were gifts from their gods. They believed their pharaoh was both a person and a god, descended from the same gods that provided their land with great wealth. The Egyptians wanted their pharaoh to make a successful journey to the afterlife so he could continue to provide Egypt with the sun and the river. For that to happen, the pharaoh's body had to remain intact and on Egyptian land.

The Egyptians buried their pharaohs with food and the ruler's most treasured objects; they believed the spiritual essence of the objects would comfort the pharaoh as he traveled through the underworld on his journey to the afterlife.

The early pharaohs were buried in the Egyptian sand, but their bodies were easy prey for jackals. Jackals are wolf-like creatures that prowl the desert for decayed flesh. The Egyptian people protected the bodies of the pharaohs by surrounding the pharaoh's graves with mud pits. Archeologists found bodies buried about 3400BCE that were largely intact. The dry sand preserved the bodies even better than the elaborate techniques the Egyptians used later in their history.

The tombs of the early pharaohs were covered with a mud brick slab called a mastaba. The mastaba was a landmark that identified the burial place and allowed the Egyptian people a place to pay their respects to the body of their



ruler. The mastaba also made protected the

pharaoh's body from jackals. Imhotep was a brilliant architect who built an elaborate monument for his pharaoh, Zoser, more than 26 centuries before the Common Era. Imhotep placed six mastabas over Zoser's grave. Each mastaba was smaller than the one below it. Imhotep then covered the mastabas with polished white limestone. The result was the Step Pyramid of Zoser, a structure that rose 203 feet into the sky.

Egyptian pharaohs built pyramids from the time of Zoser to about 1700BCE. Most pyramids were built as tombs for the pharaohs or their closest advisors. Archeologists have found 138 pyramids, though others may have been destroyed or remain hidden beneath the desert sand.

The Great Pyramid at Giza is the largest of the Egyptian pyramids, standing almost 500 feet tall, covering an area larger than ninety football fields and containing more than two million stones. The largest of the stones weigh 160,000 pounds and had to be transported more than 500 miles to Giza. Historians estimate that it took over 100,000 workers more than twenty years to build the Great Pyramid. The ancient Egyptians did not have large animals to help them carry the massive stones, and at the time of the construction of the Great Pyramid, the Egyptians had not yet discovered the iron tools. The huge blocks were cut from a quarry using copper chisels and dragged across the desert in great sleds. The weight of the stones would have stranded wheeled vehicles in the sand. The workers were probably Egyptian farmers who were idle during the season when their farmland was flooded by the Nile River.

The Greek writer Herodotus described the pyramids as one of the wonders of the ancient world. Centuries after the end of the era of the pharaohs, the pyramids remain a symbol of the achievements of ancient Egypt.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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Fill in the Blanks

The ancient Egyptians believed that their prosperity depended upon the generosity of the p__a__a__h after he made a successful j__u__n__y to the a__t__r__i__e. It was necessary for the pharaoh to be *b__r__ed in Egypt and that the body of the pharaoh be intact.

The t__m__s of the early pharaohs were covered in a mud brick slab called a m__s__a__a. Imhotep was an a__c__i__e__t who placed one mastaba on top of another to create the first s_____ pyramid. Later pyramids were more *el__b__r__te. The G__e__t Pyramid at Giza stands as high as a building with fifty floors. This is particularly amazing because the Great P__r__m__d was constructed without the use of large a__i__a__s, i_____ tools or w__e__l__d vehicles.

Answer in complete sentences

*1. How is the pharaoh an example of a polytheistic ruler?

*2. If you shared the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, what objects would you take with you to the afterlife? Explain why you chose these items.

3. Answer either question or both. You may use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.
a. Ask a parent what they what they would take with them on a journey to the Egyptian afterlife. Explain to your parent why it was important for the pharaoh to be buried with his or her most treasured possessions. Your parent is welcome to complete this problem for you.
b. What would you have taken with you to the Egyptian afterlife when you were five years old?

4. Why did the ancient Egyptians believe it was necessary to bury their pharaohs in elaborate tombs?

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