

Egyptian Achievements

The Big Idea

The Egyptians made lasting achievements in writing, architecture, and art.

Main Ideas

- Egyptian writing used hieroglyphics.
- Egypt's great temples were lavishly decorated.
- Egyptian art filled tombs.

Key Terms and People

hieroglyphics
papyrus
Rosetta Stone
sphinxes
obelisk
King Tutankhamen

If YOU were there . . .

You are an artist in ancient Egypt. A noble has hired you to decorate the walls of his family tomb. You are standing inside the new tomb, studying the bare, stone walls that you will decorate. No light reaches this chamber, but your servant holds a lantern high. You've met the noble only briefly but think that he is someone who loves his family, the gods, and Egypt.

What will you include in your painting?

Egyptian Writing

If you were reading a book and saw pictures of folded cloth, a leg, a star, a bird, and a man holding a stick, would you know what it meant? You would if you were an ancient Egyptian. In the Egyptian writing system, or **hieroglyphics** (hy-ruh-GLIH-fiks), those five symbols together meant "to teach." Egyptian hieroglyphics were one of the world's first writing systems.



Writing in Ancient Egypt The earliest known examples of Egyptian writing are from around 3300 BC. These early Egyptian writings were carved in stone or on other hard material. Later, the Egyptians learned how to make **papyrus** (puh-PY-ruhs), a long-lasting, paperlike material made from reeds. The Egyptians made papyrus by pressing layers of reeds together and pounding them into sheets. These sheets were tough and durable, yet easy to roll into scrolls. Scribes wrote on papyrus using brushes and ink.

The hieroglyphic writing system used more than 600 symbols, mostly pictures of objects. Each symbol represented one or more sounds in the Egyptian

These hieroglyphics in the burial chamber of the Pyramid of Teti give us important information about Egyptian society.

language. For example, a picture of an owl represented the same sound as our letter *M*.

Hieroglyphics could be written either horizontally or vertically. They could be written from right to left or from left to right. These options made hieroglyphics flexible to write but difficult to read. The only way to tell which way a text is written is to look at individual symbols.

The Rosetta Stone Historians and archaeologists have known about hieroglyphic writing for centuries, but for a long time they didn't know how to read it. In fact, it was not until 1799 when a lucky discovery by a French soldier gave historians the key they needed to read ancient Egyptian writing.

That key was the **Rosetta Stone**, a huge, stone slab inscribed with hieroglyphics. In addition to the hieroglyphics, the Rosetta Stone had text in Greek and a later form of Egyptian. Because the text in all three languages was the same, scholars who knew Greek were able to figure out what the hieroglyphics said.







After the soldier's discovery, the Rosetta Stone was later translated by the French historian and linguist Jean-François Champollion in the early 19th century. His world-changing discoveries helped later historians understand ancient Egypt.

Egyptian Texts Because papyrus did not decay in Egypt's dry climate, many Egyptian texts still survive. Historians today can read Egyptian government records, historical records, science texts, and medical manuals. Writing also influenced Egyptian religion and culture. It allowed Egyptians to creatively express ideas. For example, some of the world's earliest examples of literature come from ancient Egyptian culture. *The Story of Sinuhe* and *The Eloquent Peasant* were popular stories about gods and kings.

Egyptians used papyrus for written records and literature, such as this page from the *Book of the Dead*.



Egyptian Writing

	Sound	Meaning
	Imn	Amon
	Tut	Image
	Ankh	Living
Translation—"Living image of Amon"		
	Heka	Ruler
	Iunu	Heliopolis
	Resy	Southern
Translation—"Ruler of Southern Heliopolis"		



Analyze Visuals

What does the symbol for ruler look like?

Egyptian hieroglyphics used picture symbols to represent sounds.

Egyptians also wrote religious texts, such as the *Book of the Dead*, which tells about the afterlife. The development of writing helped ideas such as this to be communicated from one generation to the next. Other religious texts include the *Book of Caverns*, which discussed the journey of the sun god Re. Historians have also discovered religious texts inside coffins. They were often spells or magic formulas.

Egyptian Calendar The Egyptians created two calendars. One consisted of 12 months, each of which were based on the lunar cycle. This is the time it took for the moon to revolve around the earth. Each month was 28 or 29 days long.

Another Egyptian calendar was based on the solar cycle, or the movement of the sun. It also consisted of 12 months. Each month was 30 days long with an additional 5 days at the end of the year. The solar calendar proved to be more accurate. It was the first calendar that was 365 days long.

Reading Check
Compare How is our writing system similar to hieroglyphics?

Egypt's Great Temples

In addition to their writing system, the Egyptians are famous today for their magnificent architecture of sacred spaces. You have already read about the Egyptians' most famous structures, the pyramids. But the Egyptians also built massive temples. Those that survive are among the most spectacular sites in Egypt today.

The Egyptians believed that temples were the homes of the gods. People visited the temples to worship, offer the gods gifts, and ask for favors.

Many Egyptian temples shared some similar features. Rows of stone **sphinxes**—imaginary creatures with the bodies of lions and the heads of other animals or humans—lined the path leading to the entrance. That entrance itself was a huge, thick gate. On either side of the gate might stand an **obelisk** (AH-buh-lisk), a tall, four-sided pillar that is pointed on top.

Inside, the temples were lavishly decorated. Huge columns supported the temple's roof. In many cases, these columns were covered with paintings and hieroglyphics, as were the temple walls. Statues of gods and pharaohs often stood along the walls as well. The sanctuary, the most sacred part of the building, was at the far end of the temple.

The Temple of Karnak is only one of Egypt's great temples. Others were also built by Ramses the Great at Abu Simbel and Luxor. The temple at Abu Simbel is especially known for the huge statues carved out of the sandstone cliffs at the temple's entrance. These 66-foot-tall statues show Ramses as pharaoh. Nearby are some smaller statues of his family.

Reading Check
Form Generalizations
What were some features of Egyptian temples?

Egyptian Art

One reason Egypt's temples are so popular with tourists is the art they contain. The ancient Egyptians were masterful artists. Many of their greatest works of artistic expression were created to fill the tombs of pharaohs and other nobles. The Egyptians took great care in making these items because they believed the dead could enjoy them in the afterlife.

Paintings Egyptian art was filled with lively, colorful scenes. Detailed works covered the walls of temples and tombs. Artists also painted on canvas, papyrus, pottery, plaster, and wood. Most Egyptians, however, never saw these paintings. Only kings, priests, and important people could enter temples and tombs, and even they rarely entered the tombs.

The subjects of Egyptian paintings vary widely. Some paintings show important historical events, such as the crowning of kings and the founding of temples. Others illustrate major religious rituals. Still other paintings show scenes from everyday life, such as farming or hunting. The environment in which they lived inspired Egyptian artists. Their work showed the marshes of the Nile River and the wildlife living there.

Egyptian painting has a distinctive style. People, for example, are drawn in a certain way. In Egyptian paintings, people's heads and legs are always seen from the side, but their upper bodies and shoulders are shown straight on. In addition, people do not all appear the same size. Important figures such as pharaohs appear huge in comparison to others, especially servants or conquered people. In contrast, Egyptian animals are usually drawn realistically.

Carvings and Jewelry Painting was not the only art form Egyptians practiced. The Egyptians were also skilled stoneworkers. Many tombs included huge statues and detailed carvings.



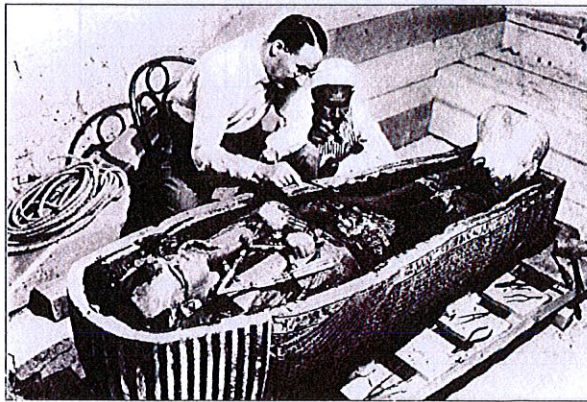
The Temple of Karnak was Egypt's largest temple. This illustration shows how Karnak's great hall may have looked during an ancient festival.

Treasures of King Tut's Tomb

In 1922 the archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the tomb of King Tut. Although the tomb had been robbed in ancient times, it was still filled with treasures, some of which are shown here.



King Tut's tomb



Howard Carter examining King Tut's coffin in 1925



The back of King Tut's chair was decorated with this image of the pharaoh and his wife.



Gold mask

Analyze Visuals

What might archaeologists learn about ancient Egypt from these artifacts?

The Egyptians also made beautiful objects of gold and precious stones. They made jewelry for both women and men. This jewelry included necklaces, collars, and bracelets. The Egyptians also used gold to make burial items for their pharaohs.

Over the years, treasure hunters emptied many pharaohs' tombs. At least one tomb, however, was not disturbed. In 1922 some archaeologists found the tomb of **King Tutankhamen** (too-tang-KAHM-uhn), or King Tut. The tomb was filled with treasures, including boxes of jewelry, robes, a burial mask, and ivory statues. King Tut's treasures have taught us much about Egyptian burial practices and beliefs.

Summary and Preview Ancient Egyptians developed one of the best-known cultures of the ancient world. Next, you will learn about a culture that developed in the shadow of Egypt—Kush.

Reading Check
Summarize What types of artwork were contained in Egyptian tombs?

Lesson 4 Assessment

Review Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. **Identify** What are hieroglyphics?

b. **Contrast** How is hieroglyphic writing different from our writing today?

c. **Evaluate** Why was finding the Rosetta Stone so important to scholars?
- a. **Describe** What are two ways the Egyptians decorated their temples?

b. **Evaluate** Why do you think pharaohs like Ramses the Great built huge temples?
- Recall** Why were tombs filled with art, jewelry, and other treasures?

Critical Thinking

- Summarize** Draw a table like the one below. In each column, list two facts about the achievements of the ancient Egyptians.

Writing	Architecture	Art