

# Egypt

## *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*



Introduction to Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Culture

Daily Life in Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Beliefs

Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs

## Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

## Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.





Ancient Egypt was split hierarchically into different social classes.

At the top was the **pharaoh**, followed by government and religious officials. These were the wealthiest and most powerful members of society.

Below them were the **skilled workers**, such as scribes, soldiers and craftsmen.

At the bottom were the poorer people or **unskilled workers** – the peasant farmers and slaves.



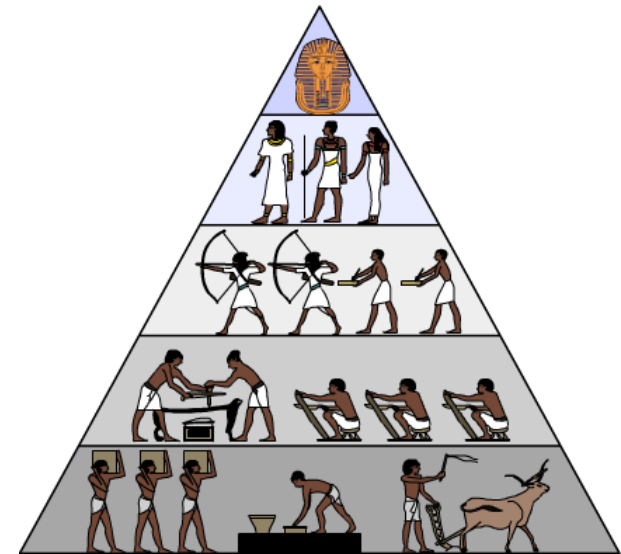


The **class structure** was quite rigid and people would generally belong to the same class as their parents. Nonetheless, there was a small amount of **social mobility**.

For example:

Some peasant families saved enough for their son to learn a trade.

Boys who learned to read and write could become scribes and work for the government.



However, in most cases, the members of each level had very different lives.

How might daily life have differed for the rich and poor?

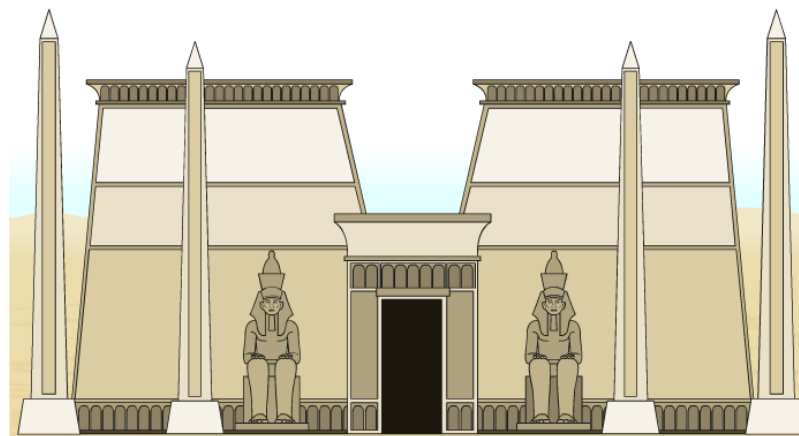




In the upper levels of Ancient Egyptian society were nobles and priests. They were the wealthiest members of society and held positions of power.

**Nobles** acted as government officials. They helped the pharaoh fulfil his duties and maintained law and order in the localities.

**Priests** were responsible for pleasing the gods. They led rituals and held festivals for the gods in temples.





**Scribes** and **soldiers** were some of the few who could rise above their parents' position in society.

Scribes were highly regarded by Ancient Egyptian society. They were official writers and record keepers. Some of the records they kept were grain accounts, court cases and taxes.



In contrast, **artisans** were seen as mere common laborers, despite their skill set. Some of their crafts included carpentry, jewelry making, metalwork and sculpting. They resided in the lower levels of the middle classes.

Why do you think these two groups were viewed so differently by the upper classes?



Peasant **farmers** and **slaves** sat on the lowest levels of the Egyptian social pyramid.

The majority of Egyptians were farmers. Their lives revolved around the **River Nile**, where the land was most fertile for growing crops.



During the flooding season they might be involved in building projects.

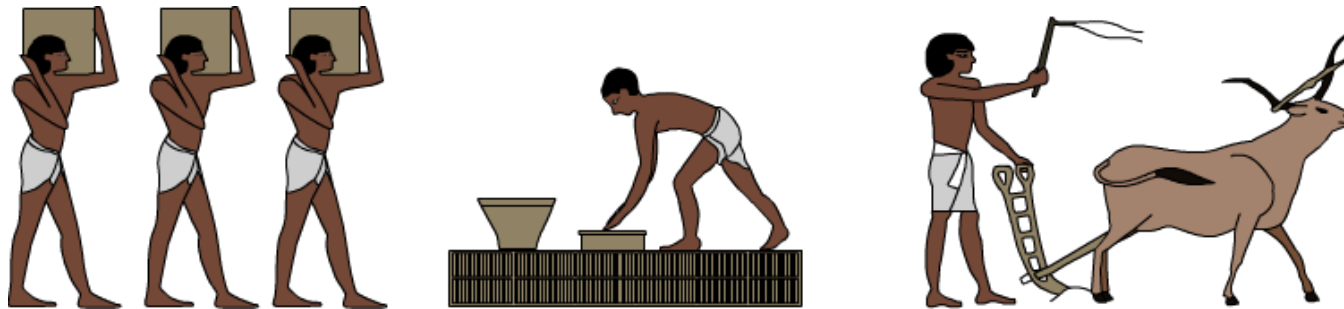
Peasant farmers had some of the worst living conditions. They lived in small houses with little furniture and had a simple diet.



It has long been thought that the pyramids were built by **slaves**. However, this was not slave labor in the sense that we now understand it.

Evidence suggests that there was little difference between servants and slaves. The slaves that did exist were probably well-treated. Farmers also helped during flooding season.

Most slaves came from the peasant classes. Someone might become a slave to pay off a debt, as a punishment or because they were captured during war. Some peasants even put themselves into service.

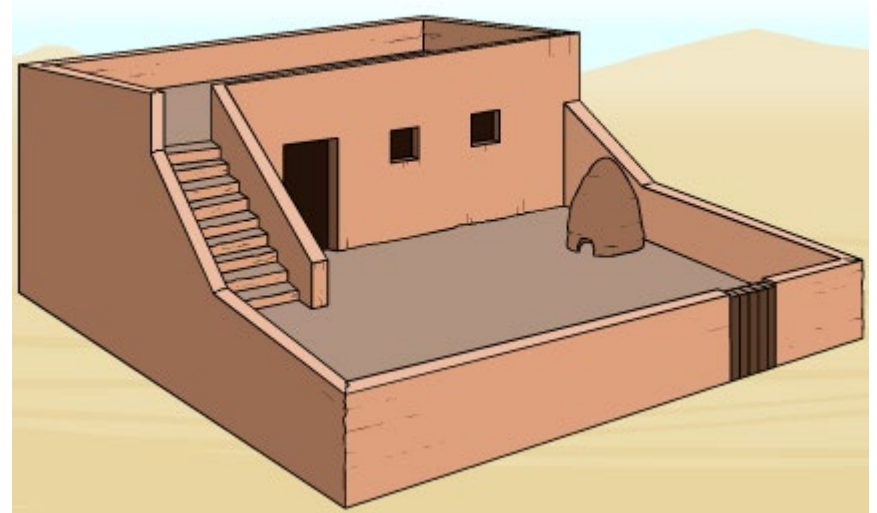




The people in Ancient Egypt lived in the area around the Nile.

Most houses were made from sun-dried **mud bricks**. They had flat roofs that families slept on during the hot summer months.

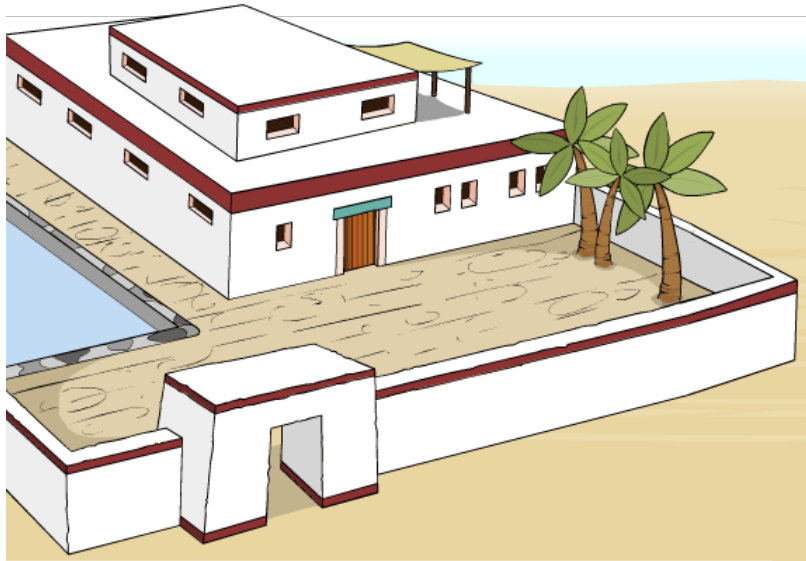
The average Egyptian's home was quite simple. There would be few rooms and very little furniture. Reed mats may cover the windows and doors to keep out flies. Tall walls provided shade.



Waste was thrown into the river, pits or onto the streets.



Craftsmen often lived in townhouses. The ground floor was used for business and the upper two levels to live in.



The wealthy had much larger homes made up of three separate areas: reception, hall and private residence. The walls might be painted white to reflect heat and the rich would have more furniture.

They also had **servants** to look after the property and care for the family.

How did living conditions differ between the rich and poor?

Bread was the staple food for all Ancient Egyptians, due to the large amount of **wheat** produced.

**Barley** was also very important and beer made from barley was the main drink during this time. The rich also drank wine.

The Egyptians enjoyed **hunting** and they ate beef, mutton and fish. However, there was not a lot of meat due to a lack of grazing and the poor were less likely to eat it than the wealthy.

The **fertile** land around the Nile produced a lot of fruit and vegetables, including onions, beans, dates and plums.



**Family life** was very important to the Ancient Egyptians.

Peasant girls married around the age of 12. Boys and wealthier girls were generally slightly older.

The average Egyptian had only one wife, but the wealthy and the pharaoh probably had several wives.



Men were the head of the household and women were generally expected to obey. Their primary role was domestic. Wealthy women would have servants to complete the household chores.



Although a woman's primary role was as caretaker of the family and home, she had freedom and rights.

Ancient Egyptian women could:

- own land and run businesses
- represent themselves in legal matters
- work as government officials, priestesses and doctors.

**Queens** were important for ensuring the line of succession. They could become very powerful in their own right.

For example, **Hatshepsut** was one of the most powerful pharaohs.



Children were considered a blessing by the Egyptians. Couples would pray to the **gods and goddesses** both if they could not have children and to keep the children they did have safe.

Mothers generally brought up their children. However, wealthier families would have **servants**, such as nannies, to raise the children.

Children played a variety of games, including team games. They had toys made from ivory and wood, but would also play with whatever they could find.



The goddess **Isis** was venerated as the ideal mother.





# Schools in Ancient Egypt



Only those who could afford it sent their children to school. Learning took place at a **temple school** under the instruction of a priest. Here boys learned reading, writing, math, sport and morals.

Some schools were targeted towards a particular career. Future scribes attended **scribe school** where they learnt the hieroglyphic writing system. Days were long and discipline was strict.



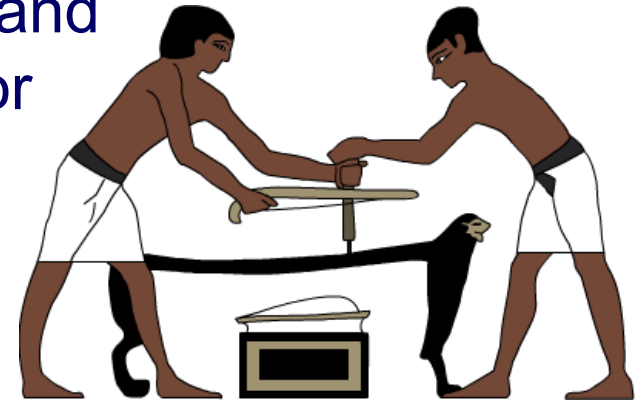
Although girls generally did not go to school, some were educated more formally. A woman might run the family business while her husband or father was away.



For the poor, **education** was provided by their parents.

Girls were taught domestic chores by their mothers ready for their role as the primary caretaker of the family unit. Girls inherited their parents' household goods.

Boys learned trades from their fathers and inherited their land. The ultimate aim for builders and sculptors was to become part of the tomb-building teams. Many others simply worked the fields alongside their father.



**What does this tell you about the differences between the lives of poor and rich children in Ancient Egypt?**



Ancient Egyptians wore clothes made of **linen**. This was cool and light, making it ideal for Egypt's hot climate. It ranged in texture from coarse for the poor to fine for the wealthy.

Women wore ankle-length sheath dresses. Lower-class women's dresses were very plain. Upper-class women might have pleated dresses with fringes.

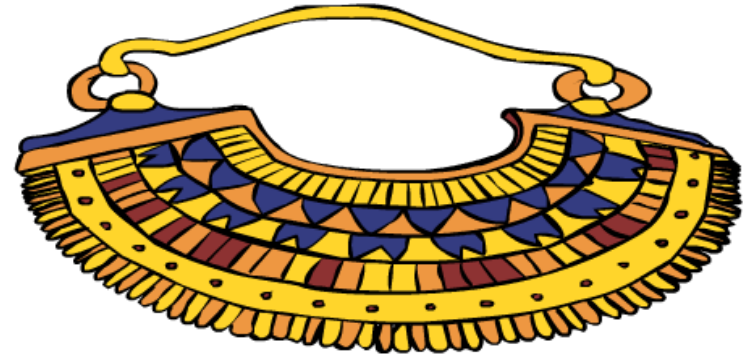
Noble men tended to wear a kilt with a belt at the waist and may have a headdress called a khat. A poor man would wear a simple loincloth.



Is this a poor or a rich couple?

**Jewelry** was worn by all Egyptians. It showed wealth and status. Amulets were thought to offer protection and were often made in the shape of sacred symbols, like the Eye of Horus.

The wealthy wore jewelry made of gold, silver and precious gem stones. The lower classes wore jewelry made from copper.



All Egyptians wore make up. It was very common to use black **kohl** around the eyes for protection against the sun.

Cleanliness was also important – the Egyptians bathed daily.

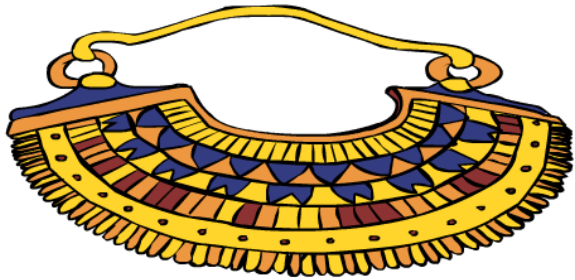




# A day in the life ...



Rich or poor? Decide whether these belonged to a rich or poor Egyptian.



Was this the daily schedule of a rich man or a poor man?

Wake up and put on clothes made of coarse linen.  
Have a simple breakfast of bread and fruit.  
Go out and work the fields whilst wife makes bread at home.  
Take part of the harvest to the temple to pay taxes.  
Eat a simple meal and go to bed.

