Gift of the Nile: Why Ancient Egypt Thrived

Teacher		**Class**	Year 4
Subject	History	**Topic**	Ancient Egypt
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United Kingdom

Pupils place Ancient Egypt in time and place and explain the Nile flood. They test farming and make a mini Nile poster about achievements.

Curriculum links

- The achievements of the earliest civilizations – an overview of where and when the first civilizations appeared and a depth study of one of the following: Ancient Sumer; The Indus Valley; Ancient Egypt; The Shang Dynasty of Ancient China [2]

Learning objectives

- Students will place Ancient Egypt in time and place along the Nile.
- Students will explain how the yearly Nile flood helped farmers grow food.
- Students will describe Egyptian achievements in building, writing and belief.

Success criteria

- I can show where and when Ancient Egypt was on maps.
- I can explain why the Nile flood helped farming happen.
- I can name three Egyptian achievements and what they were for.

What students already know

Ask: What does a civilisation need to live - water, food, homes, rules? Take two quick answers and link to rivers helping farms.

Key words

civilisation	a large group of people living in towns with rules, jobs and writing
pharaoh	a king of Ancient Egypt who ruled the land and religion [19]
flood	when river water rises over the banks and covers the fields
hieroglyphs	picture writing used in Ancient Egypt with more than 700 signs [23]
pyramid	a huge stone tomb built for a pharaoh [5]

Materials

- Slides 1-5, 7, 9-12
- Worksheet Task B (Know / Want / Learnt), Task D (Put in order), Task E (Read a bar chart), Task G (Circle the right word)
- Shallow trays, soil, small cups of water, strips of paper for canals, seeds
- Three-step picture guide: flood, leave soil, dig canal

Before the lesson

- Print Worksheet Tasks B, D, E, G - one per pupil, plus spare three-step picture guides
- Load Slides 1-5, 7, 9-12 and check they display; no video needed for this lesson
- Set out trays with a thin layer of soil, small water cups, paper canal strips and seeds in groups

- Role and word cards, whiteboards, mini Nile poster paper, pencils and crayons
- Put mop, towel and hand-washing bowl ready and clear carpet space for group work

Lesson outline

0–5 min **Starter** 5 min · Whole class

To hook pupils with the farming problem and recall what a civilisation needs.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 1 Ancient Egypt [title]: The gift of the River Nile and read the title together.
2. Say the hook and ask pupils to turn and whisper an idea to a partner.
3. Show Slide 2 mystery wall of tiny pictures and ask what they could be.
4. Give out Worksheet Task B and ask pupils to fill columns 1 and 2 only.

STUDENTS DO

1. Look at Slides 1-2 and whisper ideas to a partner.
2. Suggest river water, rain or wells as water sources.
3. Start Worksheet Task B columns 1 and 2 with a partner, no full sentences needed.

Say: Imagine you are a farmer and it almost never rains. Where will your water come from? In Ancient Egypt farmers had this problem every year. Today we will find out how the River Nile solved it.

Ask: Where could a farmer get water if it almost never rains? (From a river, stream or stored water.) · What do you see on the old stone wall? (Lots of tiny pictures, which is picture writing called hieroglyphs [23].)

Check understanding: Hands up for who thinks river water helped most. If unsure, point to Slide 1 river line and repeat the hook question once more.

Support: Give sentence starter: We know... We want to know... **Stretch:** Ask: What else besides water might farmers need from a river?

Use: Slides 1–2, Worksheet Task B

5–15 min **Teaching** 10 min · Whole class

To place Ancient Egypt in time and place on a map and timeline.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 3 chain and talk through flood, soil, food and one kingdom.
2. Show a large world map, point to the Nile Valley in north-east Africa [7] and trace flow from south to north [13].
3. Show Slide 4 steps and Slide 7 bignumber to place about 3100 BC to 30 BC [7].
4. Model Worksheet Task D by ordering two cards first, then let pupils number the rest.

STUDENTS DO

1. Point north for Lower Egypt and south for Upper Egypt on the class map.
2. Say the chain together: flood, soil, food, kingdom.
3. Do Worksheet Task D numbering events from first to last.

Say: Ancient Egypt grew along the River Nile in north-east Africa and lasted about 3,000 years [5]. It started when King Menes united two lands in about 3100 BC and ended with Cleopatra VII in 30 BC [7]. Recorded history spans roughly 5,000 years, beginning with Sumerian cuneiform script [10].

Worked example: I do: Lower Egypt is in the north by the delta, Upper Egypt is in the south in the valley [13]. So I put Lower card north, Upper card south, then Menes joins them. First is two kingdoms, next is Menes unites, last is one Egypt ruled by pharaohs.

Ask: Where was Ancient Egypt and which way does the Nile flow? (Along the Nile Valley in north-east Africa [7], flowing from south to north [13].) · When did Ancient Egypt begin and end? (About 3100 BC with King Menes uniting the lands, to 30 BC with Cleopatra VII [7].)

Check understanding: Show thumbs up if Upper Egypt is in the south. Re-point on the map if many point north.

Support: Give a map with the Nile already coloured blue and the two kingdoms outlined to label. **Stretch:** Explain in one sentence why the southern part was called Upper Egypt.

Use: Slides 3–4, 7, Worksheet Task D

15–35 min **Main activity** 20 min · Groups

To explain why the Nile flood made farming possible.

YOU DO

1. Demonstrate with one tray: pour a small cup, let water soak, point to dark damp soil left behind.
2. Explain Egyptians called the land Kemet meaning the Black Land because of dark rich soil [20].
3. Show paper canals and a shaduf, a tool used to lift water from the river onto the land [5].
4. Ask groups to test, observe and draw before and after the flood.

STUDENTS DO

1. Pour water, watch it drain and feel and look at the dark soil.
2. Lay paper canals, try lifting water and sprinkle a few seeds.
3. Draw before and after the flood and label wheat and barley for bread and beer [19].

Say: Only about 2.5 cm of rain falls in Egypt each year [23], so people relied on the summer rise of the Nile. The yearly flood left thick, dark soil full of nutrients [20] and Egyptians invented irrigation to control the flow of water [7]. You will flood, watch, then dig canals like a farmer.

Worked example: I pour half a cup slowly. Watch it spread. Now it drains. See the dark patch? That is our rich soil. I lay a paper strip as a canal and lift a drop with a cup like a shaduf. Your tray should look darker after than before.

Ask: What did the flood leave behind that helped crops? (Thick, dark soil full of nutrients [20].) · Why did farmers need canals and the shaduf? (To control the flow and lift water from the river onto the land [7][5].)

Check understanding: Hold up drawings: point to darker after-flood patch. Re-demo with one tray if soil looks the same.

Support: Provide a three-step picture guide: flood, leave soil, dig canal. **Stretch:** Predict what would happen to crops in a year with a very low flood.

Use: Slides 3

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35–50 min **Teaching** 15 min · Pairs

To describe three achievements: pyramids, writing and organised farming and belief.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 5 vote and take a quick class vote on most amazing achievement.
2. Show Slide 10 Two lives and compare pharaoh and farmer jobs.
3. Model a mini Nile poster with river down the middle and three quick sketches.
4. Give out Worksheet Task E bar chart about class votes to complete in pairs.

STUDENTS DO

1. Vote, then discuss in pairs why they chose pyramids, writing or farming.
2. Make a mini Nile poster with river, three pictures and one short label each.
3. Complete Worksheet Task E by reading the class votes chart and answering below.

Say: Pharaohs were buried in giant pyramids as tombs [5] using new quarrying and building skills [7]. Scribes used hieroglyphic writing to record decrees and grain taxes [13] and the same message on the Rosetta Stone in three scripts helped us read it [8]. Many farmers worked on temples or pyramids when fields were flooded [19].

Worked example: My poster: blue line down middle for the Nile. Left: wheat stalks labelled food for farmers. Middle: three picture signs labelled writing for scribes. Right: triangle labelled tomb for pharaoh. One short label each, neat and clear.

Ask: Why were pyramids built and who built them? (As tombs for pharaohs [5], with farmers helping during flood season [19].) · What did scribes write down and why was it powerful? (Royal orders and grain taxes [13]; only scribes could read and write [14].)

Check understanding: Count poster labels: river plus three labels. Show a good example and add missing labels together.

Support: Give label word bank: Nile, food, writing, tomb and a poster frame to fill. **Stretch:** Add one line on the poster to link a choice to afterlife belief, like treasure for the journey [14].

Use: Slides 5, 9–10, Worksheet Task E

50–60 min **Plenary** 10 min · Whole class

To check what pupils learnt and answer why Egypt is called the gift of the Nile.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 question and let pairs share one reason using their poster.
2. Show Slide 12 exit lines and ask pupils to finish column 3 of Task B.
3. Give Worksheet Task G to circle the correct word in each sentence.
4. Collect posters and praise clear links between Nile, food and achievements.

STUDENTS DO

1. Think, pair, share one reason the Nile was a gift.
2. Fill Worksheet Task B column 3 and do Worksheet Task G on their own.
3. Share one thing learnt and one question still to ask.

Say: Think, pair, share: why do we call Egypt the gift of the Nile? Use your poster to help. Then finish your Learnt column and circle the right words to show what you remember.

Ask: Why do we call Egypt the gift of the Nile? (The flood gave water, rich soil and food so villages could join and thrive.) · Name one achievement and what it was for. (Pyramids for burial, hieroglyphs for recording, irrigation for farming.)

Check understanding: Read Task G answers together. If many miss one, re-show Slide 3 or 4 and correct as a class.

Support: Give sentence starters: I learnt... I still wonder... **Stretch:** Suggest one new question you would ask about an object to learn more.

Use: Slides 11–12, Worksheet Task B, Worksheet Task G

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Thinking Upper Egypt is in the north because up on a map is north.	Pupil points north when asked to show Upper Egypt.	Re-trace the Nile flowing from south to north [13] and repeat: Upper is southern valley, Lower is northern delta.
Thinking the flood ruined farming instead of helping it.	Drawing shows crops washed away with no good result.	Point to dark soil in tray and recall it left thick, dark soil full of nutrients [20].
Thinking hieroglyphs are just decoration, not writing with meaning.	Pupil says the pictures do not say anything.	Recall rulers used hieroglyphic writing to record decrees and grain taxes [13] and the Rosetta Stone holds the same text in three scripts [8].

Support

- Use word banks, picture guides and pre-drawn Nile outlines for posters.
- Pair less confident pupils with a buddy and give role cards with one sentence to read.
- Check trays and worksheets often and model each step before pupils start.

Stretch

- Predict crop results in low-flood years and explain choices for burial goods.
- Compare pharaoh and farmer lives and decide which artefact tells more about farmers.
- Write a two-word hieroglyph message for another pair to decode.

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Stay with tray groups: help with pouring, picture guide steps and labelling wheat, writing and pyramid. Prompt think-pair-share answers.

Safety

- Mop up spills at once, keep water cups small to avoid slipping.
- Wash hands after touching soil, keep soil away from mouths and eyes.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
Where was Ancient Egypt and how long did it last?	Along the River Nile in north-east Africa for about 3,000 years, about 3100 BC to 30 BC.
Why did the yearly Nile flood help farmers?	It left dark rich soil and water for irrigation so crops like wheat and barley grew.
Name one Egyptian achievement and what it was used for.	Pyramids as pharaoh tombs, hieroglyphs for recording, or irrigation for farming.

Homework

Ask at home: if you could pack four small things for a long journey, what would you take and why?

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