The Evolution of Early Language

California Standard 6.2.9: Trace the evolution of language and its written forms.

Purpose: Students will investigate the first written forms of language and how they evolved over time.

Objectives:

- Students will read about why written language was needed and what they looked like.
- Students will learn vocabulary related to ancient languages.
- Students will read about cuneiform and practice writing the symbols in clay.
- Students will read about hieroglyphics and practice writing their names.
- Students will make bookmarks on papyrus and write their names in hieroglyphics.
- Students will read about the Phoenician alphabet and write simple messages to partners. They will read each other's messages.
- Students will read about the Rosetta Stone.

Procedure:

- Day 1: Students will read pgs. 154-155, and 160-161 in *A Message of Ancient Days* to develop background on why written language was needed by early civilizations.
- Day 2: Present vocabulary and students will make flashcards and illustrate the words.
- Day 3: Students will read about cuneiform and practice writing symbols in modeling clay. (see handout)
- Day 4: Students will read about hieroglyphic writing. They will practice writing their names in hieroglyphics and write their names on papyrus bookmarks and then decorate them with Egyptian designs. (see handout)
- Day 5: Students will read about the Phoenician alphabet. They will write simple messages and trade papers with a partner and try to decipher the message.
- Day 6: Students will read “Shunat the Scribe Student” as a Reader’s Theater.
- Day 7: Students will read about the Rosetta Stone in *A Message of Ancient Days*, pgs. 196-197. Students will also read about the emergence of literature.

Evaluation:

Students will practice writing in early forms of script: cuneiform, hieroglyphics and the Phoenician alphabet. They will produce a clay tablet, papyrus bookmark, and a message written in the Phoenician alphabet.
Vocabulary for The Evolution of Early Language

symbol
cuneiform
pictograph
ideograms
scribe
stylus
hieroglyphics
papyrus
Phoenician alphabet
Mesopotamia

Make a Clay Cuneiform Tablet

The Sumerian language is the oldest written language we have discovered. Clay tablets with Sumerian writing date to 3500 B.C. The Sumerians' first written marks were pictures of items used in daily life. These pictures stood for words or ideas and were called pictographs. The Sumerians used a stylus made from a sharpened reed to etch the pictographs into soft, moist clay. Later they extended the meanings of the pictures to stand for sounds and syllables, not just the objects themselves.

Over time pictographs changed into simplified wedge-shaped symbols that became known as cuneiform writing. Cuneiform contained about 600 different symbols and was used to express a wide variety of abstract ideas which the earlier pictographs could not do. The cuneiform system of writing was used throughout the Middle East for about 2,000 years for several different languages. Regardless of the source of the symbols, they vary in shape and size.

Look at the chart below which shows the evolution of Sumerian writing. In each column, the top pictograph dates from about 3000 B.C., the one below dates from about 2400 B.C., and the wedge-shaped writing dates to about 650 B.C. At the bottom is the meaning of the writing.

Use the chart and the point of your pencil to write a brief message on a flattened piece of soft clay. Choose either pictographs or cuneiform symbols to write your message. On a separate sheet of paper, write what you intend your message to convey. Have friends decode the message. Did your interpretations agree? If you made a mistake, "erase" your message in the clay, write it correctly, then let the clay tablet dry with the message on it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summerian pictographs ca. 3000 B.C.</th>
<th>Summerian Cuneiform ca. 2400 B.C.</th>
<th>Assyrian form ca. 650 B.C.</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eat</td>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>Bird</td>
<td>Reed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head, voice, speak, word</td>
<td>Orchard, to grow, to write</td>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summerian pictographs ca. 3000 B.C.</th>
<th>Summerian Cuneiform ca. 2400 B.C.</th>
<th>Assyrian form ca. 650 B.C.</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walk, stand</td>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>Ox</td>
<td>Pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand, give</td>
<td>Date-palm</td>
<td>Well</td>
<td>Water, seed, father, son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#573 Thematic Unit—Ancient Middle East 40 © Teacher Created Materials, Inc.
Hieroglyphics: Picture Writing

Here are two sentences written in English. Can you read them? If you can, then you should understand how ancient Egyptians read hieroglyphic writing.

Th-y sw-m -w-y v-ry sw-ftly.

Hieroglyphics are the pictures ancient Egyptians used for writing important information—like the words of the king, or religious texts. When this writing system began, about 6,000 years ago, every picture stood for the word it showed. In the picture sentence above, the stands for the word fish.

That system works well if you only write about things you can show clearly with a picture, but how do you write about ideas, like "friendship" or "cousin"? Over time, Egyptian writers changed the way they used some signs. Instead of standing for the original word, signs were used to stand for a word that sounded like the original word, but meant something different. In the sentence above, the and the are being used that way. Using some signs for sounds and some for meaning made it easier to write about abstract ideas, things that were hard to draw.

Gradually, a system developed in which some signs stood for a single sound, the way the letters of our alphabet stand for a single sound. Some stood for a syllable, or a combination of sounds. And some still stood for the thing they showed. Altogether, the system used about 700 different signs.

One curious thing about the signs that stood for sounds was that they only showed the consonant sounds, not the vowels. (Westerners have added vowels—usually the letter _e_—to a lot of Egyptian words, just to make it possible for us to pronounce them. But we really don’t know what the words sounded like in ancient Egypt.) Look at the second sentence at the top of the page. All the vowels have been taken out of the words. Still, they’re not that hard to figure out. The only one that might be confusing is sw-m. You can’t tell whether it means swim or swam, but the meanings of both of these words are pretty close to each other. Other words could be harder to figure out. For example, the word c-t could be cat, cot, or cut, depending on what the missing vowel was.

To solve this problem, the Egyptians added another kind of sign to the sound signs and sense signs. These signs were called determinatives. They helped the reader determine which word was being used. With c-t, you might show you meant a cat by adding a drawing of an animal: c-t . You might show a cat by using a drawing of a piece of furniture: c-t . And for cut, you might show a knife: c-t . None of the drawings would need to show exactly
Hieroglyphics: Picture Writing (continued)

the word you meant. They would just show the area of meaning: an animal, a piece of furniture, something sharp. The drawings would make it easier for your reader to tell which word you meant.

That's the way the Egyptians used determinative signs. To show that a word referred to a man, they drew a little ♀ after it. To show it was a woman, they used ♂. Verbs that involved movement showed a pair of legs walking: ∆. Abstract ideas—ideas that really couldn't be shown with a picture—were followed by a roll of papyrus: 捧. None of these determinative signs were pronounced. They were only used when the word was written, to make the meaning clear.

Below and on the following page are three groups of Egyptian hieroglyph signs. The first group shows the signs that stand for single sounds, like our alphabet. There are one or two vowel sounds, but most of the vowels are left out. The second group shows some sense signs, signs that stand for a whole word. The third group shows some of the determinative signs, signs that explain the area of meaning for a word.

![Sound Signs Diagram]

(continued)
Hieroglyphics: Picture Writing (continued)

### Sense Signs

- | Land, earth
- | Nose, smell
- | Sandal
- | Door
- | Dignity

- | Hand
- | To be young
- | Beautiful
- | Cloth
- | Art, craft

- | Rebel
- | Copy, write
- | Strong
- | Flying
- | Build, make

### Determinatives

- | House
- | Write, writing
- | Night
- | Eat, drink
- | Wind, air

- | Man
- | Plant
- | Woman
- | Sign to show plural
- | Go, walk

- | Boat, travel
- | Sun
- | Friend
- | People
- | Abstract idea
Hieroglyphics: Picture Writing (continued)

Try to write your name using hieroglyphics. Remember, most vowel sounds weren’t written out, and you should use a determinative sign at the end of your name.

Now, on the back of this sheet, try writing an English sentence using hieroglyphics. Some words may be hard to form, because every language has some unique sounds. English uses some sounds that Egyptian didn’t have, and some Egyptian sounds aren’t used in English. Do your best to reproduce English sounds with the Egyptian signs, leaving out the vowels. Use determinatives wherever they seem appropriate.

When you have finished, exchange papers with a partner. Try to read the sentence you have been given. Which did you find easier, translating English sounds into Egyptian signs, or figuring out the English from the hieroglyphics?

Be glad you only needed to learn 26 signs to write English, not 700!

Some English words came originally from Egyptian words. The word desert comes from the Egyptian word ḏṣḥt, referring to the dry land outside the floodplain of the Nile. And the Egyptian word for a container, soḥt, has become our word sack.
THE TEST OF THE AFTERLIFE: THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The wall painting shows the nobleman Ptah-Amun appearing before Osiris and the other gods of the underworld. Anubis, the jackal-headed god, steps forward to weigh Ptah’s heart. On one side of the scale he places the heart. On the other side he places a feather which represents ma‘at or truth. If the scale is balanced, the soul of Ptah is admitted into the afterlife, but if the scale tips, the ka, or soul, is destroyed by a fierce beast called the Devourer of Souls. Meanwhile, Thoth, the baboon-headed god, records the event. Ptah’s soul passes the test because in the next wall painting we see him being welcomed into the beautiful, green garden of the afterlife. Similar images appear in tomb after tomb of the Middle Kingdom.

The new interest in ethics or right and wrong meant that the afterlife became open to other people besides the pharaoh. Even ordinary Egyptians, if they could afford to buy the right inscriptions of funeral prayers and spells, could be assured of an eternal life. This was made easier by the existence of paper, or papyrus. This came from weaving fibers from the papyrus plant which grew in abundance along the Nile.

On the papyrus, the Egyptians used hieroglyphic writing to record these prayers and spells. Hieroglyphic writing was done by drawing pictures. Before the Old Kingdom, when Egyptians first began to use hieroglyphics, the pictures were probably supposed to mean what they represented. For example, a picture of a basket meant a basket. As time went by, however, they found this too limiting and complicated. For example, to convey the idea of walking, the Egyptians could draw a man walking, but could not show someone walking slowly. The Egyptians found that they could be more precise if they used pictures to represent sounds. Then it would be possible to spell out things that would be difficult to convey by pictures.

There were 600 different hieroglyphics representing the sounds found in the spoken Egyptian language. These hieroglyphics were used the same way we use the letters of the alphabet. For example, the hieroglyph showing a hand represented the sound of the letter “d.” The hieroglyph of a cobra represented the sound of the letter “j.” Some hieroglyphs, however, continued to mean what their pictures represented. The hieroglyph showing an ox meant just that. The hieroglyph showing an eye weeping meant “to cry.”

The Egyptian scribes also had another method of writing called hieratic. This was a shorthand for administration, accounting, and legal documents. For this scribes abbreviated hieroglyphic signs representing the most commonly used combinations. As time went
by, hieratic came to be even more abbreviated. As a result of contacts between Egypt and Greece, it finally evolved into an alphabet known as Coptic. The Coptic Christian Church in Egypt today still uses the script for its liturgy.

Most Egyptians couldn’t read or write hieroglyphics. Reading and writing were skills learned only by the scribes. Like other occupations in ancient Egypt such as farming or carpentry, the knowledge of the scribe was passed along from father to son. Many of the scribes worked in the pharaoh’s government and became powerful men.

In their tombs, Egyptians buried with them all that they believed they would need in the next life. Archaeologists have not only found papyrus scrolls containing prayers and spells, but also historical records, poetry, technical treatises in mathematics and medicine, wisdom stories, letters between government officials, business contracts, and royal proclamations. It is largely because of the survival of these papyrus records that we know so much about Egyptian life during that time.

Most of the great works of Egyptian literature were written during the Middle Kingdom. The society that they describe was peaceful, balanced, and refined. This impression is born out by the funeral architecture. It is smaller and more human than the Old Kingdom’s pyramids. The Middle Kingdom pharaoh, Mentuhotep, built a beautiful mortuary temple for himself at Deir el-Bahre. Two colonnaded terraces lead up to a small, graceful pyramid at the top.
The Changing Alphabet

The Phoenicians developed a system of writing around 1000 B.C. Their system contained 22 symbols closely related to Egyptian and Sumerian pictographs plus geometric signs they invented themselves. Each sign represented a different consonant sound; there were no signs for vowels.

When the Greeks came in contact with Phoenician traders, they learned the concept of writing individual sounds for language. Around 800 B.C. the Greeks borrowed the symbols from the Phoenicians and modified them to form the Greek alphabet. Since the Phoenician alphabet had more consonants than the Greeks needed for their language, they used the extra signs to represent vowel sounds. This was a vast improvement over previous systems because now the Greeks could combine signs for consonants and vowels to spell any word.

The Greeks adopted Phoenician names for their letters. The first letter in the Phoenician alphabet is “aleph,” meaning ox. The pictograph for this letter was an ox head. The Greeks changed the shape of the Phoenician letter slightly and named it “alpha.” The second Phoenician letter was called “beth,” meaning house. It was changed to “beta” by the Greeks.

Sometime after 800 B.C. the Etruscans moved to central Italy and brought the Greek alphabet with them. As the Romans adopted this system, they also modified it. The early Roman alphabet had about 20 letters and gradually added three more. Originally everything was written in capital letters. After the death of Jesus and the change of time reference from B.C. to A.D., scribes used rounded lowercase letters because they were easier to form and took up less space in books than capital letters.

Use the chart to write a message, letter, cargo list, proverb, poem, or story. Trade papers with a classmate, and each of you try to decipher the other’s message.
Shunat the Scribe Student

Narrators 1–10
Akhmed, his brother
Thorin, a friend

Shunat, the student
Nekht, a friend
Jaf, an advanced student

Tarine, his sister
Renof, a tutor
Rashid, the scribe master

Narrator 1: The Egyptians were one of the first civilizations to use written language, and their earliest writing dates back to 3100 B.C. They recorded information on temple walls, tombs, and papyrus scrolls. Thousands of complete and fragmented ancient papyrus scrolls exist today, preserved by the dry climate in Egypt. Because of this, historians are able to learn many interesting facts about life in Ancient Egypt.

Narrator 2: Not everyone in Egypt could read and write. Special training was required to learn the complex signs that made up their writing system called hieroglyphics—a Greek term meaning “sacred carved inscription.” Hieroglyphics began as simple picture-writing with a picture or sign representing a particular object. Slowly a method evolved for using hieroglyphs to represent ideas and actions. Eventually, it was expanded to use individual signs as sounds, much like our alphabet today. However, hieroglyphics comprises 750 signs compared to our 26 letters. Most of the hieroglyphs are pictures of people, animals, plants, or objects.

Narrator 1: Learning all of these different signs required ten years of laborious education in the temple schools, and only a few privileged boys were fortunate enough to attend. Join us for a journey into a day at school with Shunat, the son of a local nobleman. It is sunrise, and he eats his breakfast with his sister and younger brother.

Shunat: We must hurry so that we are not late for our first lesson. You know how angry Rashid, the scribe master, gets if all of his pupils are not in place and ready to receive the morning’s dictation.

Akhmed: Yes, and today I will be working with Old Renof, the tutor. He is more patient than Rashid, but he can still swing a mean cane.

Tarine: I don’t know how you can waste your time so. Every day you go off to the temple school. You work from sunrise to sundown, learning the different hieroglyphic signs and memorizing the exercises. I consider myself lucky to be a girl. I stay at home and work each day with Mother, learning to run our household. I help the servants with the cooking and sewing chores. I learn how to be a good wife and hostess so that I might marry a wealthy nobleman and entertain his friends properly. Today Mother is going to teach me a new song, and we will practice some of the special dance steps for the Festival of the Nile. You see, it is not necessary for me to bother myself with such nonsense as learning to read and write. I will be a wealthy noblewoman someday, and my husband will hire a scribe to do it for me.
Shunat the Scribe Student (cont.)

Narrator 3: According to historical records, girls did not attend temple schools. They stayed at home, learned household skills, and got some training in the arts. Girls from wealthy families also learned how to deal with the servants and run a larger household. However, some girls did learn to read and write. In the tomb of Kenamun there is a painting of a woman with a scribe’s palette beneath her chair, and letters written by women have also been discovered.

Shunat: Dream on, little sister, and hope that your wealthy husband has also “wasted” his time at the temple school. Do you not understand the advantages of learning to read and becoming a scribe? A scribe is everybody’s boss. He sits in the shade and writes while others do the backbreaking labor. A scribe does not have to work on the building sites or irrigation canals. Instead he records the materials used and names of workers. Wealth and success are the future for any good student!

Akhmed: How true. Only those who learn to read and write can ever hope to achieve a high status such as a scribe, state official, priest, or one who works in medicine. Scribes collect taxes for the pharaoh and wealthy landowners. They can leave school and work at the temples or on a nobleman’s estate. If they prove to be good record keepers, they can even be promoted to a position overseeing the accountants or possibly a position in the royal household, writing official letters and drawing up legal documents.

Shunat: The ultimate position for a scribe is to become the vizier to the pharaoh. But look how you have wasted out time. We will be late now for sure. Come, Akhmed, we must hurry.

Narrator 4: As the boys dash down the street to the temple school, known as the House of Life, they encounter their friend Thorin, who is also late. Unlike the brothers, Thorin is not a son of a wealthy nobleman or official. Although school is expensive, his fees are being paid by a local landowner who felt he showed some promise of becoming a good student. Possibly later Thorin will return the favor by working for him as his scribe.

Thorin: I see you also run to attend the morning’s lesson. Rashid will be angry, and I cannot disappoint the landowner who has been kind enough to pay my way. Very few boys like me are privileged enough to enter the House of Life. If it weren’t for him I would be home learning to be a mason like my father. It is a respectable profession, to be sure, but I dream of someday becoming a scribe responsible for many important tasks.
Shunat the Scribe Student (cont.)

Akhmed: We sometimes forget how lucky we are. Most boys must learn the craft of their father or pay to be an apprentice at a shop and learn its trade. Some boys do not have a school nearby and are sent away from their families for many years. Others are so wealthy and privileged that they are allowed to attend school at the palace along with the royal children.

Shunat: We will not be so fortunate if Rashid catches us sneaking in late. Be quiet and find your place on the floor with Reno. I must gather my writing tools.

Narrator 5: The House of Life contained no desks, chairs, or blackboards. The students all sat cross-legged on the floor and stretched their linen shenti, or kilt, across their knees to make a firm writing surface. They wrote with a reed brush and a palette of red and black ink. The black ink was used for standard information and made from soot and water. The red ink was made from desert ocher and used for special headings and more important items.

Reno: I see Thorin and Akhmed have decided to join us this morning. You are lucky that we have not yet begun our early recitation. It is also most fortunate that Rashid, the master, is busy preparing for the advanced students and did not notice these two snakes who are so knowledgeable they do not need a full day of learning come slithering in. Perhaps the two of you could enlighten the class by reviewing all of the symbols we learned yesterday and the passage you memorized in class regarding advice to youthful scribes.

Thorin: Thank you, kind tutor, for not alerting the master and allowing us to escape a beating. We shall begin with the passage.

Akhmed and Thorin: O scribe, do not be idle or you shall be cursed straight away. Do not give your heart to pleasure or you shall fail. Write with your hand; recite with your mouth. Do not spend a day of idleness or you shall be beaten. A boy’s ear is on his back and he listens when he is beaten. As for writing, it is more profitable to he who knows it than any other trade.

Narrator 6: Inside the House of Life, the boys were placed into different groups for learning. Young students began by learning to recognize the different signs and memorizing passages through chanting and repetition. Eventually, they learned to write the hieroglyphs, forming them using pottery shards or wooden writing boards coated with plaster and limestone flakes so that they could be washed off and used again. As they improved, they learned to read and write exercises and copy classical literature. Only the most advanced students were allowed to write on papyrus.

Narrator 7: Since all learning was by rote practice and repetition, it was very long and boring work. Sometimes young minds strayed, and the boys received harsh punishment from their teachers, such as beatings, reciting, or being made to write long proverbs. Students who ran away were caught and had wooden blocks tied to their ankles to keep them from doing it again.
Shunat the Scribe Student

**Renofo:** Very good, young students. I hope this reminds you about the great importance of your schooling and the consequences for idle workers. When you feel jealous of your friends out playing in the fields, remember that they can never aspire to advance their status. It is only those chosen to read and write that will acquire the positions of wealth and power. Let us now review the different hieroglyphic signs, and then we shall move on to the morning lesson.

**Narrator 7:** While the young boys read the different signs put before them by their tutor, Shunat tries to appear inconspicuous and join his group of advanced students. Luckily, Rashid has his back to the students as he gathers the scrolls of text to be copied for the day. Shunat is able to slide in between his friends Jaf and Nekht.

**Jaf:** “That was cutting it close,” said the wheat to the plow. Do you not remember what special day it is? This is the day we advance to writing on papyrus. I could hardly sleep all night, dreaming of the beautiful marks my reed will make on this sacred paper.

**Nekht:** Yes, he was waiting at the door even before the teachers had lit the entry lamps. I have never seen a boy so anxious to write. I think he plans to replace the king’s vizier. Do you think we should warn the vizier that his job is at stake?

**Jaf:** You joke now, but it is I who will be doing the laughing in the future. I take my years of education seriously, and it shows in my work. The Master himself said he has never seen finer strokes. Your work looks more like scratches from a goose. What position do you ever hope to attain—recorder for the pharaoh’s layer of eggs?

**Shunat:** Quiet, both of you, or we will all be in for a beating. Master Rashid is approaching with the daily scrolls to be copied. I hope mine will be something more interesting than yesterday. I spent seven tedious hours copying calculations for a landowner’s expenses. Perhaps today I will be more fortunate and be handed the tale of A Thousand and One Nights.

**Narrator 8:** The different scrolls that have been found show that the Egyptians recorded a variety of information. Since educated people read for pleasure, some scribes copied stories, proverbs, and love poems. Other writings were referred to as “wisdom literature,” which usually consisted of instructions and advice from older and wiser scribes. Scientific papyrus scrolls detailing instructions and information about math, medicine, surgery, and astronomy have also been found.

**Rashid:** Good morning. As you know, today is the day we begin on papyrus. You must work diligently and not waste your ink. Take special care to pull your shenti tight since writing on paper is far less stable than your wooden writing boards. Before we begin I would like our star pupil to review the different types of hieroglyphic signs. I noticed that several of you were still making careless mistakes when I reviewed yesterday’s dictation. Jaf, please bring your writing board to the front of the group and show the three different meanings for “ro,” or “mouth.”

**Jaf:** When I draw a picture of a mouth it can mean mouth, the object. This is using the hieroglyph to represent an idea, and we call it a sense-sign. But this same hieroglyph can also mean the word “toward,” since it has the same sound—“ro.” In this way it is used as a word-sign. And this same hieroglyph can also be used to form a sound-sign for the “r” sound. So you see, it is quite simple.
Shunat the Scribe Student (cont.)

Narrator 9: Obviously, it is not very simple at all, and that is why deciphering these complex hieroglyphics eluded scholars for hundreds of years. After Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt, its rulers were all Greek. Therefore, the royal language was also Greek. Some inscriptions during this period were recorded in both Egyptian and Greek. Gradually, fewer and fewer people knew how to write Egyptian hieroglyphics. Eventually, the Romans conquered Egypt and spread Christianity throughout the land. By then all knowledge of the old ways of writing had vanished.

Narrator 10: Luckily, in 1799 French soldiers were digging near the Nile delta and made a marvelous discovery. They found a stone tablet with inscriptions that had been written by priests back in 196 B.C. The tablet, called the Rosetta Stone, contained a royal decree written in Greek, hieroglyphics, and a later form of Egyptian writing. Champollion, a brilliant young French scholar of ancient languages, used the other two languages to decode the hieroglyphic signs and symbols. By 1822 the world knew of his magnificent discovery. Although there was still a great deal of work to be done, this ancient language could be read once more.

Rashid: I hope you each take Jaf's example and study hard to learn the many intricacies of our hieroglyphic signs. Today is a special day, and I have chosen a special text. We will write on fresh papyrus the first chapter of the Arabian story, A Thousand and One Nights. Please prepare your palettes and writing surfaces.

Shunat: Ah, Lord Re has heard my words and smiles upon us today.
Shunat the Scribe Student—
Vocabulary and Comprehension

Write the following words on the chalkboard for students to copy on index cards for their picture dictionary. Remind them to research and write a complete definition, explanation, or example and draw a picture.

| scribe | Rosetta Stone | hieroglyphics | House of Life | apprentice |

Use some or all of the following questions for whole-class discussion, small-group work, or individual written assessment. Allow students to refer to Shunat the Scribe Student to answer them.

1. Describe the education of an Ancient Egyptian girl. *She did not go to school. She stayed at home and learned from her mother how to run a household. She learned to cook, sew, and tend to the daily chores. If she was from a wealthy family, she was also taught how to manage the servants and entertain for her husband’s guests. Girls were taught how to sing, play music, and dance. Some girls learned to read and write using hieroglyphics.*)

2. Name the three different ways a boy might be educated or learn a trade. *A boy might be sent to school at the House of Life or the royal palace, he might learn a trade from his father, or he might pay to be an apprentice at a shop and learn a different trade or craft than his father.*

3. What were some of the advantages of becoming a scribe? *It was the only profession that allowed a person to better himself socially. A scribe had many opportunities to become wealthy and powerful since all landowners, temples, and wealthy merchants needed someone who could read and write to keep their records. A scribe did not have to do hard labor in the fields or on the building projects.*

4. What did scribe students write with, and what did they write on? *Scribes wrote with black and red ink, using a reed pen or stylus. Depending on their level, they wrote on pottery shards, a wooden writing board covered in plaster, or papyrus. They did not have desks, so they stretched their shenti, or kilt, across their knees to make a solid writing surface.*

5. How was scribe school different from school today? How was it the same? *Accept reasonable answers.*

6. Why were hieroglyphics more difficult to learn than our alphabet? *The signs were more complex than our letters, and there were over 750 signs to memorize. Hieroglyphics were also difficult to master since they could be used in a variety of ways. They could be sound-signs, word-signs, or sense-signs.*

7. Why was the Rosetta Stone such an important discovery? *It allowed scholars to decode the hieroglyphic text and read many documents that could not be deciphered earlier.*

8. Why do you think the instructors used such strict discipline methods? *Accept reasonable answers.*