

## Ancient Civilizations of Africa—Egypt

### Section 1



#### MAIN IDEAS

1. Egypt was called the gift of the Nile because the Nile River was so important.
2. Civilization developed after people began farming along the Nile River.
3. Strong kings unified all of ancient Egypt.

### Key Terms and Places

**Nile River** important river in Egypt

**Upper Egypt** southern part of Egypt

**Lower Egypt** northern part of Egypt

**cataracts** river rapids

**delta** triangle-shaped area of land made from soil deposited by a river

**pharaoh** ruler of ancient Egypt, literally means “great house”

**dynasty** series of rulers from the same family

### Section Summary

#### THE GIFT OF THE NILE

The existence of Egypt was based solely around the **Nile River**, the world’s longest river. The Nile carries water from central Africa through a vast stretch of desert land. The river was so important to people that Egypt was called the gift of the Nile.

Ancient Egypt developed along a 750-mile stretch of the Nile, and was originally organized into two kingdoms—**Upper Egypt** and **Lower Egypt**. Upper Egypt was located upriver in relation to the Nile’s flow. Lower Egypt was the northern region and was located downriver.

**Cataracts**, or rapids, marked the southern border of Upper Egypt. Lower Egypt was centered in the river **delta**, a triangle-shaped area of land made of soil deposited by the river. In midsummer, the Nile would flood Upper Egypt and in the fall the river would flood Lower Egypt. This made sure that the farmland would stay moist and fertile. As the land surrounding the Nile Valley was arid desert,

**Why is a river a gift to a desert land?**

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this watered area was the lifeline for everyone who lived in the region.

**CIVILIZATION DEVELOPS IN EGYPT**

With dry desert all around, it is no wonder that ancient settlers were attracted to this abundant and protected area of fertile farmland. Hunter-gatherers first moved to the area around 12,000 years ago and found plenty of meat and fish to hunt and eat. By 4500 BC farmers were living in villages and growing wheat and barley. They were also raising cattle and sheep.

Around 3200 BC the Egyptian villages became organized into two kingdoms. The capital of Lower Egypt was located in the northwest Nile Delta at a town called Pe. The capital city of Upper Egypt was called Nekhen. It was located on the west bank of the Nile.

**KINGS UNIFY EGYPT**

Around 3100 BC Menes (MEE-neeZ), the king of Upper Egypt, invaded Lower Egypt. He married a princess there in order to unite the two kingdoms under his rule. Menes was the first **pharaoh**, which literally means ruler of a “great house.” He also started the first Egyptian **dynasty**, or series of rulers from the same family. He built a new capital city, Memphis, which became a popular cultural center. His dynasty ruled for nearly 200 years.

**Why do you think Menes wanted to unite the two kingdoms?**

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**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** Villages did not develop until people could stop being hunter-gatherers and start growing their own food. From villages came powerful leaders who united larger territories and people under one organization. Imagine that you are an ancient Egyptian interested in becoming a leader. Write a speech explaining what would make you a powerful person fit for ruling a large village.