

Teacher Introduction

These Common Core History Assessments are designed to help your students develop key literacy and history thinking skills as they learn about Egypt. The assessments are intended to be *formative* more than *summative*. That is, they are meant to be part of the instructional process itself, providing you and your students with information at a point when timely adjustments in teaching and learning can be made.

Similar sets of assessments are available (or planned) for each unit in a typical world history class.

★ *Historical Thinking and the Challenge of the Common Core*

This set includes nine assessments aligned with the first nine Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards. We have left out the tenth Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard, which does not lend itself to assessments of the sort provided here. The set also includes two writing tasks aligned with two key Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards.

These Common Core standards challenge history teachers to develop in students the complex literacy skills they need in today's world and the ability to master the unique demands of working with historical primary and secondary source texts. The Common Core standards are supportive of the best practices in teaching historical thinking. Such practices include close reading, attending to a source's point of view and purpose, corroborating sources, and placing sources in their historical context. These are the skills needed to make history less about rote learning and more about an active effort to investigate and interpret the past.

These assessments are also useful in many ways for ELA teachers. They assess many of the skills specified in the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards, which put a good deal of emphasis on the reading of informational texts. The Anchor Standards form the basis for all of the various Common Core standards for English Language Arts.

★ *What Are These Assessments Like?*

- **A group of nine reading skills assessments and two writing tasks for each major era of world history**

Each reading skills assessment is based on one of the key Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standards—Assessment 1 addresses Common Core Reading Standard 1, Assessment 2 addresses Common Core Reading Standard 2, and so on. Two writing tasks are based on the first two College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing, which are the basis for the Common Core History/Social Studies Writing Standards. The two writing standards focus on writing arguments to support claims and writing informative/explanatory texts.

- **Based on primary or secondary sources**

In most cases, one primary source is used. In some cases, an assessment is based on more than one primary source or on a primary and a secondary source. The sources are brief. In most cases, texts have been slightly altered to improve readability, but without changing meaning or tone. Links to online versions of print media are available in the Bibliography. Please note that these links were valid at the time of production, but the websites may have since been discontinued.

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- **Brief tasks promoting historical literacy**

For each assessment, students write brief answers to one or two questions. The questions are not tests of simple factual recall. They assess the students' mastery of the skills addressed by that assessment's Common Core History/Social Studies Standard.

- **Two versions of each of the nine reading standards assessments**

A *basic* and an *advanced* version of each assessment are provided. The *basic* assessment addresses the Common Core Standard for grades 6–8. The *advanced* assessment is based on the Common Core Standard for grades 9–10 and grades 11–12 combined. Each version uses the same source or sources. In some cases, sources have been somewhat shortened for the *basic* version.

- **Easy to use as both learning and assessment tools**

These assessments do not take valuable time away from instruction. The primary sources and background information on each source make them useful mini-lessons as well as tools to assess students' historical thinking skills. The sources all deal with themes and trends normally covered when teaching the relevant historical era.

- **Evaluating student responses**

Brief but specific suggestions are provided, defining acceptable and best responses to each question asked in the assessment. The suggestions are meant to aid in evaluating students, but even more importantly, they are a way for teachers to help students better understand and master the skills on which the assessment is focused.

Assessment 1 *Basic Level*

“Hymn to the Nile”

★ Key Ideas and Details

1. (6–8) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

★ Using This Assessment

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Assessment 1 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 1 for grades 6–8. It asks students to cite specific textual evidence from two documents. It also challenges students to adapt that reading skill to the unique demands of thinking historically as they carefully interpret textual evidence in a primary source from a time in the past and a secondary source account of that same time in the past.

★ Evaluating Student Responses to This Assessment

Acceptable responses to the first assessment question should see that the hymn depicts the Nile as a gift of the gods, with the Nile perhaps being a deity itself. The hymn is deeply reverential about the Nile's great value to Egyptians. In practical terms, the Nile's value is described mainly as agricultural. The river and its floods water the crops, thereby providing the vast surplus of grain that sustains life and supports a higher civilization—causing “the workshops of Ptah to prosper” and assuring “perpetuity to the temples.” Acceptable responses to the second assessment question should note the greater detail in Document 2 about specific benefits from the Nile and its floods. The document calls attention to the regularity and predictability of the floods, not merely to the fact that they water crops. It notes the way the floods also replenish the earth with rich new soil each year. Also, the document points out the ease with which travel both up and down the river linked all parts of Egypt together cooperatively.

“Hymn to the Nile”

Directions: This exercise asks you to read one primary source document and one secondary source document carefully and answer questions about specific details in the documents. In order to better understand the documents, read and make use of the source information located just below each document. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the two assessment questions that follow.

CCS Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Document 1: A Primary Source

Hail to thee, O Nile! Who manifests thyself over this land, and comes to give life to Egypt!
Mysterious is thy issuing forth from the darkness, on this day whereon it is celebrated!
Watering the orchards created by Re, to cause all the cattle to live, you give the earth to drink, inexhaustible one! Path that descends from the sky, loving the bread of Seb and the first-fruits of Nepera, You cause the workshops of Ptah to prosper!

Lord of the fish, during the inundation, no bird alights on the crops. You create the grain, you bring forth the barley, assuring perpetuity to the temples. If you cease your toil and your work, then all that exists is in anguish. If the gods suffer in heaven, then the faces of men waste away.

Source Information: A sense of how important the Nile was to ancient Egyptians can be gained from the “Hymn to the Nile.” No one knows who wrote it or exactly when. From the style, some historians date it to the Middle Kingdom (from around 1975–1640 BCE). The Egyptian gods named in the passage are the sun god Re; the earth god Seb; the god of grain Nepera; and Ptah, creator god and god of craftsmanship. This version is adapted from *The Ancient World*, vol. 1 of *The Library of Original Sources*, edited by Oliver J. Thatcher (Milwaukee: University Research Extension Co., 1907), pp. 79–83.

Document 2: A Secondary Source

The civilization of ancient Egypt arose over 5,000 years ago. It grew from small farming villages located along the banks of the Nile River in northern Africa . . . Most early civilizations grew up along big rivers. But the Nile was unusual in many ways. One major aspect of the Nile was its annual flood . . . The Nile is about 4,100 miles long. Each year, rains far to the south flood the river all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. The ancient Egyptians looked forward to these floods. They were highly regular annual floods that began in June and lasted about four months. The flood waters would go down as Egypt's growing season began. For the next eight months, farmers would be busy in their fields.

The flood kept the lands fertile, allowing the agricultural cycle to repeat itself predictably, year after year. That's because each year's flood left behind a new layer of rich soil. This meant the same lands could be farmed year after year, for many centuries—and they would never wear out. The rich farmland along the river was able to feed many villages, and in time it came to support a huge civilization

The Nile also gave ancient Egypt a natural roadway. Villages could trade with one another easily up and down the river. Boats heading north downstream floated with the current. Going upstream, to the south, they could use sails. Winds generally blew from the Mediterranean in a southerly direction, so it was fairly easy to sail up the Nile. After about 700 miles, boats would reach the first cataract, or set of rapids. It was harder to travel beyond the cataracts. But these also acted as barriers to anyone coming down the Nile to attack Egypt.

Source Information: This is a secondary source document about the role of the Nile River in the history of ancient Egypt. A secondary source is an account of past events written later by someone who did not experience or take part in those events. This passage is an adapted and expanded version of Lesson 1 in Jonathan Burack's *Ancient Egypt*, History Unfolding (Culver City, CA: MindSparks, 2009).

Assessment Questions

1. According to Document 1, what benefits did the Nile bring to people in ancient Egypt? Cite details from the document in your answer.
2. What does Document 2 add to Document 1 to better explain why ancient Egyptians “looked forward” to the Nile’s floods? Cite specific details from Document 2 to support your answer.

Assessment 7 *Advanced Level*

Geography and Ancient Egypt

★ *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

- 7. (9–10)** Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.
- 7. (11–12)** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

★ *Using This Assessment*

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Assessment 7 is designed to measure students' ability to master the skills described in Common Core History/Social Studies Reading Standard 7 for grades 9–10 and 11–12 combined. It asks students to do something historians must do all the time—integrate evidence found in a wide variety of primary sources presented in many visual and textual formats. It also asks them to judge the relative strengths and weaknesses of visual as compared with written sources.

★ *Evaluating Student Responses to This Assessment*

Acceptable answers to the assessment question should see that Document 1 offers evidence of Egypt's long-lasting stability, indicating very long eras of unity interspersed with much shorter intermediate eras when Egypt was divided. Document 2 focuses on several geographic factors making for long-term stability and unity in Egypt—the regular floods that kept land fertile and made it possible to support a large population; the ease of travel up and down the river, which helped unify the country; and the protective desert on either side that helped to shield Egypt from outside attacks. Document 3 confirms these points visually by conveying a sense of how green and fertile the Nile Valley and delta were and how vast the desert stretches were that kept Egypt isolated and safe. Therefore, any thesis statement using all three of these sources should make some claim about the relationship of Egypt's long and relatively stable past with the geographical factors that contributed to that long-term stability.

Geography and Ancient Egypt

Directions: This exercise asks you to study three documents carefully and answer one question focused on what these sources have in common. In order to better understand the documents and their importance as historical evidence, read and make use of the source information located just below or next to each document itself. When you have studied the documents and the source information, answer the assessment question that follows.

CCS Standard 7: (9–10) Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text. **(11–12)** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Document 1: A Secondary Source

Time Line of Egyptian History	
2950–2575 BCE	Early Dynastic Period: <i>Egypt is unified for the first time</i>
2575–2150 BCE	Old Kingdom: <i>The largest pyramids are built</i>
2150–1975 BCE	First Intermediate Period: <i>A time of disunity</i>
1975–1640 BCE	Middle Kingdom: <i>Egypt is reunified.</i>
1640–1540 BCE	Second Intermediate Period: <i>A time of disunity and invasion by outsiders</i>
1540–1075 BCE	New Kingdom: <i>Egypt is reunified. Pharaohs build tombs into the Valley of Kings mountainside</i>
1075–715 BCE	Third Intermediate Period

Source Information: This time line of Egyptian history (the dates are approximate) shows the long periods when a unified state existed (the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms) and intermediate times when ancient Egypt was not united. The time line was adapted from the table in *The Human Past: World Prehistory & the Development of Human Societies*, edited by Chris Scarre (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), p. 371.

Document 2: A Secondary Source

The Nile River was the central geographic feature of ancient Egypt. It was along this river that this civilization grew up over 5,000 years ago. Among large rivers, the Nile was unusual. Its annual flood occurred in a very regular way that actually made life pleasant for people living along the river. Each year, the Nile flood came right on time and left behind a new layer of rich soil. This soil meant the same lands would not wear out even as it was farmed regularly over many centuries. A huge surplus of grain, livestock, and other basic goods could be produced. This helped to make ancient Egypt a relatively safe, comfortable land.

On either side of the huge river, the fertile lands suddenly turn to desert. In some places, this change is so sudden that a person can place one foot on fertile soil and the other on the barren desert sands. As a result, the rich farmland along the river supported many villages and cities, while the deserts on either side acted as a natural barrier, protecting Egypt against attacks from enemies. The compactness of agricultural settlement and the ease of travel up and down the river also made a unified state easier to build and maintain. Times of division and instability did occur, but much longer eras of unity under the pharaoh and his administrators were the norm.

Source Information: This document is a secondary source exploring some reasons for the comfortable and stable order that so often existed in ancient Egypt. This particular historical account was written in 2014 specifically for use as part of this activity.

Document 3: A Secondary Source



Photo source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Source Information: A NASA satellite photo showing the rich, green fertile land along the Nile and in its delta, as well as the dry, relatively unsettled desert regions around it.

Assessment Question

1. Construct a thesis statement or claim about Egypt that could be supported by evidence from *all three* of these sources. Explain how the sources support the statement you come up with.