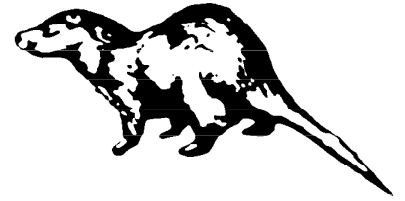


# NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



## A WORLD HISTORY STUDY

## ANCIENT EGYPT: BUILDING THE PYRAMIDS

### TEACHERS' NOTES

This was the seventh lesson in a term's topic on Ancient Egypt with a large Year 4 class. The class had already covered everyday life, the Nile, farming, homes, hieroglyphs and mummies. I planned this lesson on pyramid-building to cater for a range of learning styles and abilities, so that all the children were included and were given opportunities to learn in their preferred style. The lesson therefore incorporated visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning activities.

There are links with science and maths.

#### **Year group/class**

Year 4, 34 very mixed ability children. Two of the children have statements of Special Educational Needs.

#### **Teaching time**

Just over one hour.

#### **Learning objectives**

For the children to:

- appreciate the magnitude of the task of building the pyramids
- understand the processes involved in building a pyramid.

#### **Key question**

The pyramids: how were they built?

## Resources

Candles

Skipping ropes

Worksheet: *A mammoth task*, taken from: Richardson, L & Newton, P (1995) *Brain Waves: Ancient Egypt*, Dunstable: Folens Publishers

or Resources sheet downloaded from <http://www.primaryhistory.org/>

Topic books about Ancient Egypt

see also

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/great\\_pyramid\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/great_pyramid_01.shtml)

Scissors, glue, colouring pencils (optional)

Access to table and carpet

## Safety notes

Children must not try quarrying or cutting rock for themselves! They could hurt themselves badly.

Take care that children do not strain themselves when modelling the transport of blocks of stone.

## The teaching

**Episode 1** *Focus:* Introducing the key question through atmospheric questioning and discussion.

We began with a whole class session. With the lights low and candles burning (safely out of reach!) I led a class discussion on how the pyramids were built. My purpose was to assess the pupils' current ideas and to build on their prior knowledge. I did this by giving an outline of how historians think the pyramids were built, and some of the evidence for current theories. I wanted the atmosphere in the room to reflect the awe and wonder often inspired by the pyramids.

All the children were actively engaged in the discussion, keen to add their own theories and ideas. Areas we discussed were: finding north (how and why); quarrying the stones; transporting the stones; positioning the stones; and covering the finished pyramid with granite.

### Episode 2

*Focus: Simulation – pulling blocks of stone*

We switched on the lights and I asked for volunteers to demonstrate how large blocks of stone might have been moved.

We carefully turned a table up-side down on the carpet and attached skipping ropes to the legs (near the floor). Then as many volunteers as

possible crammed onto the table to increase its weight. The rest of the volunteers pulled on the skipping ropes.

We had to increase their number several times and work out a pulling system before the ‘block’ finally moved – with a big cheer from Pharaoh’s overseers (the spectators), the block and the Egyptian workers.

The workers’ pulling system – knowing when to pull, so they all pulled together – was a rhythmic chant. It evolved quite spontaneously.

### **Episode 3**

*Focus: Discussing and sequencing the pyramid-building process.*

I then handed out the worksheet (*A mammoth task*) and explained the task to the class. The sheet contained drawings, with captions, of eight activities involved in building a pyramid, arranged randomly. The children were to cut out the drawings and glue them into their books with the activities in chronological order.

The classroom assistant helped the SEN children with cutting out the pictures and reading the captions. More able children who finished quickly were armed with a variety of topic books and asked to find out *why* the pyramids were built.

(Alternatively, you could use the sheet supplied with this lesson. Ask the children to discuss, in pairs,

- how each activity was carried out
- what would be a sensible order in which to do the tasks.

No-one really knows how the pyramids were built – these are just suggestions. Children could illustrate each item.)

After about 20 minutes all the children had reached a stage where we could talk through the pictured activities and the order in which we thought they had been carried out. I was pleased that not all the children had sequenced the activities in the same order, and could defend their choices. In the discussion they concluded that it didn’t really matter if the Egyptians found North and marked out the four corners of the pyramid first, or if they went to the quarry first to begin cutting stone.

### **Episode 4**

*Focus: Brainstorm – reviewing our learning.*

To end the lesson we held a plenary session on the carpet. We brainstormed what we had learned. I recorded the children’s contributions on a flipchart. We reviewed what they had known

beforehand and what was new to them or different from what they had initially thought.

I was pleased that the children seemed to have grasped the wonder of the building of the pyramids by ordinary Egyptians with no access to bulldozers or other modern machinery. They also seemed to appreciate the particular difficulties involved in moving large blocks of stone with only people and ropes.

### Learning outcomes

The children:

- appreciated the magnitude of the task of building the pyramids
- gained an understanding of the processes involved in building a pyramid
- were able, through discussion and debate, to work out and justify a sequence of pyramid-building activities.

### Reflection/evaluation

The children thoroughly enjoyed the lesson; they were enthusiastic and fully engaged, so I was able to sustain a good working pace throughout.

My planning for different learning styles worked well:

- The *visual* learners learned from watching the block-pulling simulation and from the pictorial (or drawing) task.
- The *auditory* learners were catered for in the discussions at the beginning of the lesson, in Episode 3 and in the end-of-lesson plenary.
- The *kinaesthetic* learners gained their understanding through the simulation, where they physically had to pull the ‘block of stone’. They also learned by manually arranging the pyramid-building processes in order.

### Nuffield Primary History project

**General editor:** Jacqui Dean

**Author of this unit:** Candice Bell

© in this format Nuffield Primary History 2003

downloaded from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)