

# CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION

## SAMPLE LESSON

CityYouth: Ancient History

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### Ancient Egypt

### Lesson 2

## Promise and Problems of the Nile

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Describe the Nile River system in Egypt.
- Explain the benefits and problems caused by the Nile.
- Explain how the Egyptians resolved these problems.
- Create and analyze options to a hypothetical problem caused by the Nile.
- Select the best option based on stated criteria.

### PREPARATION

**Handout 2A: The Promise and Problems of the Nile**—1 per student

**Handout 2B: Advisors to the Mayor**—1 per student

**Handout 2C: Crown Middle School**—Optional activity—1 per student

### Overview

This lesson examines the benefits and challenges the Nile brought to the people of ancient Egypt. First, students discuss what problems the United States faces today. Then they read and discuss an article on the problems and promises that the Nile River posed to ancient Egypt. Finally, in small groups, students role play advisors to the mayor of an ancient Egyptian city by analyzing a hypothetical problem on the Nile, brainstorming options, and deciding on which option to recommend to the mayor.

### STANDARDS ADDRESSED

**California History–Social Science Standard 6.2: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of . . . Egypt . . . .** (1) Locate and describe the major river systems and discuss the physical settings that supported permanent settlement and early civilizations.

**National World History Standard 3: Understands the major characteristics of civilization and the development of civilizations in . . . Egypt . . . .** (1) Understands influences on the development of various civilizations in the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE (e.g., how the natural environment of the . . . Nile . . . shaped the early development of civilization; different characteristics of urban development in . . . Egypt . . . ).

## Vocabulary

famine      granaries  
highlands    levees

## Procedure

### A. Focus Discussion

1. Tell students that the Greek historian Herodotus called Egypt “the gift of the Nile.” Ask students: What do you think he meant by this?

Explain that the Nile brought Egypt water and rich soil for farming and that its civilization was very successful and lasted almost 3,000 years.

2. Point out that, like all civilizations, the Egyptians still faced many problems. Hold a brief discussion by asking: What are some problems that the United States faces today?
3. Tell students that they are going to learn about some of the problems that ancient Egyptians had to deal with.

### B. Reading and Discussion—Promise and Problems of the Nile

1. Explain that the problems had to do with the Nile. Distribute **Handout 2A: Promise and Problems of the Nile**. Ask students to look for the following as they read:
  - The benefits the Nile brought to Egyptians.
  - The problems the river posed.
  - How the Egyptians resolved these problems.
2. When students finish reading, hold a discussion on the promise and problems of the Nile. Questions to raise:
  - How would you describe the Nile River?
  - What benefits did the Nile give to Egypt?
  - What problems did the Nile pose to Egypt?
  - How did the Egyptians resolve these problems?

### C. Small-Group Activity—Advisors to the Mayor

1. Tell students that they are going to get a chance to decide a dispute in ancient Egypt. Ask students to recall that the Nile overflowed its banks every year. Explain the following:

Egyptians used stone markers to mark off each person’s land. After each year’s flood, royal surveyors used these markers to determine who owned what land and how much tax each landowner owed to the pharaoh. (The tax was based on the amount of land the person owned.)
2. Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Distribute **Handout 2B: Advisors to the Mayor** to each student. Review the instructions on the handout and answer any questions students may have. Give them time to complete the activity.

3. When they are ready, tell students that you are the mayor and that you are going to call on each group to give advice. Call on a group and ask for its advice. Ask students why they think this is the best decision. Call on other groups to give their advice. Hold a class discussion with you role-playing the mayor and questioning what should be done. Conclude by making a decision and giving your reasons for it.

### **Extension Activity—Crown Middle School**

As an option, have students do this additional activity in which they examine a hypothetical current school problem, brainstorm options, and decide on a course of action.

1. Tell students that when the Egyptians solved their problems they might have gone through common problem solving steps. Write the following steps on the board and explain them:
  - a. Discuss the problem.
  - b. Brainstorm options for solving the problem.
  - c. Discuss the options.
  - d. Decide on the best option.
2. Explain that students are going to get a chance to resolve a problem that many middle schools have. Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Distribute **Handout 2C: Crown Middle School** to each student. Review the instructions on the handout and answer any questions students may have.
3. When students finish, call on a group to give their solution to the problem and the reasons favoring this solution. Ask other groups for their solutions and rationales. Hold a discussion on the pros and cons of the proposed solutions.

If appropriate, after the discussion, have students vote on what they believe is the best solution.

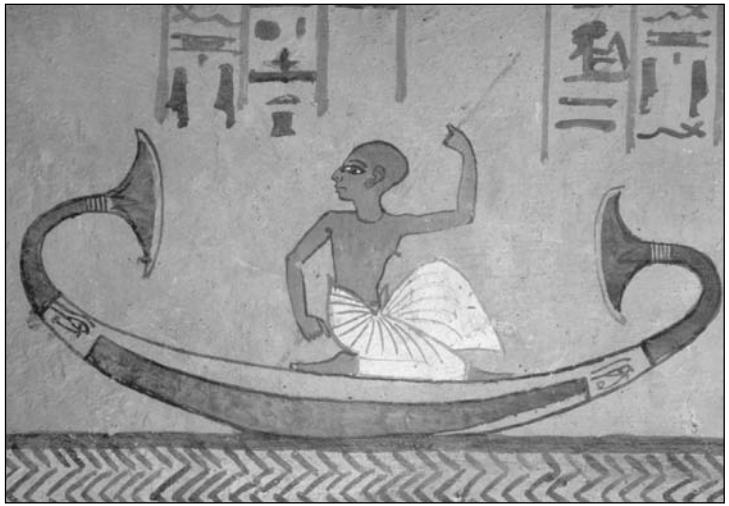
4. Hold a discussion to debrief the activity by asking: What do you think was the hardest part of finding a solution to this problem?

## Promise and Problems of the Nile

Ancient Egypt depended on the Nile River. It served as the main way to travel. It provided water to irrigate the crops. Every year it overflowed its banks and enriched the soil. Its waters were home to many fish and birds that Egyptians used for food.

The Nile is the longest river in the world—4,160 miles long. It flows north from the middle of Africa, goes through Egypt, and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. It begins as two separate rivers, the White Nile and the Blue Nile. The two rivers join south of Egypt and flow as one. About 100 miles from the Mediterranean, the river splits into many branches. This triangular, marshy region is called the Nile Delta. The delta was known as Lower Egypt. The rest of Egypt was Upper Egypt.

The ancient Egyptians did not even know where the Nile began. Nor did they know that the heavy rains in the African highlands



The Nile was ancient Egypt's main highway. Many Nile riverboats were made from papyrus, a reed that grew along the great river's shores.

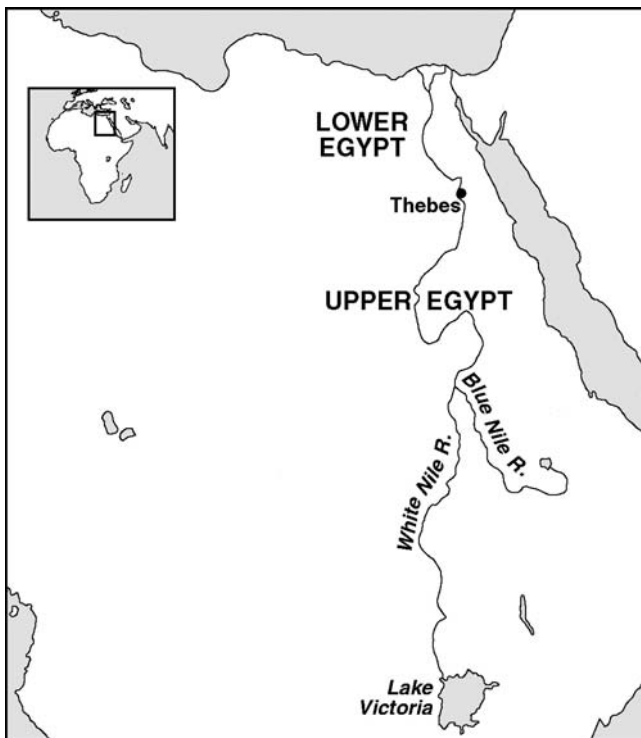
thousands of miles away made the Nile overflow each year.

Still, they studied the river carefully. By keeping track of the seasons, they could predict when the yearly flood would begin. At different points on the Nile, they set up measuring stations. Each contained a device to find out how high the Nile rose each year. The devices were called nilometers. Based on these measures, the Egyptians knew how much of the Nile Valley would flood. From this, they could predict how good the harvest would be.

If the Nile flood was low, it could mean a lean year or even famine. To prevent famine, Egyptians stored surplus grain in granaries.

### Pronunciation Key

nilometers (nye LOM uh terz)  
pharaoh (FAIR oh)  
papyrus (puh PIE rus)



The Nile is the longest river in the world. Ancient Egyptians did not know where the great river began.

If the Nile was too high, it could flood the cities on the river. The Egyptians worked hard to control the flood of the Nile. To protect cities, they built levees (dirt walls). To get water to cities farther off the river and to fields farther inland, they built canals. Even so, sometimes flood waters destroyed buildings and villages.

The annual flooding caused another big problem. Each year the flood put thousands of farmers out of work. Until the fields dried, farmers could not plant or work in the fields. The floods lasted for several months, and farmers had nothing to do. Early in Egyptian history, the pharaoh came up with a solution for the problem.

The thousands of laid-off workers were put to work building the pyramids. Thousands worked cutting and hauling stones to build the pharaohs' massive tombs. Later, when the pharaohs no longer built pyramids, the workers built temples, cities, and monuments.

Most historians today believe that the workers on these projects were well-fed and well-treated. They also believe that the workers felt what they were doing was important. To them, the pharaoh was a god on earth. By working on his pyramid or temple, they were honoring their gods and might benefit in the afterlife. For them, working for the pharaoh was an important time in their lives and a public service.

### For Discussion

1. How would you describe the Nile River?
2. What benefits did the Nile give to Egypt?
3. What problems did the Nile pose to Egypt?
4. How did the Egyptians resolve these problems?

## Advisors to the Mayor

Imagine that you are advisors to the mayor of a city in ancient Egypt. A dispute has arisen that the mayor must decide. You are going to give the mayor advice on what the right decision should be.

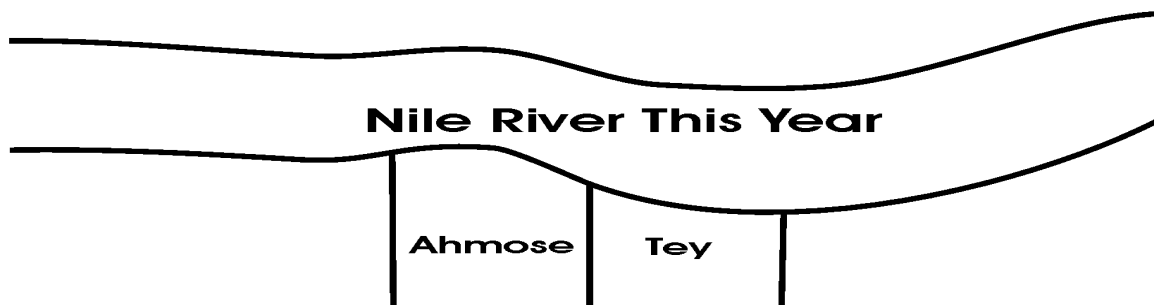
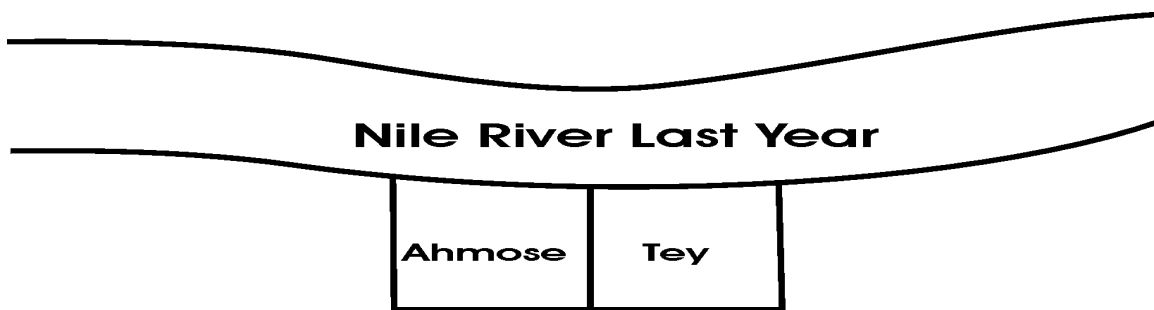
The dispute began after the yearly flood of the Nile. It concerns two neighbors, Ahmose (AH mohs) and Tey (TAY). They both owned land right next to the Nile. This year's flood washed away some of Tey's land and changed the course of the river.

When the royal surveyors came out, they found that Ahmose's land area had increased by 20

percent. They found that Tey had lost 25 percent of his land area.

**Tey** says his land, since it is 25 percent smaller, will produce 25 percent less grain. He has asked Ahmose to give him the land he gained because it is really Tey's. Ahmose has refused. Tey is furious. He notes that almost all the land he lost went to Ahmose. He has gone to other neighbors along the Nile. They support Tey and are angry at Ahmose.

**Ahmose** says he has done nothing wrong. He points out that since he has more land this year, he will pay a greater tax (which is based



on the amount of land surveyed each year). He notes that he is a distant relative of the pharaoh. He says he will defend his land against Tey and the neighbors if they try to take it from him.

The dispute has come before the mayor. The mayor must report his decision to the vizier, the chief advisor to the pharaoh.

The mayor must base his decision on two factors:

1. What will be best for pharaoh? (Pharaoh is interested in collecting taxes and in keeping the peace.)
2. What is fairest? (When deciding the case, the mayor will wear a gold pendant of Ma'at, the goddess of truth and justice.)

The mayor has presented you with these options, but you can think of another option:

1. Let Ahmose keep his new land and pay 20 percent more taxes. Cut Tey's taxes by 25 percent.
2. Give Tey 20 percent of Ahmose's land. Let Ahmose decide which 20 percent to give Tey. Ahmose's taxes will stay the same and Tey's will go down 5 percent.
3. Stay out of the dispute.

Decide on the best option and be prepared to give your advice to the mayor.

## Crown Middle School

Imagine that you are on the student council at Crown Middle School. Last year, the new sixth graders had a big problem. They said they were scared of the new school. They were afraid that bigger kids would tease and pick on them. They didn't know their classmates (because they were coming from several different elementary schools). The change from elementary school to middle school was hard. The student council has decided to do something so that next year's class of sixth graders will feel more comfortable and welcome.

Your group is the student council. As the council, do the following:

1. Discuss the problem.
2. Brainstorm options. (What can be done about the problem?) Make a list of options.

List three options here:

- A.
- B.
- C.

3. Discuss the options. (What are the pros and cons of each option?)
4. Decide on the best option. (Which option will most likely resolve the problem?)

Tell exactly what you plan to do:

5. Explain why you think this is the best thing to do:

6. Prepare to report your decision and reasons for it to the class.