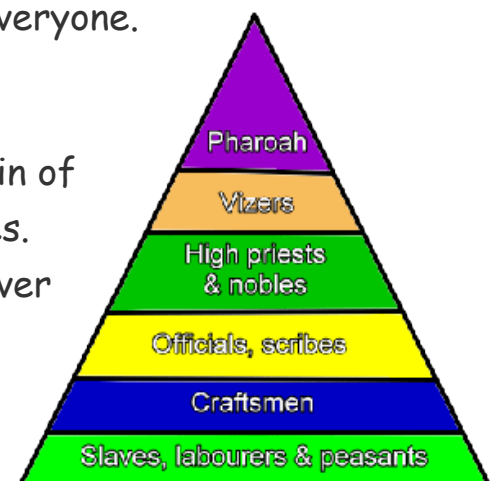


Egyptian Hierarchy

Ancient Egypt was a successful culture for over 3,000 years. In the early years there were two 'kingdoms' that operated like two different countries. Each had a ruler and their own religious beliefs and ways of doing things. After the two kingdoms were united, they became a lot more organised and over the years developed a system of what is called a 'hierarchy'. This was a class system and each person living in ancient Egypt knew where they existed in the system and had specific rights of that class.

The Egyptian hierarchy was a lot like the pyramids that they built. At the very top of this social structure was the pharaoh and their gods. Since the pharaoh was thought to be a god, he took his place next to all of the others. The gods were thought to be in control of the flooding of the Nile each year, as well as death and famine. The pharaoh was also in charge of the armies and any laws that were decided upon were the responsibility of the pharaoh. All farmers paid taxes every year. Instead of money, they paid in amounts of grain that was stored in warehouses that belonged to the pharaoh. In case of drought and famine, this was the grain that would be used to feed everyone.

Under the pharaoh and the other gods, there was a chain of command to help the pharaoh accomplish all of his duties. There was a chief minister call a 'vizier' that watched over tax collection, and monitored the government records that were kept by the scribes. Along with the vizier were the various nobles that held government jobs and the priests of the temples. The nobles became wealthy as they kept a part of the tax normally given to the pharaoh as well as some of the tributes that were given by the people to the gods.

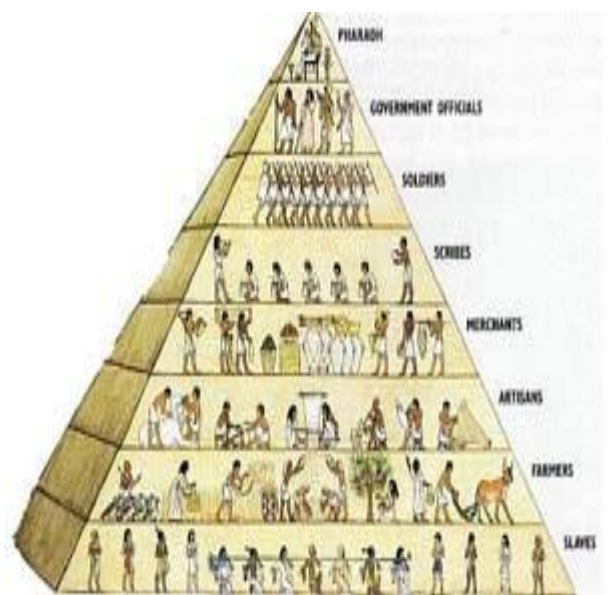


The next level down contained the scribes, craftsmen, artisans, and traders. The soldiers fought in the armies during wartime but in peacetime many supervised the peasants, slaves and farmers and were also part of the building process of palaces, pyramids and other structures. The craftsman, artisans,

traders and even physicians were considered the middle class of ancient Egypt. Storekeepers and merchants were also included in this class.

The bottom of the social structure contained the farmers and beneath them, the slaves. Farmers took care of the fields and crops, cared for the animals, maintained the water canals and reservoirs, did stone quarry work and built monuments to the pharaoh. They paid high taxes to the pharaoh, sometimes as much as sixty percent of what they grew. Slaves were people that may have been war prisoners or criminals. Slavery became a major part of the ancient Egyptian community and they were forced to do whatever labour that was needed by the nobles and the pharaoh.

A son or daughter took on the social class or 'hierarchy' of their parents. There were small possibilities of moving into the next higher class. Some farmers and peasants saved money to send their children to the trade and village schools for better education and to learn a specific trade. The schools were run by artisans and priests. If a boy did well in school, he could be raised into the scribe class and possibly go on to better government jobs. It was not a common practice to send the girls to school, but some that attended did well and even became physicians. Moving into the next class up meant an increase in money and they could help themselves and their families.



The social structure of ancient Egypt may not have sounded fair when we think of our lives today, but during those days it was a requirement for survival and the success of the society.

Egyptian Hierarchy

Explain what hierarchy means to the Ancient Egyptians?

Why do you think this was a requirement for the survival and success of the society in Ancient Egyptian times?

Do you think this was a fair way to live? Explain why?

Extension: If you lived back in the Ancient Egyptian times, where would Mrs Young and Miss Spicer be located in the hierarchy? Why?

Challenge: Where would you like to fall in the hierarchy and why?
