

# **The Gift of the Nile: Egypt and its River Contributed by Cynthia Ryan**

**Suggested Grade Level: 6-8**  
**Class Length: Two 50-minute sessions**

**Inquiry Question: Why is Egypt the Gift of the Nile?**

## **Preview of Main Ideas:**

This lesson is part of a unit study of Africa. The unit of Africa will take approximately eight weeks. The study of North Africa will be about two weeks. This lesson is part of the study of North Africa and highlights the country of Egypt and the river that gives it life; the Nile River.

The study begins with students using physical and political maps to gain understanding of location and characteristics of this region of the world. Thematic maps lead to an awareness of environments, climate, natural hazards, populations, and economies of the Nile River Valley as well as settlement patterns. The second part of this study examines how human interaction with the environment created Lake Nasser and has altered the annual flooding of the Nile River Valley with the construction of the Aswan High Dam. The final part of the study explores the present conditions of the Nile River Valley and the implications for the future. How do the benefits gained balance against the cost?

## **Purpose:**

To familiarize students with the connection between the physical environments and human settlements and the impact civilizations have on their region.

## **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Describe the Nile River and its importance to this region
- Identify the contributions it made to the development of ancient Egyptian civilization
- Compare and contrast ancient and modern settlements in the Nile Region
- Describe the benefits of controlling the Nile River with the Aswan High Dam
- List costs (consequences) of controlling the Nile River

## **Standards Addressed:**

**Standard 1.** How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

**Standard 4.** The physical and human characteristics of places.

**Standard 12.** The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement.

**Standard 14.** How human actions modify the physical environment.

**Standard 18.** How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future.

## **Geographical Skills**

### **Asking Geographic Questions:**

Where is the Nile River located? How has it affected settlement patterns? How has settlement along the Nile River Valley affected the Nile River?

### **Organizing Geographic Information:**

Create a relief map showing the Nile River Valley. Use a compass rose, and symbols for countries, cities, cataracts, dam, reservoir, and delta appropriately.

**Analyzing Geographic Information:**

Examine, interpret, and explain why settlement occurred along the Nile River Valley, and predict some future consequences that result from this settlement.

**Answering Geographic Questions:**

Generalize and connect human interaction on the Nile River with that on the Aral Sea previously studied.

**Geographic Vocabulary/Concepts:**

Basin irrigation, perennial irrigation, reservoir, fellaheen, cataract, delta, fertile, silt

**Materials:**

Family size pound cake

White frosting

Food coloring or other color frostings – yellow, blue and green

Orange and pink sprinkles

Large box

Wrapping paper

Ribbon

Card with hieroglyphics for a greeting

Transparency: physical and political map of Africa

Foam board

Play dough

Toothpicks

Self stick labels

Plastic dishpan to hold water

Plastic cups to hold water for each group

Marbles

“zip lock” bags to hold map symbols for each group

**Procedure:****1. Starting the Lesson**

As the students enter the room, give them a piece of a puzzle or picture that shows an artifact from ancient Egypt. Tell the students they are to sit with others in the room who will make their picture complete. Then give students a trivia quiz on the Nile River.

Exchange and correct papers. The group with the most correct answers will receive a “gift”. Have students open the wrapped gift box. Inside is a pound cake decorated to represent the Nile River Valley, from its source to its mouth. To avoid a mutiny, explain that all of the students will be able to enjoy some cake later during the lesson. Explain that Herodotus, a Greek philosopher, said, “Egypt is the gift of the Nile.” Ask why do they think he said this? (As indicated in the video, the task of creating a map on the cake may be given to the students instead of using playdough as indicated in the next part of the lesson).

**2. Questioning and Mapping:**

Show transparencies of both physical and political maps of Africa, focusing on Egypt and elicit questions and answers about what can be observed from the information on the maps. Location – relative and absolute, direction, scale, landforms, and bodies of water. Show transparency of the Nile River Delta from Landsat satellite and the Aswan High

Dam. Use vocabulary words: basin irrigation, perennial irrigation, reservoir, cataract, delta, fertile, silt. Ask what can be observed from these photographs. What effect on the Nile River does the dam have? How about the delta?

### 3. Constructing relief map:

- A. Review the definition of a relief map. Ask students what they would need to construct a relief map of the Nile River Valley. Encourage them to develop the following list: (Use transparencies of both physical and political maps if necessary.)

**Water** – Nile River, Blue Nile, White Nile, Lake Tana , Lake Victoria, Lake Nasser

**Desert** – Sahara, Nubian Desert, Libyan Desert

**Highlands** – Ethiopian Plateau, Rift Valley

**Vegetation** – desert, cropland

**Delta** – mouth of the Nile River

**Cataracts** – six along the Nile River

Include the following political features:

**Cities** – Cairo, Alexandria, (Luxor), Khartoum

**Historical sites** – Sphinx and Pyramids, Valley of the Kings

- B. Divide the class into smaller groups to construct their relief map of the Nile River Valley. Each group will need:  
**Foam board** – with an outline of Africa and the Nile River  
**Play dough** – Green, yellow, brown, and blue  
**5 zip lock bags** – that contain markers for countries, cities, bodies of water, the delta, and historical sites  
**5 fact sheets** – one for each baggie to give students five facts for each of the above categories contained inside their bag.
- C. Instruct each group to construct a relief map of the Nile River Valley as directed by the GROUP INFORMATION SHEET provided in their “kit.” They are to work together cooperatively, following the steps outlined on their group information sheet.
- D. Reconvene as a class to discuss what construction has taken place and make observations about the Nile River and its valley. The discussion should include the physical features and landscape of the Nile River Valley, the effect on human settlement, the development of settlements, and their impact on the future of the Nile River. Students should demonstrate an awareness of this region as a result of their individual fact sheets and their exchange of knowledge during the construction period.

### 4. Concluding the lesson:

Identify past and future advantages and costs of life along the Nile River and its valley. Use a chart identifying things as “positive” or “negative” to pull ideas together. Show a poster with a picture of Napoleon and his quote: “Under a good administration the Nile gains on the desert; under a bad one, the desert gains on the Nile.” Ask what is meant by this? Under what conditions does the Nile win? Under what conditions does the Nile lose?

## **5. Extending the lesson:**

### **What do you want to be when you grow up?**

Assign students a role: farmer, environmentalist, businessperson, fisherman, laborer, archeologist, or government official of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. Give each a “fact card” connecting their job with the Nile River. Based on what they have discovered about the Nile River and the “fact” cards related to each occupation, lead them in a discussion about today’s life along the Nile River. Encourage strong role-playing and points of view. Have each student read the “fact” on their card and tell whether it is a benefit or a cost to the Nile River Valley. They will post their fact on the chart placed in front of the class in the appropriate column labeled “Positive” or “Negative.” This assessment should show knowledge of the physical region as well as the effect of the population settled along the Nile River Valley.

### **What connections can you make around the world?**

Use the Aral Sea irrigation project in Northern Eurasia, the Three Gorges Dam in China, and other dam and irrigation projects to make connections and use critical thinking skills to discuss irrigation, hydroelectric power, relocation of people, ancient archaeological sites disturbed by construction, soil salinity, fertility of soil, and how changes to one region can impact another.

### **Here we go again!**

Rework the relief map to refine what was shown about this region. Compare this to other cultural hearths such as Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, the Ganges Delta, and the Wei/Huang He Rivers. Ask what do they have in common? These settlements grew up around a dependable source of water and allowed great civilizations to thrive. What have we gained from these civilizations? List inventions, etc.

### **Now you’re talking!**

Use the Positive and negative chart to spark a debate/conflict resolution discussion about the future of the Nile River and population so densely settled along it and so dependent upon it.

### **Should we or shouldn’t we?**

Create a commission to study an imaginary river. Create a map and charge students with a mission to decide whether to give permission to construct a dam for flood control, irrigation, and hydroelectric power. Various points of view should be given to the directors of the bank that has been approached to grant a loan to build the dam. An anthropological, engineering, environmental, economic, and archaeological report should be filed with pros and cons.

### **Ancient Egypt**

Archaeology, architecture, art, mathematics, etc.

### **Current Events**

Connections and links to the past and future.

### **History**

Timelines of ancient Egypt or recent era.

### **Science**

Study the salinity of soil with lab experiments/environmental issues.

**Language Arts**

Write geopoems, folk tales, acrostics, fables, about this region, reflecting the past, present and future.

**RESOURCES:**

National Geographic, vol. 191, No. 1, January 1997. "The Imperiled Nile Delta."

National Geographic, vol. 192, No. 3, September 1997. "China's Three Gorges."

National Geographic, vol. 177, No. 2, February 1990. "A Soviet Sea Lies Dying."