

Yale 2013 PIER Summer Institutes

Sponsored by the Yale Programs in International Educational Resources (PIER)

TITLE OF LESSON: Ancient Egyptian Voices

Author(s): Anne C. Maier

School: Brighton High School, Rochester, New York

Subject Area: English (semester course entitled Myth and the Modern World)

Grade Level(s): 12

Time Frame to Allow for Unit: 2-4 days

Introduction: Brief Description of the Lesson

This lesson serves as a preface to the introduction of Egyptian gods and goddesses. Its objective is to allow students to recognize the varying literary genres and expressive voices in the Egyptian story that stand apart from the myths themselves. Through close readings of various excerpts, students will gather evidence that informs their imagined view of the ancient Egyptians. Subsequently, their evidence and conclusions will aid in their prediction of what constitutes the basic elements of the religious belief system of ancient Egypt. And in keeping with one of the running themes of the course, students will be mindful of the extent to which the attitudes and concerns of our modern voices are essentially echoes of ancient ones.

Geographic Connections: Related to Summer Institute Themes

The content of the lesson is influenced primarily from lectures on the history and literature of ancient Egypt. The literary selections represent writings primarily from the Middle Kingdom (one from the New Kingdom) in various areas of the country such as Herakleopolis, Memphis, and Nubia. Due to one of the objectives of the lesson, it was important to select excerpts that do not include specific names of gods and goddesses.

Vocabulary: Terms, Concepts

Note: In keeping with Close Reading strategies, no background information about the excerpts is shared with the students beforehand; consequently, at the end of the lesson, the following terms and concepts will be introduced along with basic information about the history of each text: Middle Kingdom, Ma'at as a concept, dramatic monologue, stela, vernacular, scribe

Stage 1 – Desired Results

Common Core Content Standard(s):

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Understanding (s)/Goals:

Students will understand that:

- Like today, the ancient Egyptians produced a variety of literary genres
- Like today, social, political, spiritual, and personal values are revealed through the literature of a culture.
- Identifying cultural values of an ancient civilization informs that of modern perspectives
- Characteristics of the style and content of ancient texts are not always limited to that culture; that the literature of a specific society reflects archetypes.

Essential Question(s) Related to Theme(s):

1. How does literature, both fiction and non-fiction, reflect the values of a society?
2. What societal values from an ancient civilization such as Egypt are ones you understand to be applicable to the modern world?
3. How are the values of one culture reflected in another?
4. Are there essential human values that exist regardless of geographical and cultural differences?

Student Objectives (Outcomes):

Students will be able to: Use close reading strategies, discussion, and written expression to establish their impressions of the people of ancient Egypt, their ways of life, and their values that will ultimately lead to a basic understanding and appreciation of the ancient Egyptian cosmogony and pantheon.

Stage 2 – Assessment Evidence

Performance Task(s):

- Close reading (passage analysis) and annotation
- Small group collaboration
- Large group reporting
- Note taking

Other Evidence:

Follow-up writing task to assess students' abilities to comprehend, interpret, synthesize, substantiate, and predict in clearly written prose.

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Learning Activities:

- The teacher will communicate the rationale, objectives, and expectations of the lesson.
- Students will be arranged in study groups of 3-4 members
- Each group will receive copies of an excerpt from ancient Egyptian literature
- Each group member will silently read and annotate the assigned text
- Group members will then share their observations with one another and clarify vocabulary if necessary.
- Each group will then be asked to address a variety of questions that will aid in meeting the lesson's objective.
- Depending on class enrollment (one section of this course can range from approximately 14 – 28 students) representatives from each group will then report a summary of what was read along with their conclusions about how the text reflects way of life and values. Students in other groups will listen and take notes in order to gather as much information as possible on the subject. Or groups will merge with other groups to share before representatives report to the larger group.
- Once information is reported, general discussion will continue in order to make further observations, ask questions, and offer general conclusions. (study group work, group reporting, and general discussion could take up to two full class periods)
- Each student will then receive copies of all the excerpts for reference as he or she prepares for the following day's writing assignment.
- In the writing lab, students will be asked to address two questions as a way of reflecting on what they learned from the literary excerpts. They will be expected to refer to their notes and use the excerpts as needed. (one class period will be permitted for this writing task)
- The teacher, after assessing the written assignment, will report her findings to the class: what values tended to dominate the students' perception of ancient Egyptians and what logical predictions emerged regarding ancient Egyptian religious beliefs.
- Clarification and historical information about the excerpts will serve a conclusion to the lesson and a transition to the focus on elements that comprise Egyptian mythology.

LESSON MATERIALS

Excerpt #1

There was once a man whose name was Khunanup. He was a peasant of Sekhet-Hemat, and he had a wife named Merit. Now this peasant said to his wife, "Behold, I am going down to Egypt in order to bring provisions from there for my children. Go and measure for me the barley which is in the storehouse, that which remains from last year's barley." (His wife did as he had requested), and then he set out for her six measures of barley. Then the peasant said to his wife, "Behold, there are twenty measures of barley as food for you and your children. Now make these six measures of barley into bread and beer for me as daily rations, that I may live on them."

So the peasant then set out for Egypt, having loaded his donkeys with reeds, herbs, natron, salt, wood, plants, pigeons, berries, and seeds, a full abundance of all the finest products of Sekhet-Hemat.

The peasant continued on his way, traveling southward in the direction of Neni-nesut, and arrived at the district of Per-Fefi to the north of Medenit. There he encountered a man standing on the river bank whose name was Nemtynakhte. He was the son of a man whose name was Isry, and he was a subordinate of the Chief Steward Rensi, the son of Meru. Then this Nemtynakhte, when he had seen the peasant's donkeys which greatly delighted his heart, spoke saying, "Would that I had some kind of charm endowed with power through which I might confiscate the possessions of this peasant!" Now the house of this Nemtynakhte was at the juncture of the beginning of a narrow path, one which was not broad enough to exceed the width of a loincloth. One side of it was bounded by the water, and the other side by the barley. Then Nemtynakhte said to his servant, "Go and bring me a piece of clothing from my house." Immediately it was brought to him, and he stretched it out over the juncture of the beginning of the path, so that its fringe touched the water, and its hem the barley.

Now the peasant was traveling along the public road, and Nemtynakhte said, "Watch out, peasant! Do not tread on my clothing." Then the peasant said, "I shall do what pleases you, for my path is good." So he went toward the higher ground. Then Nemtynakhte said, "Is my barley to be a path to you?" Then the peasant said, "My path is good, but the bank is steep, so my way must be through the barley, for you are obstructing the road with your clothing. Will you let us pass on the road?"

He had just finished speaking these words when one of the donkeys filled his mouth with an ear of barley. Then Nemtynakhte said, "So now, I shall confiscate your donkey, peasant, because he is eating my barley. Behold, he will tread grain because of his crime." But the peasant replied, "My path is good, and only one ear of barley has been harmed. Could I buy back my donkey for its value, if you should seize him for filling his mouth with an ear of barley?..."

Excerpt #2

Whom can I trust today?
One's brothers have become evil,
And friends of today have no compassion.

Whom can I trust today?
Hearts are greedy,
And every man steals his neighbor's goods.

Whom can I trust today?
Compassion has perished,
And violence attacks everyone.

Whom can I trust today?
Men are pleased with the evil
Which everywhere throws goodness underfoot.

Whom can I trust today?
Though a man be woeful through ill fortune,
His evil plight causes all to mock him.

Whom can I trust today?
Men plunder,
And everyone robs his comrade.

Whom can I trust today?
A reprobate is my closest friend,
And the companion with whom I associated has become a foe...

Death is before me today
Like the healing of a sick man,
Like going outside after illness.

Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of myrrh,
Like sitting under the sails on a windy day.

Death is before me today
Like the fragrance of a lotus,
Like tottering at the verge of drunkenness.

Death is before me today
Like the course of the Nile,
As when men return home from a campaign.
Death is before me today
Like the clearing of the sky,

As when a man understands what had been unknown to him.

Death is before me today
Like a man's yearning to see his home
After passing many years in exile.

Excerpt #3

16. If you are a leader,
Take responsibility in the matters entrusted to you,
And you will accomplish things of note.
But think on the days which are still to come.
Lest some misdeed should arise to destroy your favorable position,
For an occasion of hatred is like the entrance of a crocodile.

17. If you are a man of authority,
Be patient when you are listening to the words of a petitioner;
Do not dismiss him until he has completely unburdened himself
Of what he had planned to say to you.
A man who has been wronged desires to express his frustrations
Even more than the accomplishment of the justice for which he came;
But concerning him who dismisses petitions
Men say, 'Why ever did he reject it?'
Not everything about which he has petitioned will be done,
But a sympathetic hearing is a means of calming the heart.

18. If you desire that friendship should endure
In a house which you enter
As a lord, as a brother, or as a friend:
In any place which you enter,
Avoid approaching the women,
For there is nothing good in any situation where such is done.
It is never prudent to become overly familiar with them.
For countless men have thus been diverted from their own best interests.
One may be deceived by an exquisite body,
But then it suddenly turns to misery.
All it takes is a trifling moment like a dream,
And one comes to destruction through having known them.
Pricking the jealousy of a rival is nasty piece of business;
A man may perish because of so doing, if the heart becomes ensnared.
As for him who is ruined through becoming embroiled with them,
No venture will ever be successful in his hand.

19. If you desire that your way of life be blameless,
Keep yourself far from every evil.
Guard yourself against the blemish of greediness,
For it is a grave affliction of an incurable disease,
And those who fall into it cannot recover.
It creates dissention among fathers, mothers,
And maternal brothers;
It embitters beloved friends;
It alienates a trustworthy man from his lord;
It isolates a wife from her husband.
It is an embracing of every evil;
It is a combining of everything which is hateful.
That man will endure who is meticulous in uprightness
And who walks in accordance with his proper station;
He will make a testament thereby;
But for the greedy there will be no tomb.

Excerpt #4

31

My beloved is unrivaled,
There is none to equal her,
She is beautiful beyond all women.
Behold, she is like the star which appears
At the onset of a prosperous year.

Exquisite is her splendor,
Gleaming is her complexion,
Brilliant are her gazing eyes.
Sweet are her lips when they speak,
For she is not given to excessive speech.

High is her neck,
Resplendent are her breasts,
Of pure lapis lazuli is her hair.
Her arms surpass even gold,
Like lotus flowers are her fingers.

Her buttocks are soft, her waist is slender,
And her thighs extend her beauty.

So charming are her movements as she strolls on the earth
That she seizes my heart in her embrace.

She causes the necks of all men to turn to watch her,
And everyone rejoices who embraces her,
For he is first among all lovers.

When she goes outside, she is revealed
As that goddess without rival.

34

My heart swiftly betakes itself to flight
Since I have remembered my love for you.
It does not permit me to walk like an ordinary person,
But leaps from its proper place.
It does not permit me to put on a dress,
Nor can I don my mantle.

I put no makeup on my eyes
Nor anoint myself in any way.
“Do not delay! Go straight to his house!”
So it says to me each time I think of him.

Do not create folly for me, my heart.
Why do you act like a fool?
Sit quietly, and your lover will come to you,
And many others as well.
Do not let people to say about me,
“She is a woman distraught by love.”
Be strong each time you remember him;
Oh my heart, do not take flight!

37

It is seven days yesterday that I have not seen my beloved!
Affliction has spread throughout me,
My limbs have become heavy,
And I have forgotten my own body.

Even if the foremost physicians were to attend me,
My heart would not be soothed by their medicines.
As for the magicians, there are no resources in them,
And my affliction cannot be cured.

Only if someone were to say to me,
“Look! It is she!” would revive me,

For her name alone can refresh me.
The coming and going of her messengers
Is the one thing which can revive my heart.

More beneficial to me than all medicines is my beloved,
She is better than all medical skill.
My healing is her coming in to me;
Let me but see her, and then I will be healthy.

Let her open her eyes, and my body will be vigorous,
Let her speak, and I shall be firm.
When I embrace her, she banishes all ill from me.
But it has been seven days since she left me.

Excerpt #4

...Then they closed their fortification and they sent out troops against some of the troops of His Majesty, who were but craftsmen, architects and sailors who had come to the harbor of Memphis. Now that Chief of Sais arrived in Memphis at night, ordering his soldiers, his sailors, all the elite of his army, a total of 8,000 men, ordering them firmly:

“Behold, Memphis is filled with troops comprising all the elite of Lower Egypt, with barley, emmer, every sort of grain, with the granaries overflowing, and with every sort of weapon of war. It is protected by a stronghold; a great battlement has been built as a work of skillful craftsmanship; the river encircles its East, and fighting will not be found there. The stables here are filled with oxen, the treasuries supplied with everything: silver, gold, copper, clothing, incense, honey, and oil. I shall go that I might give things to the Chiefs of Lower Egypt, that I might open for them their nomes, and I might become...days until I return.”

He then mounted upon his horse, as he did not trust his chariot. He then went northward in fear of His Majesty. As the land lightened and the morning dawned, His Majesty arrived at Memphis. When he moored on its north, he found the water risen to the ramparts, with ships moored at the houses of Memphis.

Then His Majesty saw that it was strong, the enclosure walls high with new construction, and the battlements supplied in strength. No way of attacking it was found. Every man proceeded to state his opinion among the troops of His Majesty, entailing every tactic of fighting, with every man saying: “Let us lay siege to Memphis. Behold, its army is numerous,” while others were saying: “Make a ramp against it so that we elevate the ground to its ramparts. Let us put together a siege platform, erecting masts and using sails as walls for it. Let us divide it by this means on every side of it, with talus and...on its north, to elevate the ground to its rampart so that we might find a path for our feet.”

...Then he sent his ships and his troops to assault the harbor of Memphis, and they brought away for him every boat, every ferry, every pleasure boat, as many ships as were moored at the harbor of Memphis with prow rope fastened among its houses. There was not a common soldier who wept among the entire army of His Majesty. His Majesty himself went to arrange the battle formation of the ships, as many as they were. His Majesty commanded his army:

“Forward against it! Mount the ramparts! Enter the houses atop the river! If one among you enters over the rampart, no one will stand in his way,...no troops will repel you. It would be vile,

then, that we should seal Upper Egypt, moor at Lower Egypt, and yet sit in siege at “The Balance of the Two Lands.”

Excerpt #5

1. The beginning of the teaching which the man of Tjel named Dua-Khety made for his son named Pepy, while he sailed southwards to the Residence to place him in the school of writings among the children of the magistrates, the most eminent men of the Residence.
2. Thereupon he spoke to him: Since I have seen those who have been beaten, it is to writings that you must set your mind. See for yourself, it saves one from work. Behold, there is nothing that surpasses writings! They are like a boat upon the water. Read then at the end of the Book of Kemyet and you will find this statement in it saying: As for a scribe in any office in the Residence, he will not suffer want in it.
3. When he fulfills the bidding of another, he does not come forth satisfied. I do not see an office to be compared with it, to which this maxim could relate. I shall make you love books more than your mother, and I shall place their excellence before you. It is indeed greater than any office. There is nothing like it on earth. When he began to become sturdy but was still a child, he was greeted respectfully. When he was sent to carry out a task, before he returned he was dressed in adult garments.
4. I do not see a stoneworker on an important errand or a goldsmith in a place to which he has been sent, but I have seen a coppersmith at his work at the mouth of the furnace. His fingers were like the claws of the crocodile, and he stank more than fish eggs.
5. Every carpenter who bears the adze is wearier than a laborer. His field is his wood, his hoe is the axe. It is the night that will rescue him, for he must labor excessively in his activity. But at nighttime he still must light his lamp.
6. The jeweler pierces stone in stringing beads in all kinds of hard stone. When he has completed the inlaying of the eye amulets, his strength vanishes and he is tired out. He sits until the arrival of the sun, his knees and his back bent...
7. The barber shaves until the end of the evening. But he must be up early, crying out, his bowl upon his arm. He takes himself from street to street to seek out someone to shave. He wears out his arms to fill his belly, like bees who eat only according to their work.
8. The arrowmaker goes north to the delta to fetch himself arrows. He must work excessively in his activity. When the gnats sting him and the sand fleas bite him as well, then he is judged.
9. The potter is covered with earth, although his lifetime is still among the living. He burrows in the field more than swine to bake his cooking vessels. His clothes being stiff with mud, his headcloth consists only of rags, so that the air which comes forth from his burning furnace enters his nose. He operates a pestle with his feet, with which he himself is pounded, penetrating the courtyard of every house and driving earth into every open place...
13. The field hand cries out forever. His voice is louder than the raven's. His fingers have become ulcerous with an excess of stench. He is tired out in Delta labor, he is in tatters. He is well among lions but his experience is painful. The forced labor then is tripled. If he comes back from the marshes there, he reaches his house worn out, for the forced labor has ruined him.

14. The weaver inside the weaving house is more wretched than a woman. His knees are drawn up against his belly. He cannot breathe the air. If he wastes a single day without weaving, he is beaten with fifty whip lashes. He has to give food to the doorkeeper to allow him to come out to the daylight...

22. But if you understand writings, then it will be better for you than the professions which I have set before you. Behold the official and the dependent pertaining to him. The tenant farmer of a man cannot say to him: Do not keep watching me. What I have done in journeying southward to the Residence is what I have done through love of you. A day at school is advantageous to you. Its work of mountains is forever, while the workmen I have caused you to know hurry on and I cause the recalcitrant to hasten.

Myth and the Modern World

Now that you have read, marked up your text, clarified vocabulary, and shared reactions with your group members, work together to address the questions below.

Keep track of your responses in your personal class notes.

How does the excerpt read? Fiction or Nonfiction? If Fiction, what type? If Nonfiction, what type? Or is it something else?

What aspects of the excerpt have determined your choice of genre? In other words, defend your choice.

Summarize the content of the excerpt and decide which group member will report the summary to the rest of the class.

Identify any literary devices or writing techniques that the author has used to express the content?

Does anything about the text suggest a particular way of life or a particular social order (class structure)?

What is your evidence?

Does the excerpt reveal any particular skills that might be important for this society's survival or success?

What personal, moral, social, and/or spiritual values are expressed or implied in the excerpt?

Suggest the author's purpose and/or the intended audience. How do you know?

Can you suggest a tone? In others words, can you detect the writer's attitude about what is being expressed?

List any words that you had to look up in order to clearly understand the text.

Myth and the Modern World

Egyptian Voices

You have read, analyzed, discussed. Now it is time to put it all together and write.

You have the full period to complete this assignment.
Print one copy and submit at the end of class.

Spend approximately 20 minutes on each question and allow time for proofreading.

#1

From the evidence you gathered during the previous classes, write approximately two well written, detailed paragraphs in response to this question: What kind of people do you imagine the ancient Egyptians to have been? Use your evidence to support your thoughtful conclusions. Also, feel free to use what you know of the Sumerian people as a point of comparison and/or contrast.

#2

Now that you have presented a general impression of ancient Egyptians as reflected in their literature, predict the nature of their religious belief system. For example, what might their attitudes be about fate and free will, the purpose of mortal life, the existence of an after-life, the characteristics of their gods and goddesses, the relationship between humans and the divine? Also, if you are already knowledgeable about some aspects of ancient Egyptian religion, feel free to share what you know here. Again, approximately two thoughtful, well-written paragraphs. Use evidence from your reading and your notes to support your conclusions.

Resource List/Bibliography:

From “The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant” in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*. Ed. William Kelly Simpson. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2003. pp. 26-28. Print.

From “The Man Who Was Weary of Life” in Simpson, pp. 184-186.

From “The Maxims of Ptahhotep” in Simpson, pp. 137-138.

From “The Love Songs of Papyrus Chester Beatty” in Simpson, pp. 322-323; 325; 327.

From “The Victory Stela of Piye” in Simpson, pp. 379-380.

From “The Satire of Trades: The Instruction of Dua-Khety” in Simpson, pp. 432-434.

How Are You Going to Use This Unit? This lesson will be used with 12th grade students enrolled in a semester course of study called Myth and the Modern World during the Fall semester (in and around November 1) and the Spring semester (in and around March 15) at Brighton High School in Rochester, NY.