Inside Ancient Thebes

Find the connected features of an ancient civilization

AWH.C.1.6 "Identify the major characteristics of civilizations (e.g., geographic boundaries and political institutions, economies that produce food surpluses, the formation of cities and states, social classes and hierarchical organization..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details about Egypt's settled region and government; circle evidence of food surpluses and city life; then write 1 beside an example of social hierarchy, 2 beside an example of religion or art, and 3 beside an example of writing or record keeping.

Thebes and the Nile

1 Imagine arriving by boat at Thebes, a major city in ancient Egypt during the New Kingdom (about 1550 to 1070 BCE). The Nile runs through a narrow valley, with deserts on either side; its waters connect Thebes to other settlements and the Mediterranean coast. The valley and delta formed Egypt's main settled region, although Egyptians also traded and traveled beyond them. A pharaoh ruled the Egyptian state, while appointed officials collected taxes and oversaw building projects. From Thebes, royal orders could reach towns along the river. Thebes was not an isolated village but part of a larger political system.

2 Most people lived outside cities and farmed the Nile's fertile floodplain. Floodwaters left soil that helped farmers grow grain, though floods did not bring the same results every year. After harvest, officials collected part of the crop as tax and stored grain in state granaries. This stored food could support people who did not grow their own meals, including scribes, craft workers, and laborers on state projects. At Thebes, markets and workshops brought these workers together. Wealth and power were unequal: the pharaoh and elite officials held authority, while farmers and laborers had far less control over decisions.

3 Religion shaped the city as much as trade did. At Karnak, builders expanded a vast temple complex honoring Amun and other gods; its halls and carved reliefs displayed skilled architecture and art. Priests conducted ceremonies, and royal patrons supported temples. Scribes learned to read and write, keeping records of grain, taxes, and supplies on papyrus and other surfaces. Some temple inscriptions used hieroglyphs to commemorate rulers and religious events. These records help historians investigate Egyptian life, although surviving texts tell more about officials and temples than about many ordinary people. Together, Thebes and the surrounding farmland reveal several connected features of a civilization.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What details show that Egypt had both a main settled region and a state government?

2. How did a food surplus make work other than farming possible in Thebes?

3. Which groups in the passage show that Egyptian society had a hierarchy, and what made their positions different?

4. Identify one detail each that shows developed religion, art or architecture, and writing or record keeping.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a society in a setting different from the Nile Valley. In five or six sentences, describe its geographic setting, government, stored food surplus, city life and social ranks, a religious or artistic practice, and a system for keeping written records.

ANSWER KEY

Inside Ancient Thebes

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline details about Egypt's settled region and government; circle evidence of food surpluses and city life; then write 1 beside an example of social hierarchy, 2 beside an example of religion or art, and 3 beside an example of writing or record keeping. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What details show that Egypt had both a main settled region and a state government?	**The Nile valley and delta formed the main settled region. A pharaoh ruled, and appointed officials collected taxes and oversaw projects.**
2	How did a food surplus make work other than farming possible in Thebes?	**Officials stored part of the grain harvest in granaries. That food could support scribes, craft workers, and laborers who did not grow their own meals.**
3	Which groups in the passage show that Egyptian society had a hierarchy, and what made their positions different?	**The pharaoh and elite officials held authority, while farmers and laborers had far less control over decisions.**
4	Identify one detail each that shows developed religion, art or architecture, and writing or record keeping.	**Priests conducted ceremonies for gods; Karnak had carved reliefs and temple halls; scribes recorded grain, taxes, and supplies.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Between coastal cliffs and inland hills, the invented city-state of Luma controls a sheltered bay. A council elected by landowners sets rules and appoints harbor officials. Farmers on terraced slopes grow extra beans, which the council stores for lean seasons. Sailors, farmers, and craft workers trade in the port, while council families hold more power than other residents. At a stone hall, people perform ceremonies for a sea deity and carve scenes of voyages. Trained clerks write ship cargoes and grain payments on wooden tablets.

Accept other accurate details from the passage that demonstrate each named characteristic. For the invented society, look for all six requested features and a clear connection between stored food and people who do other work.