Beyond the Pyramids

Read for the achievements that helped Egyptian civilization thrive.

AWH.C.3.5 "Summarize important achievements of Egyptian civilization (e.g., agricultural system, invention of a calendar, monumental architecture and art, hieroglyphic writing, the invention of papyrus)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline an achievement in each of five areas: farming, timekeeping, buildings and art, writing, and writing materials; circle one detail that shows why each mattered.

What It Took to Build a Civilization

1. Each year, the Nile rose and spread water and rich silt across nearby fields. When the water receded, farmers planted wheat and barley in the moist soil. Egyptians also built dikes, canals, and basins to guide and hold water for crops. This agricultural system helped communities grow food beyond what a single family needed. The river's changing levels made timing important. Egyptians developed a calendar of 365 days, with twelve 30-day months and five additional days. Observing the sky and the river helped them organize work around the yearly cycle of flooding and planting.

2. Surplus food could support workers with jobs other than farming, including stonecutters, painters, and scribes. Egyptian rulers directed the building of huge monuments, such as pyramids, which served as royal tombs. Builders moved and fitted massive stone blocks with careful planning and skilled labor. Temples displayed carved columns and statues, while painted scenes on tomb walls showed offerings, ceremonies, and daily activities. This art was not just decoration. Images and buildings expressed religious beliefs, honored rulers and gods, and preserved ideas about how Egyptians hoped to be remembered after death. Their scale also showed a ruler's ability to organize people and resources.

3. To keep records and communicate ideas, Egyptians used hieroglyphic writing, a system of signs that could represent sounds or words. Scribes carved signs on stone monuments and wrote with ink on papyrus. To make papyrus sheets, workers layered and pressed strips cut from the inner stem of the papyrus plant. The sheets were lighter and easier to carry than stone, so they were useful for letters, accounts, and religious texts. Records could track supplies and work, while inscriptions could name rulers and describe beliefs. Together, writing and a portable writing surface helped information travel across places and generations.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Summarize how Egyptians used the Nile and built structures to grow crops.

2. Summarize the calendar achievement and explain how it helped Egyptians plan.

3. Summarize what Egyptian monuments and art showed about the civilization.

4. Summarize how hieroglyphic writing and papyrus helped Egyptians share information.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word proposal for a museum display called “More Than Pyramids.” Choose three achievements from the passage, including at least one that is not art or architecture, and explain how they worked together to support Egyptian civilization; give one precise detail for each.

Beyond the Pyramids

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline an achievement in each of five areas: farming, timekeeping, buildings and art, writing, and writing materials; circle one detail that shows why each mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Summarize how Egyptians used the Nile and built structures to grow crops.	**Farmers planted in moist soil after the Nile receded and used dikes, canals, and basins to guide and hold water for crops.**
2	Summarize the calendar achievement and explain how it helped Egyptians plan.	**Egyptians developed a 365-day calendar with twelve 30-day months and five additional days. It helped them organize work around the yearly cycle of flooding and planting.**
3	Summarize what Egyptian monuments and art showed about the civilization.	**Pyramids, temples, statues, and paintings expressed religious beliefs, honored rulers and gods, and showed the ability to organize workers and resources.**
4	Summarize how hieroglyphic writing and papyrus helped Egyptians share information.	**Hieroglyphic signs recorded words or sounds. Portable papyrus sheets let Egyptians carry written letters, accounts, and religious texts.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My display would connect farming, the calendar, and papyrus instead of showing a pyramid alone. A model basin would show how Egyptians held Nile water for crops. A calendar card would show their twelve 30-day months and five extra days, which helped organize work around yearly changes. A papyrus sheet would show how a portable surface could carry accounts of supplies. Together, these objects show that growing food, planning labor, and recording information helped Egyptian communities function across the year.

Accept accurate summaries in students' own words. For the proposal, look for three distinct achievements, a precise detail for each, and a clear explanation of how they worked together.