

# THE GREAT PYRAMID

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## CONTENTS

Word List .....	4
Chapter 1 .....	7
Chapter 2 .....	9
Chapter 3 .....	14
Chapter 4 .....	19
Chapter 5 .....	23
Chapter 6 .....	28
Chapter 7 .....	32
Chapter 8 .....	37
Chapter 9 .....	45
Chapter 10 .....	49
Chapter 11 .....	52
Chapter 12 .....	58
Bibliography .....	61

# Word List

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**Djoser** (ZHOE-suhr) The Pharaoh who built the first great stone pyramid.

**drought** (drowt) A time when no rain falls and crops are damaged.

**Giza** (GEE-zah) A city in ancient Egypt where the biggest and longest-lasting pyramids are.

**Herodotus** (hah-ROD-uh-tuhs) An ancient Greek writer who wrote about the Great Pyramid.

**Imhotep** (im-HOE-tep) Builder of the greatest mastabas.

**Khufu** (KOO-foo) Sneferu's son and the Pharaoh who built the greatest pyramid of ancient Egypt.

**ma'at** (muh-AHT) The divine order of the universe.

**mastaba** (mahs-TUH-buh) A huge brick building shaped like a rectangle, with a flat top.

**Nile River** (nyuhl) The longest river in the world, found in Egypt.

**papyrus** (puh-PIE-russ) A plant used to make a

kind of paper and whose reeds can be woven into a rope.

**Pharaoh** (FARE-oh) Another name for any of the kings who ruled ancient Egypt.

**pi** (pie) The symbol  $\pi$ . In math it represents the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter.

**Plateau of Giza** (plah-TOE of GEE-zah) A high, flat, wide area of land in Egypt, home of the Great Pyramid of Khufu.

**pyramid** (PEER-uh-mid) A tomb that the ancient Egyptians built for the Pharaoh.

**pyramidion** (peer-uh-MID-ee-on) A stone block covered with sheets of gold that went on top of the pyramid.

**pyramidologist** (peer-uh-mid-AHL-uh-gist) A person who studies pyramids.

**Ra** (rah) The sun god and most important Egyptian god.

**sarcophagus** (sar-COFF-uh-gus) A king's stone coffin.

**Sneferu** (SNEF-uh-roo) The Pharaoh who built the first pyramid.

**zaa** (zah) A group of about a hundred workers.



# Chapter 1

For thousands of years, anyone who has traveled in the Egyptian desert has seen an amazing sight. Most of the desert is nothing but burning-hot sand, but people still come to see the greatest monuments ever built--the pyramids (PEER-uh-midz).

Like a sleeping giant, the largest pyramid rises almost 500 feet above the desert floor. At sunset, it shines golden in the setting sun. The Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza has stood the test of time. For centuries, the monument has impressed people from all over the world.

The mysteries of the pyramids make us ask many questions. Why were the

pyramids built? Who built them? How did each of the heavy stones get put exactly where it belonged? How did the ancient people of Egypt know how to build the pyramids so perfectly, long before modern machines and information? How have the pyramids affected the lives of people to this day? What great secrets have they held for so long—secrets that are just now being discovered? How have the pyramids survived so long while other monuments have disappeared? Will we ever know all the secrets hidden in the pyramids?

To solve some of these mysteries, we need to go back, long before the great pyramids were built.

# Chapter 2

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To understand why the pyramids were built, it is important to know what life was like in ancient Egypt. The Great Pyramid of Khufu was built more than 4,000 years ago, but the events leading up to its construction happened long before that.

Because Egypt is mostly desert, water is the most important thing needed for life. The earliest Egyptians built villages near the Nile (NY-uhl) River. The Nile, which is the longest river in the world, was an important reason why the pyramids were built. The Nile runs through Egypt. Because it flows from south to north, the Egyptians called the land in the south “Upper Egypt,” and

the land in the north was called “Lower Egypt.”

The Nile River carved a narrow green valley in the desert. The first people to live there in ancient times were farmers who grew grain, vegetables, and other food.



Unlike other bodies of water, the Nile flooded the land the same way every season. From June to September, the river flooded, and rich soil from the south filled its waters. When the floodwaters went down, rich new soil was left on the farmland on both sides of the Nile. The farmers were able to grow much-needed food and have a good life. This seasonal flooding made

the people think of the world as a dependable and regular place.

The Egyptians began to think of life and the whole universe as a very orderly place. To them, the world was controlled by many gods. The most important god was the sun god, Ra (rah).

Over time, this way of thinking also created a social order in Egypt. The king, who was called the Pharaoh (FAIR-oh), was the most important person in Egyptian society. Egyptians believed the Pharaoh was put on the earth by the gods to keep what they called *ma'at* (muh-AHT), which means the divine order of the universe. The people obeyed the Pharaoh and honored him by giving him their crops and other belongings. The Pharaoh's job was to keep the Nile flooding so that there was plenty of food and the people were happy.

In the social order of Egypt, the Pharaoh and his high officials were at

the top and had the most power. After them came lower officials, priests, craftsmen, town leaders, and rich farmers. The majority of the rest of the people were mostly small farmers.

Because the Egyptians believed their Pharaoh got his power from the gods, his death was a very important event in all their lives. They did everything possible to make sure his spirit would be safe and would live with the other gods in the afterlife. His funeral and the placing of his body in his own pyramid became the most important event in the lives of the Egyptians.

A pyramid was built as a huge tomb to house the dead body of the Pharaoh, along with all the things he would need for his journey to the afterlife. According to ancient writings, the Egyptians believed that when their Pharaoh died, the sun would send its beams to the earth and make a golden ramp to the heavens. The Pharaoh's spirit would

then travel up the ramp and meet with Ra every morning at sunrise. This explains why the pyramid's four sides all point to the heavens. They symbolized the ramps the Pharaoh used to meet with Ra.

*How* the pyramids were made was one of the great mysteries of ancient Egypt. Many questions about this mystery kept experts wondering for a very long time. For instance, how could an ancient people make such a perfect building without using modern technology? Where did they get their information? Why did the Egyptians stop building pyramids if they were so important to them? Most interesting of all, how did the pyramids get the strange shape that made them so famous? Finding these answers would solve one of the greatest mysteries of all time.