Name _____ Date _____

Ancient Egypt: Social Classes and Daily Life

Directions: Read the passage and study the table of Egypt's social groups. Use details from both to answer the questions, and look for the evidence behind each claim.

Life in Ancient Egypt

Who Did What in Ancient Egypt

Historians often describe ancient Egyptian society as a pyramid. The pharaoh stood at the top. Below were smaller groups of officials, priests and nobles, then scribes, then skilled workers and traders. Farmers, near the bottom, were the largest group. Enslaved people, many of them prisoners of war, were at the very bottom and had the fewest rights.

Most farmers worked fields along the Nile River. They grew wheat and barley, which families turned into bread and beer, the main foods for most Egyptians. Farmers paid part of each harvest to the government as taxes.

Few Egyptians could read and write. Scribes trained for years, then kept records of taxes, harvests and laws. A few boys from ordinary families rose to good government jobs by becoming scribes.

Women in Egypt had more legal rights than women in some other ancient lands, such as Greece. By law, a woman could own and sell property, make contracts and take a case to court.

Who built the pyramids? Old movies showed crowds of enslaved people. But archaeologists have found a town near the pyramids at Giza where many builders lived. It had bakeries and places to sleep. They also found the builders' own tombs close to the pyramids. Zahi Hawass, who dug up the tombs, argued that enslaved people would not have been buried with such honor. Historians now think that many builders were paid or drafted Egyptian workers. Skilled crews worked all year. Farmers came for a few months at a time, often while the Nile's yearly flood covered their fields.

Egypt's social pyramid, as historians describe it, from top to bottom

Group	Their role
Pharaoh	Ruled all of Egypt, made laws and led the army.
Officials, priests and nobles	Ran the government and the temples. The vizier, the top official, made sure taxes were collected.
Scribes	Read and wrote. Kept records of taxes, harvests and laws.
Skilled workers and traders	Carpenters, jewelers and other craftspeople made goods, and traders bought and sold them.
Farmers	The largest group. Grew crops along the Nile and paid taxes in grain.

Group	Their role
Enslaved people	Many were prisoners of war or people who owed debts they could not repay. They were forced to work for others.

1. According to the table, which group was the largest in ancient Egypt?

A. Scribes
B. Farmers
C. Skilled workers and traders
D. Officials, priests and nobles

2. Why could many Egyptian farmers work on the pyramids for part of the year?

A. The pharaoh paid them in gold to stop farming forever.
B. Farming was against the law in the summer.
C. Their fields were in the desert next to Giza.
D. The Nile's yearly flood covered their fields, so they could not farm them then.

3. A boy from a farming family hoped to get a good government job. Based on the passage and the table, what would help him most?

A. Growing more wheat than his neighbors
B. Paying extra grain in taxes
C. Training for years to become a scribe
D. Working on the pyramids for a few months

4. According to the table, how did many people in ancient Egypt become enslaved?

A. They were captured in war or could not pay their debts.
B. They chose to work for the pharaoh as scribes.
C. They lost a vote in the city assembly.
D. They were born into noble families.

5. Complete the sentence about the legal rights of Egyptian women.

Word bank

Giza • property • court • pyramid

By law, an Egyptian woman could own _____ and take a case to _____.

6. Which two discoveries do historians use as evidence that the pyramid builders were not crowds of enslaved people?

☐ A. Records showing that farmers paid taxes in grain
☐ B. The builders' own tombs close to the pyramids
☐ C. A town near the pyramids with bakeries and places to sleep
☐ D. Old movies showing crowds of workers
☐ E. Scribes' records of Egypt's laws

7. What do historians now think about the people who built the pyramids?
A. No one has any evidence about who they were.
B. They were all priests and nobles.
C. They were enslaved people brought from other lands.
D. Many were paid or drafted Egyptian workers.

8. Why does the passage mention old movies?
A. To explain how bread and beer were made
B. To describe daily life for scribes
C. To show an older picture of the builders that the evidence does not support
D. To prove that crowds of enslaved people built the pyramids

9. What were the main foods for most families in ancient Egypt?
A. Rice and fish from the sea
B. Bread and beer made from wheat and barley
C. Corn and potatoes
D. Beef and pork at every meal

10. Which statement about Egypt's social pyramid matches the passage?
A. It was a real building where every class lived.
B. It is a way historians describe how Egyptian society was arranged.
C. It shows that no one could ever move to a higher group.
D. It puts farmers at the top because they grew the food.