**Pyramids of Egypt**

The ancient Egyptian people believed the powerful sun and the mysterious Nile River were gifts from their gods. They believed their pharaoh was both a person and a god. The Egyptians wanted their pharaoh to make a successful journey to the afterlife so he could continue to provide Egypt with the sun and the river. For this to happen, the pharaoh’s body had to remain intact and on Egyptian land.

The Egyptians buried their pharaohs with food and the ruler’s most treasured objects; they believed the objects would comfort the pharaoh as he traveled through the underworld on his journey to the afterlife.

The early pharaohs were buried in the Egyptian sand, but their bodies were easy prey for jackals. Jackals are wolf-like creatures that prowl the desert for decayed flesh. The Egyptian people first protected the bodies of the pharaohs by surrounding the pharaoh’s graves with mud pits. The tombs of the early pharaohs were covered with a mud brick slab called a mastaba. The mastaba was a landmark that identified the burial place and allowed the Egyptian people a place to pay their respects to the body of their ruler.

Imhotep was a brilliant architect who built an elaborate monument for his pharaoh, Zoser, more than 4600 years ago. Imhotep placed six mastabas over Zoser’s grave. Each mastaba was smaller than the one below it. Imhotep then covered the mastabas with polished white limestone. The result was the Step Pyramid of Zoser, a structure that rose 62 metres into the sky. The Pyramid of Zoser was Egypt’s first pyramid.

Egyptian pharaohs built pyramids from the time of Zoser to about 3700 years ago. Archaeologists have found 138 pyramids, though others may have been destroyed or remain hidden beneath the desert sand.

The Great Pyramid at Giza is the largest of the Egyptian pyramids, standing almost 140 metres tall, covering an area larger than ninety football fields and containing more than two million stones. The largest of the stones weigh 72 tonnes and had to be transported more than 800 kilometers to Giza. Historians estimate that it took over 100,000 workers more than twenty years to build the Great Pyramid. The Egyptians had not yet discovered the iron tools, so the huge blocks were cut using copper chisels and dragged across the desert in great sleds and on boats on the river. The workers were probably Egyptian farmers who worked when the Nile River flooded their farmland.

**Pyramids of Egypt: Questions**

1. Why was it important that the Pharaoh was buried in Egypt?

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1. Why was the Pharaoh buried with his possessions?

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1. Why were Jackals a problem in the earliest burials of Pharaohs?

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1. What was a Mastaba? How was a mastaba made?

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1. Who was Imhotep? Why was he important?

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1. When did the Egyptians stop building pyramids?

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1. How many pyramids have been found?

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1. How tall is the great Pyramid of Giza?

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1. How long do historians think it took to build the great pyramid?

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1. Why was it hard to make the stone blocks used in the Great Pyramid?

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1. Who was used to construct the Great Pyramid? Why were they used?

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| **Pyramid of Zoser** |  |
| **Both** |  |
| **Pyramid of Khafre** |  |

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