



Hieroglyph Holiday

Primary Audience: Kindergarten – 4th Grade

Description: Identify certain Egyptian hieroglyphs and recognize their meanings and uses.

Keywords: Hieroglyphs

Concepts:

- A Greek word meaning "sacred symbol." In Egypt, one of some seven hundred signs used in writing (considerably more if one counts signs used exclusively in the Old Kingdom and the periods after the New Kingdom). "Hieroglyphs" refers to the signs themselves; "hieroglyphic script" is Egyptian writing. (Calling the signs "hieroglyphics" is incorrect.)

Materials:

- Per Group:
 - Blank Paper
 - Markers or Pencils
 - Access to Copy of Egyptian Alphabet

Instructions:

Tell your family to pretend that they have no form of writing. Then ask them how they can send a message to someone far away. Brainstorm until someone suggests that this can be done with pictures. Ask them what sort of pictures they would draw. These would have to be simple things familiar to the message sender and the receiver. Have your family think about their natural environment. What objects are most familiar? Encourage them to think of trees, grass, stones, birds, squirrels, flowers and anything that is typical of your environment. (If you live in Arizona, symbols might include cactus and snakes.) Make a list on the board of objects that could be used to send a "picture message." Suggest they include human body parts, like hands, feet, eyes, and ears.

Now ask how the following message could be depicted with pictures: "The tree is split in two." One would simply draw a tree broken in two. Explain that they can actually make a written language using these pictures to express more complicated actions, such as: "The silly rabbit lost its carrot and had to go to sleep hungry." Ask for their ideas of how this can be done. Then explain the system of using pictures to represent sounds rather than specific images. For example, a picture of a tree could represent the sound (or letter) b. Using the list you've already written on the board, assign a sound to each one. (You might mention that a fun part of this activity is that spelling doesn't matter. It's what

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you hear that counts.) Make certain you have included the following letter sounds: a, aw, b, d, ee, g (hard), h, i, k (for hard c), l, n, oh, p, r, s, t, th, oo, and uh.

Now that you have your alphabet, work together to figure out how to write the sentence ("The silly rabbit lost its carrot and had to go to sleep hungry.") using the symbols. Write it on a big sheet of paper or white board.

Now tell them about the different forms of writing in the world, past and present, such as Egyptian hieroglyphs. Point out that the Egyptian system was the same as the one they've just invented themselves.

Your family may be happily surprised to see that the Egyptians used symbols similar to those they chose, although some are different, given the differences in environment. (The environment of Egypt is desert/river valley.) Point out that birds (there are three - a chick, a vulture, and an owl, as well as feathers) seem to have been important to the Egyptians. So was water (the symbol for n). Explain that b is a foot (did you have one in your list?) and r is a mouth.

Hand out copies you have previously printed of the Egyptian alphabet (available online) to each child as well as blank sheets of paper and pencils. As a group, make up some short sentences. For example, "the moon is big." Ask them to write a sentence on the paper using the Egyptian letters. Have them share the results. Then do another sentence.

Now that they have an idea of how hieroglyphs were used, tell them they will be Egyptian scribes. Make certain that they have their copies of the Egyptian alphabet. Pass out large pieces of white paper and markers or crayons. Each family member will write his or her name in hieroglyphs (first and last) Explain that the Egyptian scribes worked very slowly and carefully.

When the project is done, have them share their hieroglyphs with one another. If time is an issue, you may have the participants present their name hieroglyphs and ideograms in small groups while you walk around the room posing questions or giving comments.

As a conclusion to this activity, inform them that even the Adventure Exhibition Area has its own language and only by using teamwork will they be able to uncover the secret clues within that language.

Possible Interactive Questions:

- What are some ways people have used to communicate in the past and the present?
- What writing systems have been developed in other cultures at other times?
- What can hieroglyphs tell us about ancient cultures throughout the world?

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What's Going On?

This activity introduces participants to the writing, art, and the culture of ancient Egypt through hieroglyphs, one of the oldest writing systems in the world. In the first part of this activity, the participants create a pictorial alphabet and then, during the second part of the activity, learn and use the symbols of the Egyptian hieroglyphic alphabet.

Hieroglyphs consist of pictures of familiar objects that represent sounds. They were used in ancient Egypt from about 3100 BC to 400 CE.

It was the Greek historian Herodotus who first told us about the sacred writings of the ancient Egyptians.

Hieroglyphics is made up from two Greek words—Hieros meaning “sacred” and gluptien meaning “carvings.” The Egyptians themselves called this writing medou neter, which means “words of the gods,” and they believed that this precious gift came to them through Thoth, their god of wisdom. It was sacred because of its origins but was also most often used in sacred settings such as tombs and temples.

At the time of Herodotus there were perhaps 6,000 different hieroglyphic symbols in use, most known only to priests and other highly educated people. Only about 1% of Egyptians could read this writing but they respected those that could. Most hieroglyphic writing on temple walls and accompanying public monuments make use of only 150-200 symbols, so learning to read some of the writing is both possible and enjoyable, as many tourists have found.

Roman emperors, converted to Christianity, banned the use of “pagan” hieroglyphics in the fourth century, A.D. Gradually people forgot how to read or write it. Then one of Napoleon’s soldiers found a black stone near Rosetta, Egypt, with three kinds of writing on it. One was Egyptian hieroglyphics. Soon the world learned again how to read this mysterious writing.

Relevant Ohio Science Content Standards:

- History K-2: C. Compare daily life in the past and present demonstrating an understanding that while basic human needs remain the same, they are met in different ways in different times and places.
 - 1.4: Raise questions about how families lived in the past and use photographs, letters, artifacts and books to clarify what is known and what is unknown.
- Creative Expression and Communication K-4: C. Develop and select a range of subject matter and ideas to communicate meaning in a two- and three- dimensional works of art.
 - 1.5: Explore and use a range of subject matter (e.g. people, places, animals, and nature) to create original works of art.