

Key Question:

Why is Egypt called 'The Gift of the Nile'?

Why did the Ancient Egyptian civilisation begin on the banks of the River Nile?

Look at a map of your own region. Why do you think that major towns and cities are often situated near a river? Make a list of all the reasons you can think of for settling near a river.

It is sometimes said that Egypt is the Gift of the Nile. But what does this mean? No one can survive without water, but there are many more reasons why a river brings life to those who live on its banks. This is shown no more clearly anywhere in the world than on the banks of the River Nile.

The River Nile, at over 6,695 km, is the longest river in the world. Heavy rains in the mountains of Ethiopia feed the great river, causing the Nile to overflow its banks, leaving behind a rich black soil. A *Nilometer* (marked on nearby walls) recorded the level of the flood each year. A good flood meant food for the winter, but a poor flood meant famine and starvation. A sort of wooden crane, called a *shaduf* collected water from the river for the farmer's crops. The Nile provided fish, caught in large nets, while birds were knocked from the air with sticks and killed for their meat.

The mud left on the river bank provided a good building material. Collected into a rectangular, wooden mould, the mud could be shaped into bricks and left to dry in the hot sun. The reeds that grew along the river's edge were cut to make a kind of paper called *papyrus*. The same reeds could be tied in bundles for boat building. To sail your boat downstream towards the sea you lowered your sail and let the current take you. To travel upstream you raised your sail to capture the power of the wind.

Think about:

1. How long is the River Nile?
2. Where does the river begin?
3. What happens after the flood water dies away?
4. What was a Nilometer?
5. Why was it important to measure the level of the flood?
6. Name two uses for the reeds that grew at the water's edge.
7. Describe how you could travel both ways on the River Nile.
8. What would you use to catch fish in Ancient Egypt?
9. What other creatures might come down to the river? Why?
10. Large birds were also killed to eat. Why do you think the birds came down to the river?

