***Ancient Egypt***

Ancient Egypt had many natural barriers. The mountains to the south helped to separate Egypt from the rest of Africa. There are deserts to the east and west of the Nile River. You could reach Egypt. They did not live in isolation. They were not alone in the ancient world. They knew that. But still, their natural barriers helped them to develop a culture uniquely Egyptian.

The Nile is the longest river in the world. It is shaped like a lotus flower, the design seen in ancient Egyptian art, math, and hieroglyphics. It runs south to north, beginning in the mountains in the south and ending 4,000 miles later at the Mediterranean Sea.

Each spring, snow on the mountains would melt. The Nile River would flood. This was a very good thing. When the flood waters receded, they left behind fertile soil. Crops could easily be grown in this black, rich soil. The ancient Egyptians called this soil the "The Gift of the Nile".

The Nile provided other gifts to the ancient Egyptians. Papyrus, used for everything, grew wildly along its banks. It provided water for cooking and bathing. Fish and waterfowl were plentiful. Wild vegetables could be found, along with bird eggs. Egypt is located in the middle of a desert. But life along the Nile was splendid.

Without the Nile River, all of Egypt would be desert. Only about an inch (2.5 centimeters) of rain falls throughout Egypt each year. But each summer, the river rises because of rains at its source far to the south in Ethiopia. Floods cover the river's valleys, leaving sediments needed for trees, plants, and crops to grow.

Egypt is often divided into two sections: **Upper Egypt** in the south and **Lower Egypt** in the north. The sections are named this way because the Nile flows from south to north. The river empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

Southern Egypt's landscape contains low mountains and desert. Northern Egypt has wide valleys near the Nile and desert to the east and west. North of Cairo, the capital, is the sprawling, triangular Nile River Delta. This fertile land is completely covered with farms.

The climate of Egypt is desert and as such it has very hot, dry summers and mild winters. Cairo, Egypt's capital which is located in the Nile valley, has an average July high temperature of 94.5˚F (35˚C) and an average January low of 48˚F (9˚C).

The development of agriculture enabled the rise of the first civilizations, located primarily along river valleys

These complex societies were influenced by geographic conditions and shared a number of defining political, social, and economic characteristics.

Complex societies and civilizations shared common characteristics of religion, job specialization, cities, government, language/writing systems, technology, and social hierarchy, and they made unique contributions.

*Ancient Egypt was a complex society needing people doing many different tasks and jobs. Some of the jobs they had included:*

**Farmers** - most of the people were farmers. They grew barley to make bear, wheat for bread, vegetables such as onions and cucumbers, and flax to make into linen. They grew their crops near the banks of the Nile River where the rich black soil was good for crops.

**Artisans**- There were a wide variety of craftsmen jobs. They included carpenters, weavers, jewelers, leather workers, and potters. How skilled a craftsman was would determine his success.

**Soldiers** - Becoming a soldier was an opportunity for a person to rise in society. Most of the soldiers were footmen. There was a well-defined hierarchy in the Egyptian army. In peacetime, soldiers would help with government projects such as moving stone for a pyramid or digging a canal.

**Scribes** - Scribes were important people in Ancient Egypt as they were the only people who knew how to read and write. Scribes came from wealthy families and took years of training to learn the complex Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Merchants- Egypt was one of the wealthiest countries in the ancient world. Egyptian merchants – who were more like traders – carried products such as gold, papyrus made into writing paper or twisted into rope, linen cloth, and jewelry to other countries. In exchange, they brought back cedar and ebony wood, elephant tusks, panther skins, giraffe tails for fly whisks, and animals such as baboons and lions for the temples or palaces.

**Priests and Priestesses** - Priests and Priestesses were responsible for the temples and held religious ceremonies.

**Fun Facts about Ancient Egyptian Daily Life**

* The bread the Egyptians ate was so rough that it caused their teeth to wear away.
* The inside of houses was often painted with scenes from nature or colorful patterns.
* Women could hold important jobs in Ancient Egyptian society including high ranking positions such as priestesses, supervisors, and administrators. Some women reached the highest ranking posts in the land. Hatshepsut was a woman who became one of Egypt's most powerful Pharaohs.
* The average peasant girl married young, around the age of 12.
* Most people bathed daily, often in the Nile River.