

Achievements in Writing!

Directions: Read and annotate the selection below. Make sure to answer the guided questions in COMPLETE sentences and to complete your own Rosetta Stone.

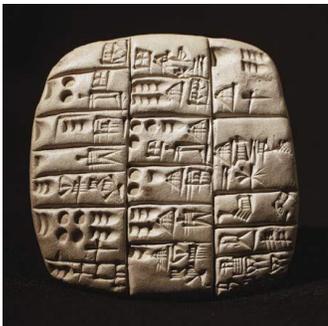
The First Writing

Writing has its origins in the Fertile Crescent and the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations. Even though these civilizations emerged around the same time, first credit for this totally transforming human development is usually given to Sumer (Mesopotamia) by a short margin. Sumerian script is usually dated to about 3100 BCE, while the Egyptian version is dated about a century later. New evidence for both sides is still being discovered so we can never say for certain.

Evolution in Writing

Most early writing systems begin with small images used as words, literally depicting the object in question. But pictograms of this kind are limiting. Some physical objects are too difficult to draw and many words are concepts rather than objects.

Cuneiform in Mesopotamia: from 3100 BC



In about 3200 BC temple officials in Sumer develop a reliable and lasting method of keeping track of the animals and other goods which are the temple's wealth. On lumps of wet clay the scribes draw a simplified picture of the item in question. They then make a similar mark in the clay for the number counted and recorded. When allowed to bake hard in the sun, the clay tablet becomes a permanent document. .



Significantly the chief official of many Sumerian temples is known by a word, *sangu*, which seems to mean 'accountant'. But however non-literary the purpose, these practical jottings in Sumer are the first steps in writing.

As writing develops, a standardized method of doing it begins to emerge. This is essential to the very purpose of writing, making it capable of carrying a message over unlimited distances of space or time. Doing so depends on the second scribe, in a faraway place or the distant future, being able to read what the first scribe has written.

In Mesopotamia clay remains the most common writing surface, and the standard writing implement becomes the end of a sharply cut reed. These two ingredients define this early human script. Characters are formed from the wedge-shaped marks which the reed makes when pressed into the damp clay, so the style of writing becomes known as cuneiform (from the Latin *cuneus*, meaning wedge).

Today, we call this written language of wedge-shaped symbols *cuneiform*.

We know a great deal about the ancient Sumerian civilization from the written records they left behind in stone and clay. The ancient Sumerians kept excellent records and lists of things. They listed their household goods. They listed their court activity. They listed their

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sales and purchases. They even kept a list of their kings that was updated from time to time, as new kings came to power.

A Cuneiform "Alphabet"			
A		N	
B		O	
C		P	
D		Q	
E		R	
F		S	
G		T	
H		U	
I		V	
J		W	
K		X	
L		Y	
M		Z	

Write your Name in Cuneiform!

English Letter:									
Cuneiform Symbol:									

Write THREE complete sentences about yourself:

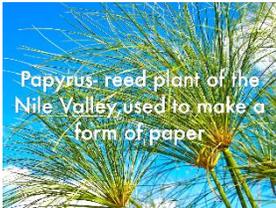


Hieroglyphs and papyrus in Egypt: from 3000 BC

The second civilization to develop writing, shortly after the Sumerians, is Egypt. The Egyptian characters are much more directly pictorial in kind than the Sumerian, but the system of suggesting objects and concepts is similar. The Egyptian characters are



called hieroglyphs by the Greeks in about 500 BC, because by that time this form of writing is reserved for holy texts; hieros and glypho mean 'sacred' and 'engrave' in Greek. Due to the importance of hieroglyphic inscriptions in temples and tombs, much of the creation of these beautiful characters is by painters, sculptors in relief and craftsmen modelling in plaster. But with the introduction of papyrus, the Egyptian script is also the business of scribes.



The Egyptian scribe uses a fine reed pen to write on the smooth surface of the papyrus scroll. They also use a wooden pen holder with two circular indentations, one for red ink and one for black. The red ink was prepared by mixing ochre with gelatin, gum and bee wax and the black ink was prepared by mixing carbon or soot with the same materials to make it in a form of cake and then use water and write with it. Inevitably the act of writing causes the hieroglyphs to become more fluid than the strictly formal versions carved and painted in tombs. Over time three official versions of script (known technically as hieratic) used by the scribes emerge. There is one, the most formal, for religious documents; one for literature and official documents; and one for private letters. In about 700 BC the pressure of business causes the Egyptian scribes to develop a more abbreviated version of the hieratic script. Its constituent parts are still the same Egyptian hieroglyphs, established more than 2000 years previously, but they are now so elided (omitting vowels) that the result looks like an entirely new script. Known as demotic ('for the people'), it is harder to read than the earlier written versions of Egyptian. Both hieroglyphs and demotic continue to be used until about 400 AD. Thereafter their secret is forgotten, until the chance discovery of the Rosetta stone makes it possible for the hieroglyphic code to be cracked in the 19th century.



The Rosetta Stone



The Rosetta Stone is a stele, or piece of stone with writing on it. It was discovered by French soldiers in Napoleon's army when he invaded Egypt. The basalt slab was found in the town of Rosetta (now Rashid) in 1799. What has come to be called the Rosetta Stone was written on March 27, 196 BCE. The stone is so important because carved on the stone was a decree praising King Ptolemy V. What was written wasn't so important, but the way it was written was very important! The Rosetta Stone has the same information in three different languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Demotic, and ancient Greek. When the stone was found no one

knew how to read hieroglyphics or Demotic, but they could read ancient Greek. Eventually a French expert, Jean-Francois Champollion in languages was able to use his knowledge of

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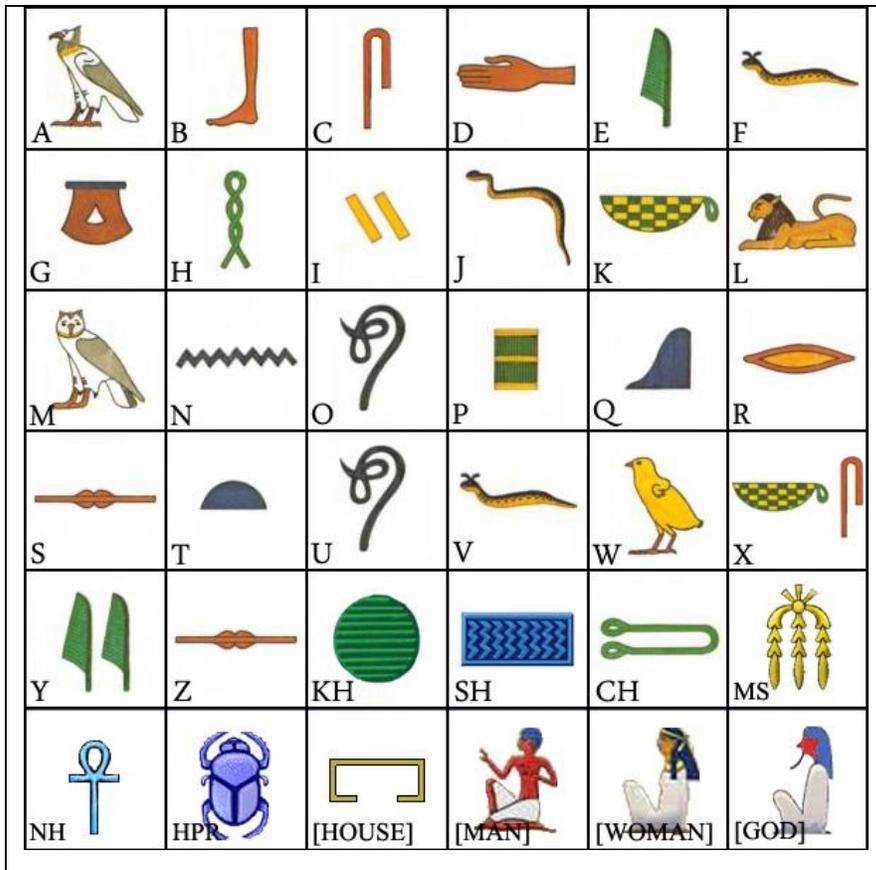
Coptic, Arabic and Hebrew, three languages related to Egyptian, to unlock the key to the translation. In 1822 Champollion became the first person in 1500 years to read the language of the ancient Egyptians!

Creating an Egyptian cartouche:

A **cartouche** is an oval frame which surrounds the hieroglyphs that make up the name of an Egyptian god or someone from the royal family.

A cartouche represents a looped rope which has the magical power to protect the name this written inside it. It was meant to protect against evil spirits both in this life and the afterlife. A lot of Cartouche's can be arranged either horizontally or vertically depending on the best layout for its design.

Directions: Using the hieroglyphics, write your name in the given Cartouche. Be creative and you must use color!

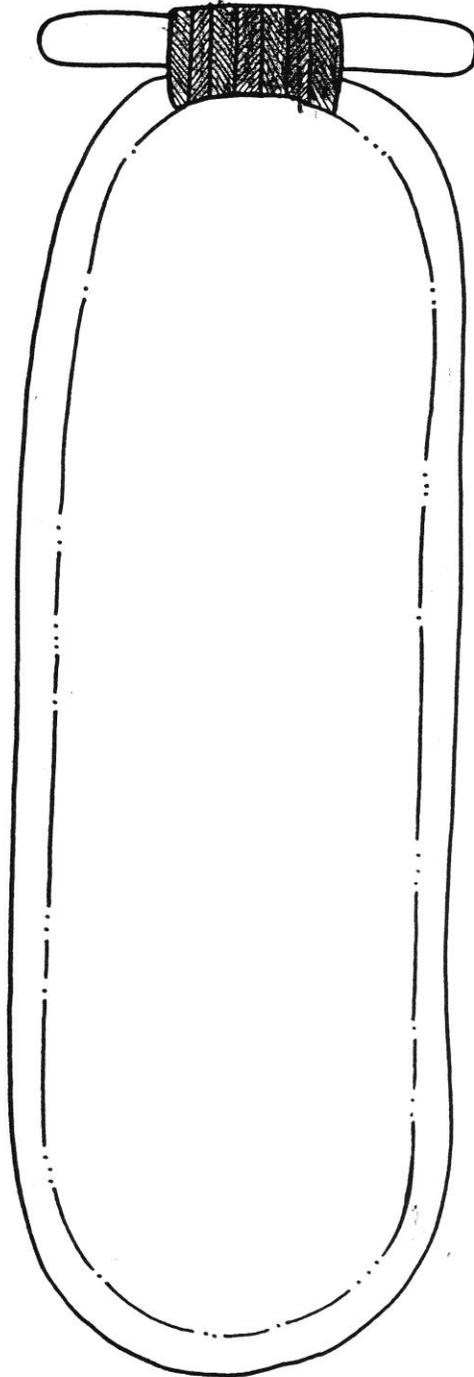


Translation	Sign description	Translation	Sign description
A	Vulture	S	Door bolt
B	Foot	T	Bread loaf
C	Folded cloth	U	Lasso
D	Hand	V	Homed viper
E	Flowering reed	W	Quail chick
F	Viper	X	Basket and folded cloth
G	Jar stand	Y	Two flowering reeds
H	Twisted flax	Z	Door bolt
I	Two strokes	KH	P
J	Cobra	SH	Pool (seen from above)
K	Basket	CH	Tethering rope
L	Lion	MS	Three fox skins tied together
M	Owl	NH	Life symbol
N	Water	HPR	Beetle symbol
O	Lasso	[HOUSE]	House, building symbol
P	Stool (seen from above)	[MAN]	Man symbol
Q	Hill	[WOMAN]	Woman symbol
R	Mouth	[GOD]	God, king symbol

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Cartouche:



Phonetics and the alphabet: from the 15th century BC

The most significant development in the history of writing, since the first development of a script in about 3200 BC, is the move from a pictographic or syllabic system (characteristic of Sumerian and ancient Egyptian) to a phonetic one, based on recording the spoken sound of a word. This change has one enormous benefit. It can take the hard work out of learning all the characters in writing and make it more accessible to EVERYONE.



The first early steps in this direction are taken in the second millennium BC in the trading communities of Phoenicia. The contribution of the Greeks, adapting the Phoenician system of writing in the 8th century BC, is to add vowels. For some they use the names of existing Phoenician letters (alpha for example). For others entirely new signs are added. The result is a Greek alphabet of twenty-four letters. The alphabet takes its name from the first two letters in the Phoenician system, alpha and beta, borrowed and adapted by the Greeks.

The Romans in their turn develop the Greek alphabet to form letters suitable for the writing of Latin. It is in the Roman form - and through the Roman Empire - that the alphabet spreads through Europe, and eventually through much of the world, as a standard system of writing. With a system as simple as this, and with portable writing materials such as papyrus, wooden tablets or leaves written correspondence becomes a familiar part of everyday life.

This is the Greek alphabet (the first letters are the capital letters, the second are lower case)

Aa	Bb	Gg	Dd	Ee	Zz	Hh	TH	Ii	Kk	Ll	Mm
alpha	beta	gamma	delta	epsilon	zeta	eta	theta	iota	kappa	lambda	mu
Α α	Β β	Γ γ	Δ δ	Ε ε	Ζ ζ	Η η	Θ θ	Ι ι	Κ κ	Λ λ	Μ μ

Nn	Xx	Oo	Pp	Rr	Ss	Tt	Y/u	f/ph	Xx	PS
nu	/ks xi	omega	pi	rho	sigma	Tau	upsilon	phi	ch	psi
Nv	Ξ ξ	Ω ω	Π π	Ρ ρ	Σ σ	Τ τ	Υ υ	Φ φ	Χ χ	Ψ ψ

Achievements in Writing: Guided Questions:**Directions:** answer each in COMPLETE sentences.

1. Though it is close, who is currently credited for the first writing system?

2. In ancient Mesopotamia, what was cuneiform first used for?

3. Why is the Rosetta Stone such an important discovery?

4. Explain the similarities and differences between the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek writing systems.

Creating your own Rosetta Stone**Directions:**

After reading and annotating each passage about the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greek civilizations, create your own 'Rosetta Stone' with your name in all four languages (including English) and three words describing yourself. You must write this on a separate sheet of paper and yes, you must use color and be creative!

Grading Checklist:

Used separate sheet of paper for Rosetta stone	_____/10
Wrote name and THREE describing characteristics in English	_____/15
Wrote name and THREE describing characteristics in Cuneiform	_____/15
Wrote name and THREE describing characteristics in Hieroglyphics	_____/15
Wrote name and THREE describing characteristics in Greek	_____/15
Answered questions above in complete sentences:	_____/15
Used color and creativity (boogers do not count as color)	_____/15

Name:

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