




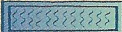



The Hieroglyphic Alphabet

Each letter of the hieroglyphic alphabet is represented by a picture.

The words in red tell you what these pictures are.

The hints in blue helped us to learn the hieroglyphs. We hope you'll find them useful.

	A		H!		P
Arm (An arm)		Twisted rope (Hanging rope) hard 'H'		Reed Stool (Pedestal)	
	Ah		I		Qu
Vulture ("Ah" screeched the vulture)		Reed (Ink pen)		Hill (Quite a steep hill)	
	B		J		R
Leg (Boot)		Cobra (Jellied eel)		Mouth (Red lips)	
	Ch		K		S
Hobble Rope (Chain)		Basket (Basket)		Folded Cloth (Stick)	
	D		Kh		Sh
Hand (Directions)		Unknown (soft 'Kh' as in Scottish "loch")		Pool (Splash!)	
	F		Kh!		T
Horned Viper (Ereddie the viper)		Animal's Belly (hard 'Kh' as in German "achtung!")		Loaf of Bread (Teacake)	
	G		M		U
Pot Stand (Pot of Gold)		Owl (Mousecatcher)		Quail Chick (Cuddly quail)	
	H		N		Z
Reed Shelter (Hut) soft 'H'		Water (Nile)		Door Bolt (Zip)	

THE HISTORY OF HIEROGLYPHS

WHAT IS HIEROGLYPHIC WRITING?

It's one of the oldest and most beautiful forms of writing in the world. It is made up of a combination of pictures and signs called hieroglyphs. Some hieroglyphs simply represent sounds, rather like our alphabet, and others represent ideas or areas of meaning.

HOW MANY HIEROGLYPHS ARE THERE?

All in all there are known to be 6,000 different hieroglyphs with which the ancient Egyptians could write anything they wanted, from words describing everyday objects to the most complicated abstract thoughts.

FOR HOW LONG DID THE EGYPTIANS USE HIEROGLYPHS?

Nearly 3,500 years - an astonishing period of time, especially when you think that the roots of the English language only go back about 1,000 years. Hieroglyphs were in use for longer than almost any other form of writing in history.

WHAT WERE THEY USED FOR?

At first, hieroglyphs were used for religious and state purposes, carved, with great skill, on stone and wood. Later in Egyptian history hieroglyphic writing became more widespread - love letters and even shopping lists have been discovered!

WHY DID PEOPLE STOP USING HIEROGLYPHS?

Towards the end of its history ancient Egypt was invaded by many different peoples, with other beliefs, languages and ways of writing. The eventual death blow for hieroglyphic writing came during the Roman-Christian period, around 1,600 years ago.

THE HIEROGLYPHIC MYSTERY

The last known hieroglyphs were written around AD400 and, for 1,400 years afterwards, hieroglyphs remained a mystery. During this time, travellers to Egypt invented many weird and wonderful meanings for the mysterious pictures they saw etched on the ancient monuments.

UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERY

About 200 years ago, at Rosetta in Egypt, Napoleon's soldiers unearthed a large black stone, built into an ancient wall. By chance, these French soldiers had stumbled across the key to the secret of the hieroglyphs. For in addition to the hieroglyphs, this inscription was also written in ancient Greek and demotic (another ancient Egyptian script). Guessing the importance of the stone, they made ink impressions of it. Soon, scholars all over Europe were comparing the Greek (which they already understood), with the hieroglyphic, and trying to unravel the mystery.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

At about the time the Rosetta Stone was discovered an eleven year old French boy, Jean-François Champollion, was shown some hieroglyphs and told that nobody in the world could read them. He saw this as a huge challenge and, as he got older, devoted years of study to the Rosetta Stone. He was the first scholar to work out that hieroglyphs were not exclusively sound signs, picture signs or idea signs, but a combination of all three. With this realisation he was able to crack the hieroglyphic code and so open the door on our understanding of ancient Egyptian civilisation.

WHERE DOES THE NAME HIEROGLYPH COME FROM?

The ancient Egyptians called their writing 'medu-necher', meaning 'divine words'. It was actually the Greeks who called the symbols hieroglyphs from their words 'hiero' meaning 'sacred' and 'glyph' meaning 'carving'.

SCRIBES

COULD ALL EGYPTIANS READ AND WRITE HIEROGLYPHS?

No. Only one in a hundred people could read and write. Those who could were called scribes.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A SCRIBE?

The most gifted boys (and only boys) would be selected at the age of six to become apprentices. They trained for ten years until, at sixteen, they were fully qualified.

HOW DID THEY MANAGE TO LEARN ALL OF THE SIGNS?

They probably didn't! Just as nowadays we use only a small percentage of the words that exist in English, the ancient scribes didn't need to know all 6,000 hieroglyphs. In fact, if you were able to go back in time, you could get a job as a scribe knowing fewer than 700!

WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS OF BEING A SCRIBE?

It was one of the most respected professions, and once you'd mastered the art, you were assured of a very good standard of living. Often, because of their writing skills, scribes went on to specialise in other well paid jobs in law, medicine or government. It was the dream of most parents that their sons become scribes. As one Egyptian father said, "It is greater than any other profession. There is nothing like it on earth".


WHAT DID YOU DO IF YOU COULDN'T READ OR WRITE?

Every town and village had a scribe and if you needed anything written - a personal letter, a receipt or even a tax return - you had to go to the scribe and pay him to write it for you. Later, you'd have to pay him again to read the reply!

WHAT DID SCRIBES WRITE ON?


When a young scribe was learning to read and write he would practise on stones or small fragments of broken pot, because they were cheap and easy to come by. Only as he became more skilled, would he be allowed to write on papyrus.

WHAT IS PAPYRUS?

It's an early form of paper made from the papyrus plant. It was produced in rolls, and was very time consuming and expensive to make. You can see the hieroglyph  for 'papyrus roll' on the 'Communication' ideacard and in words such as 'law' and 'to write'.

WHAT DID SCRIBES WRITE WITH?

They wrote with a reed pen, about 20 cm long, the end of which was bashed and bruised to make the fibres flexible and able to absorb the ink. The coloured inks were made from vegetables and different types of earth, mixed with gum and water. The hieroglyph for a scribe's writing equipment is also shown on the 'Communication' ideacard. On

 the left you can see the palette for mixing the different colours, then the pouch containing powdered inks, and on the right, the holder for the reed pen.