

The Importance of the Nile River

Long ago, many people thought of the Nile River as the "giver of life." For thousands of years its waters allowed life to survive in the dry region.

Around 5000 B.C., early people began to settle along the Nile in what is now the country of Egypt. The early Egyptians led a more peaceful life near the Nile River than the Mesopotamians did near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Nile overflowed about the same time each year. The Egyptians knew that they could safely plant seeds as soon as the floodwaters left the land. They also knew to harvest, or gather, their crops before the floods returned.

Each year, the flooding of the Nile brought the early farmers a gift of new silt. After the flooding, a thin layer of this rich soil covered the ground. The new silt made the land ready to grow new crops.

The Egyptians needed more than fresh silt to grow crops. They also needed a steady supply of water. To get the water they needed, they built irrigation systems. Human-made ponds stored water to be used when needed.



Dams and dikes helped hold back floodwater. Canals carried floodwater back to the river.

In 1970 the Aswan High dam was built in southern Egypt. Because of the dam, the Nile River no longer floods its banks. Farmers now must use pumps to bring water to their fields.

Review

CHECK UNDERSTANDING

1. Into what body of water does the Nile River flow?

THINK CRITICALLY

2. Why have most Egyptians throughout history lived near the Nile River?

SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW

Diorama Activity Make a diorama that shows early farming in ancient Egypt. Include the Nile River, fertile land, crops, and the desert.