

Inside the Pyramids

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Program Description

Master Builders (32 min.) – Explores the mystery and engineering mastery of pyramid builders from ancient civilizations around the globe. *Sneferu, King of Pyramids* (18 min.) – Profiles the Egyptian king whose pioneering new geometry allowed him to build the world's first true pyramid and launch the golden age of pyramids.

Onscreen Questions

- How can a ruler display power?
 - How did rituals performed in pyramids maintain and enhance a ruler's control?
 - How did Sneferu display his power?
 - How did Sneferu assure his legacy?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand why pyramids are important to different cultures.
- Explore the differences and similarities among Egyptian, Maya, and Aztec pyramids.
- Explain and illustrate these similarities and differences by developing a page for a magazine.

Materials

- *Inside the Pyramids* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Computer with Internet access
- Print resources about the Egyptian, Maya, and Aztec pyramids

Procedures

1. Ask students what they know about pyramids. Many students will probably know that the Egyptians built pyramids as tombs for their pharaohs. Point out that other cultures, such as the Maya and the Aztecs, also built pyramids.
2. Tell students that pyramids reveal much about the cultures of which they are a part, especially about the relationship between human beings and the gods. Explain to students that they will be comparing and contrasting pyramids from the Egyptians, the Maya, and the Aztecs as a way to better understand their societies.
3. Divide students into groups of three. Tell each group to research the pyramids from these societies. As they work, they should address the following questions:
 - Where are the pyramids located?
 - How were they built?
 - What was their purpose?
 - How do they reflect the culture from which they emerged?
 - How do the pyramids reveal the culture's relationship to their gods?
4. Give students time in class to begin their research. The following Web sites provide a good starting point:
 - Egyptian Pyramids
 - <http://www.cnn.com/TRAVEL/DESTINATIONS/9705/seven.wonders/pyramids.html>
 - <http://www.touregypt.net/construction/>
 - <http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmnh/pyramid.htm>
 - <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/pyramids/pyramids.html>
 - http://www.culturefocus.com/egypt_pyramids.htm
 - Maya and Aztec Pyramids
 - <http://www.crystalinks.com/mexico.html>
 - <http://www.crystalinks.com/chichenitza.html>
 - <http://www.lost-civilizations.net/mayan-pyramids-chichen-itza.html>
 - http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/12/1206_021206_TVMayanTemple.html
 - <http://www.unexplained-mysteries.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=28388>
 - <http://www.nativeweb.org/pages/pyramids/overview.html>
 - http://home.comcast.net/~buroker1/aztecs_human_sacrifices.htm
5. During the next class period, ask students to imagine that they work for a magazine developing a story about pyramids. Each group will create a page illustrating what they have found out about pyramids. The page should include a discussion of the similarities and differences among the three cultures' pyramids, as well as photographs and diagrams illustrating pyramids from each society.

6. Have the groups present their magazine pages to the class. Discuss which pages are most effective. Combine all of the pages into a class magazine about pyramids.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; worked effectively in their groups, completing all the research; produced a comprehensive and creative magazine page, including all of the requested information.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; worked satisfactorily in their groups, completing most of the research; produced a satisfactory magazine page, including most of the requested information.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions; had difficulty working in their groups and completing the research; did not complete the magazine page with the requested information.

Vocabulary

Chichén Itzá

Definition: A complex of ruins in Mexico that is the site of pyramids, temples, and other structures built by the ancient Maya, an indigenous people of Mexico and Central America

Context: Not only can pyramids be found at Chichén Itzá, but also temples, an observatory, and ball courts.

Great Pyramid

Definition: The largest and most famous of the pyramids of Giza, built by Sneferu's son, Khufu (Cheops), it is made of more than two million blocks of stone.

Context: The Great Pyramid is so carefully constructed that the ancient Greeks considered it one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

mastaba

Definition: an ancient Egyptian tomb that is rectangular in shape with a flat top.

Definition: The step pyramids were created by placing gradually smaller mastabas on top of each other.

Tenochtitlan

Definition: The capitol of the Aztec Empire, where temples and pyramids were constructed

Context: The Aztecs brought gifts to Tenochtitlan to honor the gods who resided in the city's numerous temples.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History: Era 2— Understands the major characteristics of civilization and the development of civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley
- World History: Era 3— Understands how early agrarian civilizations arose in Mesoamerica
- Language Arts: Viewing— Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
 - Time, Continuity, and Change
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>