General World Cultures

Chapter 15- North Africa

**monarchy**- a government run by a single ruler, usually a king or queen, who inherits the position

**republic**- a government in which laws are made by a small group of citizens elected by the people

**erg**- a huge sand dune that shifts over time

**oasis**- an area in a desert where water springs are found

**pharaoh**- the ruler of ancient Egypt

**hieroglyphic**- related to a system of writing in which pictures called hieroglyphs stand for ideas

**arable**- suitable for use as farmland

**The Countries of North Africa**

\* There are five countries in North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. France and Italy controlled parts of Africa between the 1800s and 1900s.

\* History sets Egypt apart from the other countries of North Africa. In ancient times, it was a powerful empire. Later, it was conquered by the Roman empire, then by Arab peoples and then by the Turkish empire. Egypt became a separate country in the early 1800s. However, the British government controlled it. Not until 1936 did Egypt become truly independent.

\* Today, Morocco is a **monarchy** and is ruled by a king. Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt are **republics**, with elected presidents. Libya is ruled by a military junta, which is headed by a dictator.

**Nomads**

\* The Berber people are nomadic herders. They live in tents and move from place to place. Traditionally, women of this nomadic group make cloth from goat hair and sew tents out of this cloth. The men elect a tribal leader, who decides when and where the group will migrate.

\* The Berbers keep goats, sheep, cattle, or camels. These nomadic people live mainly off the milk and dairy products from their animals. They also collect dates from wild palm trees.

\* Camels are especially important to the nomadic lifestyle because camels re well adapted to desert life. They can live for weeks without water and shut their noses to keep out sand during a windstorm. They can also walk across soft sand because their feet are padded.

Here are some interesting facts about camels: <http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/news-expressive-faces-camels>

**The Sahara**

\* North Africa is the world’s largest desert- the Sahara. It covers more than 3 million square miles. The Sahara is almost as large as the United States! It stretches through every country in North Africa, covering 80% of Algeria and Libya. In Libya, large parts of the desert are covered with loose sand. Wind blows the sand into hills called **dunes**. Huge dunes that shift over time are called **ergs**.

\* Most of the Sahara is hard and rocky. A few parts are even mountainous and catch some rainfall. Other parts of the desert are dotted with **oases**. An oasis may have a patch of grass and a few palm trees. The nomadic herders move from oasis to oasis out of necessity. Still, large parts of the desert in Algeria and Libya are completely uninhabited.

\* The Atlas Mountains provide water from small rivers that flow out of the mountain. They irrigate their fields. Only the rivers that flow north to the Mediterranean Sea are used. Those that flow south disappear into the desert.

*Complete the Geographer’s Tool Kit Reading Economic Maps on page 212.*

**The Nile River: Past and Present**

\* The main geographic feature in Egypt is the Nile River. It is the longest river in the world. It starts at Lake Victorian East Africa and flows more than 4,000 miles to the Mediterranean Sea.

\* One of the world’s first civilizations bloomed along the Nile River around 3100 B.C. Why might people have chosen to settle there instead of another place in Africa?

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People settled along the Nile because it was easy to farm there. Once a year, the Nile flooded its banks, spreading rich, new soil and providing water for irrigation.

\* In ancient Egypt, priests were powerful. The head priest developed into a **pharaoh**, or king. The ancient Egyptians thought of their pharaohs as gods. Pharaohs ruled Egypt for about 3,000 years.

\* The ancient Egyptians built huge pyramids as tombs for their pharaohs. They built large temples, too. Many of these buildings still stand. The Egyptians also invented **hieroglyphic** writing. Their writings tell us much about their laws, religion, and daily life.

\* The Egyptians developed a 365-day calendar. They based it on the Nile floods, which came every year at about the same time. The Egyptian calendar had 12 months- each 30 days long. At the end of the year came five extra days that were set aside as feast days for the gods. These extra days completed the 365-day year. The modern Western calendar is based on the ancient Egyptian calendar.

\* Life is somewhat unchanged on the Nile. The river still provides water for farmers. Boats still use the river as a highway. Egyptians still build houses out of clay from the riverbed. Farmers even use certain tools based on those used in ancient times.

\* One such tool is the shaduf, which consists, in part, of a wooden beam set up next to the river. From one end of the beam hangs a bucket, from the other end a weight. The farmer dips the bucket in the water. The weight makes the bucket easy to life. The farmer then empties the bucket into an irrigation ditch.

\* Thanks to the shaduf, the farmer does not have to haul water by hand. Still, irrigating the field this way is hard work. Farmers who can buy water pumps gladly do so.

You will now create an invention to make life easier. You will determine a price, make a design, and write a promotional ad explaining how it will make life easier.

\* In some ways, however, life has changed along the Nile. Many big changes came after the Aswan High Dam was built about 500 miles upriver from its delta in 1971. The dam provides electricity and regulates the flow of the Nile.

\* Before 1971, farmers planted only once a year, right after the yearly flood. The floods no longer occur because the dam controls the Nile waters and allows the farmers to irrigate their fields year round. In addition, because the climate is warm all year, farmers can plant two or three times a year.

\* Can a dam have negative effects? Think critically and make educated guesses.

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Every year, floods bring new, rich soil, which was like a natural fertilizer. Now, farmers must buy fertilizer, which costs money and takes extra work to mix the soil.

\* Floods also bring in fast-moving water, which flushed the river clean. Now, the water in the Nile moves slowly, allowing a certain type of snail to live and grow in irrigation channels. Snails of this type carry a parasite that causes a disease called bilharziasis, also called schitosomiasis. This disease can be treated, but many people cannot afford the treatment.

According to <http://www.internationalrivers.org/environmental-impacts-of-dams> …

The environmental consequences of large dams are numerous and varied, and includes direct impacts to the biological, chemical and physical properties of rivers and riparian (or "stream-side") environments.

The dam wall itself blocks fish migrations, which in some cases and with some species completely separate spawning habitats from rearing habitats.  The dam also traps sediments, which are critical for maintaining physical processes and habitats downstream of the dam (include the maintenance of productive deltas, barrier islands, fertile floodplains and coastal wetlands).

Another significant and obvious impact is the transformation upstream of the dam from a free-flowing river ecosystem to an artificial slack-water reservoir habitat. Changes in temperature, chemical composition, dissolved oxygen levels and the physical properties of a reservoir are often not suitable to the aquatic plants and animals that evolved with a given river system. Indeed, reservoirs often host non-native and invasive species (e.g. snails, algae, predatory fish) that further undermine the river's natural communities of plants and animals.

The alteration of a river's flow and sediment transport downstream of a dam often causes the greatest sustained environmental impacts. Life in and around a river evolves and is conditioned on the timing and quantities of river flow.  Disrupted and altered water flows can be as severe as completely de-watering river reaches and the life they contain.  Yet even subtle changes in the quantity and timing of water flows impact aquatic and riparian life, which can unravel the ecological web of a river system.

A dam also holds back [sediments](http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/2221) that would naturally replenish downstream ecosystems. When a river is deprived of its sediment load, it seeks to recapture it by eroding the downstream river bed and banks (which can undermine bridges and other riverbank structures, as well as riverside woodlands). Riverbeds downstream of dams are typically eroded by several meters within the decade of first closing a dam; the damage can extend for tens or even hundreds of kilometers below a dam.  Riverbed deepening (or "incising") will also lower groundwater tables along a river, lowering the water table accessible to plant roots (and to human communities drawing water from wells) .  Altering the riverbed also reduces habitat for fish that spawn in river bottoms, and for invertebrates.

In aggregate, dammed rivers have also impacted processes in the broader biosphere.  Most reservoirs, especially those in the tropics, are significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions (a recent study pegged global greenhouse gas emissions from reservoirs on par with that of the aviation industry, about 4% of human-caused GHG emissions).  Recent studies on the Congo River have demonstrated that the sediment and nutrient flow from the Congo drives biological processes far into the Atlantic Ocean, including serving as a carbon sink for atmospheric greenhouse gases.

Large dams have led to the [extinction](http://www.internationalrivers.org/node/1314) of many fish and other aquatic species, the disappearance of birds in floodplains, huge losses of forest, wetland and farmland, erosion of coastal deltas, and many other unmitigable impacts.

**Modern Egypt**

\* Cairo is Egypt’s capital. About ten percent of Egyptian people live in or near the capital, the largest city in Africa. Cairo is growing very quickly. In this city, horses share the streets with cars. Some neighborhoods have tall apartment buildings, and some have mud huts. Many people cannot find housing at all. Several hundred thousand people, in fact, live in an old cemetery, which Egyptians call the City of the Dead.

\* The government owns and runs 80% of the industry in Egypt. Yet, up to one out of every four workers in Cairo has no job.

\* Many more are **underemployed**. That is, they are trained for a job other than the one they have. For example, many cabdrivers in Egypt have university degrees. Meanwhile, prices of goods and services are rising 25-30% each year.

\* Egypt has the most productive farms in North Africa. Less than 5% of the land in Egypt is **arable**. The most important crop is cotton, which is not food. What is cotton used for in our society? Think of all you can.

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Egypt sells oil, cotton, and cotton products to other countries. Tourism is another source of money. Thousands of people visit Egypt each year to see the remains of ancient civilizations. I would love to see the pyramids and travel the Nile River. A third important source of money is the Suez Canal.

\* Much of the world’s oil travels through the Suez Canal on tankers. The Suez Canal was opened in 1869 to connect the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea. Before the canal was built, ships had to travel around Africa to get from Europe to East Asia. The Suez Canal reduced this journey by more than 4,000 miles. A French company built the canal. At first, France and Britain jointly owned it. Egypt took control of the canal in 1956. Now, ships must pay Egypt for the right to use the canl.

*Complete the Geography in Your Life Analyzing Photographs on page 217.*