


HIEROGLYPHS


The Ancient Egyptian language includes symbols known as pictograms, which represented real life objects, like cows, boats, and people. As wealth accumulated and people like the king had possessions to count, those responsible for counting them could draw the picture, and then put a tally of numbers next to it. The symbols were written with ink and a pen made from a sharpened reed. 

Knowing about things that are important to people provides clues to their culture. Can you make icons or pictograms of things that have meaning in your household? Draw them here:

Eventually, when society and culture found the need to write down more and longer things, additional symbols were added to express complex ideas. How could you express family relationships and feelings with just that pictogram you drew of your cell phone?

Two or more symbols could be combined to represent how the word sounded, instead of just a picture of the object.  This is how the word for town was written. There was a core alphabet, and lots of helper symbols. Here is the core alphabet.

Many more symbols were developed over time. Imagine needing to learn 750 symbols! Only a few people could afford to be trained to write. They were called scribes. They carried a portable writing kit so they could work anywhere they were needed.  This word for scribe

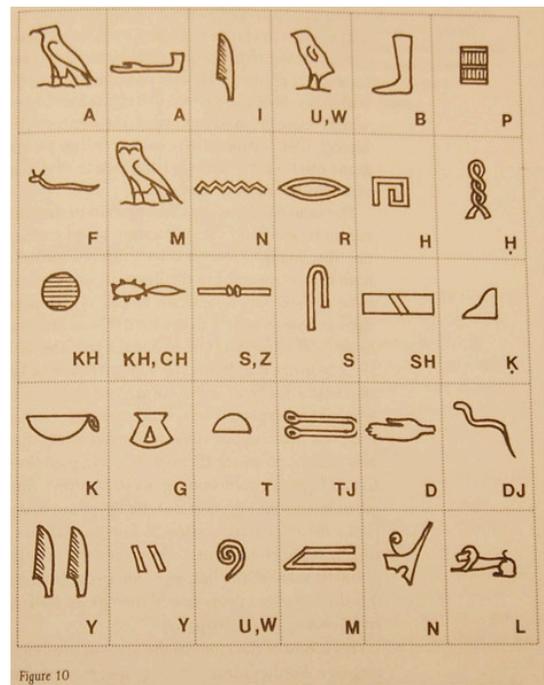
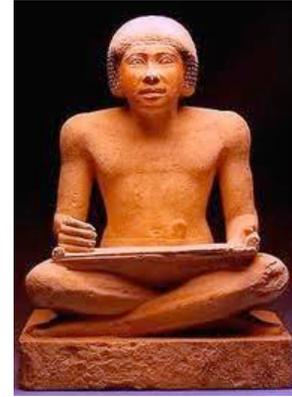


Figure 10

shows a man and his writing kit. Being a scribe was considered a very good job.



Like most languages, ancient Egyptian words were partly made of consonants and partly of vowels. But, hieroglyphs never wrote down the vowels. How would your name look if you wrote it without the vowels?

You might guess that trying to read a language with the words only partly written makes for a bit of a mystery – especially since no one alive still speaks the language. For example, the word for woman is sounded s t. It could be sit, set, sut, sat or sot. To prevent confusion, those who study the language have agreed to normally put in an “e” and get on with it.

Today, we know this system for writing Ancient Egyptian language as hieroglyphs, or sacred writings. To say “hieroglyphics” is not correct, so say it like the experts do. They could be written on papyrus, or the scrap paper of the time, broken pottery pieces, or, carved and painted onto the walls of temples and tombs where they praised the relationship between the king and the gods.



When used in certain places, such as tombs or temples, writing might also be considered to have magical properties. If it was written, it happened. In some of these cases, where budget was no object, the hieroglyphs were often beautifully crafted as works of art.

Instead of drawing an outline of a bird, all the feathers might be detailed.



Sometimes, if a word contained a harmful symbol, like a snake or a bee, it might be left incomplete or mutilated so the creature could not come to life and harm anyone. How would you cut this snake to make him harmless? Just make a slash through the picture with your pencil.

