



THE CUSTODIAN'S KEYS

Chapter 1 – Lesson Plan

EGYPT PUZZLE: HIEROGLYPHS

Portion 1

This puzzle is based on ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, one of history's most enduring and engaging mysteries. Hieroglyphics were indecipherable for many centuries until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, an ancient document that included the same message in three different written languages: hieroglyphs, Demotic, and Ancient Greek. This allowed scholars in the early 1800s to decipher the message based on the text in the other languages!

These activities and resources will help students use hieroglyphics to learn more about hieroglyphics and about written language in general.

GR. 2-5

Hieroglyphics are the ancient Egyptian alphabet. They are symbols that represent words, using pictures of things that were important to people in ancient Egypt. These things must have been very important indeed for the Egyptians to include them in their language!

ACTIVITY 1

Look at the hieroglyphics in the Egypt Puzzle. What pictures can you identify?

Why do you think the Egyptians chose these things to be part of their language?

ACTIVITY 2

Think of some things that are important to you. Maybe you have a favourite pet, or a favourite sport. Maybe you love going to the beach or for a hike in the forest!

Which things in your life would you choose to be part of your language, if you were creating a language for yourself and your community? Make a list!

Then, draw your own "hieroglyphics" for several of these things. Exchange with a friend and see if you can interpret each other's messages!

GR. 6-8 (ALSO APPROPRIATE FOR 9-12)

Hieroglyphics are the symbols that make up the writing system used by the ancient Egyptians. They can be used to solve this puzzle, but they are also a unique, fascinating system in their own right!

There are two major types of writing systems in human language: *logographic scripts*, which use pictures or characters to represent whole words as well as sounds, and *segmental scripts*, which use letters (sometimes called *graphemes*), and sometimes other marks, to represent sounds. Alphabets, like the English alphabet, are one type of segmental script, while Egyptian hieroglyphics are a logographic script.

ACTIVITY 1

Can you think of another language that uses the same alphabet as English? Are there differences in how some letters are pronounced? Are there letters in that language that do not exist or are not used in English?

Choose one of these languages and make a list of letters that are pronounced differently, or do not exist in English.

(Some examples: Spanish, French, Norwegian)

ACTIVITY 2

Can you think of another language that has its own alphabet, but does not use the same alphabet as English? How does that language's alphabet or writing system differ from English?

Choose one of these languages and compare it to English. How many letters does the alphabet have? Does it have letters for both vowels and consonants, or does it use special marks (sometimes called *diacritics*) to make vowel sounds? See if you can write your name in this language!

(Some examples: Russian/Cyrillic alphabet, Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit)

ACTIVITY 3

Can you think of another language that uses a *logographic* script? They aren't very common, but they do exist. Hint: one of them is the language spoken by the world's most populous country!

(Some examples: Chinese, Japanese)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE FOR GR. 9-12

Google's Arts and Culture Lab has created a tool called Fabricius, which uses machine learning (training computers to recognize images and symbols) to translate hieroglyphics into modern languages. They've made this tool available to everyone. You can find it here:

<https://artsexperiments.withgoogle.com/fabricius/en/about>

ACTIVITY

Pair up with a friend or classmate, either in your classroom or working remotely, and use Fabricius to text each other using hieroglyphics. Be creative!

FURTHER RESOURCES: HIEROGLYPHICS AND WRITING SYSTEMS

For younger kids or all kids:

National Geographic Kids

<https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/egypt/hieroglyphics-uncovered/>
(includes a hieroglyphic sound guide and a video)

Royal Ontario Museum

<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/learn/activities/classroom/hieroglyphs>
(a step-by-step activity for writing one's name in hieroglyphics)

For older kids:

The British Museum

<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-the-rosetta-stone/> (an excellent resource all about the Rosetta Stone, which is held in the museum's collections!)

Brown University

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/international-affairs/year-of-china/language-and-cultural-resources/introduction-chinese-characters/introduction-chinese-characters> (a history of Chinese characters, for students interested in logographic scripts)

MEDIEVAL PUZZLE: HERALDRY

Portion 2

You may not know the term “heralrdy”, but you’ve definitely seen it! If you’ve ever seen a film or played a video game where medieval knights battle each other with colourful shields and pennants (or battlefield flags), you’ve experienced heraldry.

Although heraldry is often associated with European battles and pageantry in the Middle Ages, it is so useful and powerful that it has continued to this day, even though battles no longer involve armoured knights on horseback and there are no more jousting tournaments!

Heraldry, at its core, is a form of *communication*. It is a way to identify things that are important to the person or organization creating the symbols, and to communicate that importance to the people around them, whether in a battle or at the boardroom table.

Coats of arms, flags, shield decorations, even ceremonial clothing are all elements of heraldry.

GR. 2-5

ACTIVITY: HERALDIC ANIMALS

In the puzzle, you can see that there are different animals on the shields. The people who made those shields used animals to symbolize, or to stand for, different *attributes* that were important to them. (*Attributes* are the things about you that make you who you are. For instance, if you are very brave when things are difficult, then bravery is an *attribute* of yours.)

Here are some of the animals that traditional heralds used to symbolize different attributes:

- Lions = bravery
- Dogs = faithfulness, reliability
- Stags (male deer with antlers) = wisdom and long life
- Eagles = power and nobility
- Hares (a kind of rabbit) = speed
- Badgers = endurance or 'hanging on'

Heralds chose these animals because of their own attributes. If you have a dog, you know that dogs are very faithful to their families. If you’ve ever seen a rabbit run across the grass, you know that they’re very fast! And if you’ve ever seen a lion roar, you can understand why they represent bravery.

Which of these animals best represents *you*? Why?

Can you think of some other animals you like? What might they represent? (Some examples to get you started: a bee, a swan, a cat, a raccoon, a tiger, an elephant, a horse)

GR. 6-8

ACTIVITY: CREATE YOUR OWN COAT OF ARMS!

(this activity is also appropriate for gr. 9-12)

We're going to create a coat of arms with a few heraldic elements: one or two *special colours*, one or two *animals*, and one or two heraldic *ordinaries* (the symbols and shapes on a shield). Colours, animals and ordinaries and their meanings can be found here: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/guide-to-heraldry>

1. Choose at least one *traditional* heraldic element for your coat of arms. Describe why you chose these elements. How do they go together? What aspects of yourself do they describe?
2. Create three of *your own* heraldic elements for your coat of arms: animals, colours, ordinaries, or one or more of each. You can use mythical creatures, too (like unicorns), or combinations of colour (like a rainbow). Feel free to be creative!
 - a. For each element, describe why it fits who you are. Would someone recognize you as a person by your coat of arms?
 - b. When you're finished, swap coats of arms with a classmate or friend (either remotely or in the classroom). Discuss your coats of arms with each other, and guess why your partner chose the elements they did.
 - c. For homeschoolers: work with your family to make a family coat of arms!
3. Choose a *motto* for your coat of arms: this is like a tag line for yourself! Traditional heraldic mottoes are in Latin, but yours doesn't have to be. It should be short and should describe something that's one of the most important things about you. For example, the United States' heraldic motto is "E Pluribus Unum" ("from many, one"), which refers to the union of the original 13 colonies into the confederacy of the early United States of America!

GR. 9-12

Although we often associate heraldry with medieval knights and royalty, the practice of heraldry continues today! Governmental units like states and cities, organizations like universities, schools and companies, and even private families still use their heraldic symbols as part of their public presence. In fact, *your* school probably has a coat of arms and a motto as well!

ACTIVITY: IDENTIFY MODERN HERALDRY!

1. Look up the flag of your state or province. Does it include heraldic elements (like ordinaries, colours or animals)? Do some research to find out why the flag includes those symbols; most state and provincial governments include this information on their websites.
2. Look up your city's coat of arms: if you live in a large enough city or town, it most likely has one. (If you live in a small town, look up the coat of arms of the closest large city.) What do the symbols on the coat of arms represent? Does this match up with your experience of the city?
3. Not all heraldry is based in European heraldic tradition. Many Indigenous peoples in North America have their own heraldic symbols and insignias. These usually do not look like European heraldic symbols, but they are just as important. Do some research to find out which Indigenous traditional land you live on, and see if you can find out what their traditional symbols are. (The Native Land map at <https://native-land.ca/> is a great resource for discovering which land you are on!)

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FURTHER RESOURCES

Hieroglyphics and Writing Systems

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Royal Ontario Museum

<https://www.rom.on.ca/en/learn/activities/classroom/hieroglyphs> (a step-by-step activity for writing one's name in hieroglyphics)

For older kids:

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<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-the-rosetta-stone/>
(an excellent resource all about the Rosetta Stone, which is held in the museum's collections!)

Brown University

<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/international-affairs/year-of-china/language-and-cultural-resources/introduction-chinese-characters/introduction-chinese-characters>
(a history of Chinese characters, for students interested in logographic scripts)

Heralry and Medieval History

For younger kids or all kids:

English Heritage UK

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/guide-to-heraldry>
(a brilliant guide to heraldic symbols and meanings)

English Heritage UK

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/siteassets/home/easter/herladry-activity-pack-1.pdf>
(a downloadable PDF colouring book that includes all the major heraldic symbolic animals and their meanings)

University of Alberta

http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/symbolism_and_traditions/
(a series of videos and learning materials discussing Canadian Indigenous symbols and visual traditions)

For older kids:

Project Gutenberg

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41617/41617-h/41617-h.htm>
(Project Gutenberg is an organization that digitizes very old texts so that people can access them even if they can't get to a library. This is a guide to heraldry written in 1909! High school-aged students may enjoy exploring other resources in PG as well.)

Design Week

<https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/20-26-april-2020/modern-heraldry-counter-print/>
(A substantive review of the book Modern Heraldry, which investigates the connections between traditional heraldry and modern design and branding; may be of interest to high school students, and adults!)