Hall of Ancient Egypt
Third Floor

**Vocabulary (8th Grade):**
Agricultural, ancient, ancestry, branches of government, capitol, civilization, coffin, dilapidated, drought, erode, flood plain, heritage, hieroglyphic, mummification, mummy, ruins, sarcophagus, script, society, temples, pyramids, Pharaoh

**Egypt: Gift of the Nile**

Some 5,000 years ago, the Nile River Valley saw the birth of the first great African civilization. Protected from foreign invasion by deserts filled with useful minerals, and sustained by an annual Nile flood which deposited fertile silt along the river, the Egyptians developed from a simple agricultural community into a sophisticated society. Under a system of divine kingship, Egyptian civilization contributed strongly to the later cultures of the Mediterranean and Europe. Ancient Egypt still exerts a fascination over us.
Which continent is Egypt located?

What river runs through Egypt?

After reading the text panel above, examine the map to answer the questions below.
Notice the river running through Egypt and explain why the Nile River is the backbone of Egypt.

What geographical formation could protect the Egyptians from foreign enemies?

Extend your Knowledge! Keeping in mind what you know about the Nile River, why do you think Upper Egypt is south of Lower Egypt?
Look at the timeline above to answer the following questions.

What famous Queen ruled Egypt during the Ptolemaic Egyptian time period (332 – 30 BC)?

What culture surfaced in North America during Ptolemaic Egypt?

Name two things that occurred in other parts of the world during the New Kingdom.

1. ______________________________

2. ______________________________

According to the timeline, in what year was the Rosetta Stone created?

Which time period came 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, and 3\textsuperscript{rd}? New Kingdom, Old Kingdom, and Middle Kingdom.

1\textsuperscript{st}: ______________________________

2\textsuperscript{nd}: ______________________________

3\textsuperscript{rd}: ______________________________
Map: Egypt
Color and label the map with the 12 places listed below and include a compass rose. Use the text panels throughout this Knowledge Hunt to help you locate the areas listed.

- Lower Egypt
- Upper Egypt
- Nile River
- Red Sea
- Mediterranean Sea
- Alexandria
- Thebes
- Memphis
- Rome
- Italy
- Greece
- Jerusalem
Egypt’s Ancient Roots

Flint handaxes found along the gravel terraces on either side of the Nile attest to human presence in the early Paleolithic, or early Old Stone Age, pre-dating 100,000 BC. By the late Paleolithic, between 25,000 to 10,000 BC, environmental changes and subsequent adaptations in human behavior laid the foundation of what came to be known as ancient Egyptian civilization. Drought conditions during this period forced human hunter-gatherers into the Nile valley. Seasonal camps arose, evidence that humans were moving over relatively short distances, instead of covering large areas. Stone tool technology marked important changes: handaxes were replaced by small blades, used to make tools such as knives, arrowheads, spears, fishhooks and harpoons.

Around 10,000 BC the period of extreme drought came to an end, and rainfall became more plentiful. The first cattle were domesticated around that time. By the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth millennium BC, pottery appeared around this time. Drier weather returned, forcing Neolithic human settlement to focus on the Nile valley once more. Around the middle of the third millennium BC, the climate was closer to modern conditions, encouraging people to leave the increasingly dry desert land for the Nile floodplain. The stage was set for the creation of the pharaonic state.

What natural occurrence encouraged ancient Egyptians to leave the desert and move to the Nile flood plain?

When did cows become domesticated?
Extend your knowledge! Which two breeds of cattle make up the Texas Longhorn?

According to the text panel on the previous page, when did pottery appear in the ancient Egyptian timeline?

Choose one of the pottery pieces in the picture above and explain what you think it was used for. Draw it below.
The Predynastic Period (6000 – 3100 BC)

The late Neolithic period in Egypt is known as the Predynastic period—i.e. the time before the “dynasties” of ruling families recorded in written history. It covers the time between the emergence of the first Neolithic communities around 5000 BC and the beginning of a unified Egyptian state around 3100 BC. The second part of this long period of time is traditionally divided into two parts: the Naqada I period (4200–3700 BC); and the Naqada II period (3700–3200 BC), named after the Upper Egyptian site of Naqada where objects from this period were first excavated.

Pooling resources created surplus time and labor, allowing society to specialize and stratify. There is evidence of increasing inequality during the Predynastic period—as villages became towns and states, their leaders changed from headmen to kings. Finds from settlements and cemeteries suggest that Upper and Lower Egypt were culturally distinct: pottery and stone vessels, in particular, have different shapes. In spite of this, north and south were part of an international trading network. Gold from Nubia, shells from the Red Sea, and even blue lapis lazuli from Afghanistan were all traded at this period.

Associated with these early sedentary communities were cemeteries located in the low desert nearby. Burials were simple pit graves, in which the dead person was laid in a crouched position. The bodies were naturally dried by the hot sand. In later burials, the bodies were sometimes wrapped in mats. Sometimes the person’s head and limbs were bound with cloth. Grave goods, such as items of jewelry, slate palettes for grinding makeup and pots are our main sources of information about this time.

Objects from the Upper Egyptian Naqada II culture are increasingly found in Lower Egypt. The following period, once called Naqada III, is now known as the Protodynastic Period (ca. 3200–3000 BC), as it sees all Egypt united under one ruler and the development of hieroglyphic writing.

What artifacts suggest that Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt were culturally distinct?

How did historians gain information about this time period? What kind of items did they study?
The first examples of Egyptian writing survive from an elite burial of the Protodynastic Period, about 3200 BC. Short groups of picture signs written on ivory box labels identified their contents. Within a couple of hundred years, longer inscriptions show a fully developed grammar in use.

These signs can be phonetic—standing for a sound or group of sounds, based around an ‘alphabet’ of 24 uniliteral (one letter only) signs—and ideographic symbols, depicting a concept.

The **hieroglyphic** (‘sacred carving’) script, with its carefully delineated images, was the most prestigious. It was a suitable way of communicating with the gods for posterity in temple and tomb contexts, and allowed for the subtle design of attractive inscriptions. However, it was time-consuming to write. Thus, in tandem with hieroglyphs, the **hieratic** (‘priestly’) script developed. This was a cursive, contracted form well adapted for fast, casual writing of business documents, letters, and literature on papyrus or the limestone or pottery flakes archaeologists call ostraca—the post-it notes of antiquity.

From around 700 BC, another even more abbreviated script, **demotic** (‘popular’), evolved from hieratic. It became the usual script for business, legal and literary documents for nearly a thousand years. Hieroglyphs continued to be employed for inscriptions on stone, and religious texts were mainly written in hieratic.

Scribal schools were the main form of institutional education in pharaonic Egypt, and produced the small elite who were literate. This education was exclusively for boys, and there is little evidence that any women were literate. Scribal training brought the prospect of a comfortable professional life, perhaps even high-ranking office.

During the Ptolemaic period, when Egypt was ruled by a line of Greek rulers, the Greek language and script was used as the language for administration and commerce throughout the country, although the Egyptian language continued to be used. The advantages of an alphabetic script became more and more clear, however. During the Ptolemaic period texts in the Egyptian language began to be written in Greek characters, with demotic characters added to represent sounds not used in Greek. This Coptic (from *Aigyptos*—Greek for ‘Egypt’) script properly came into its own with the introduction of Christianity.
What kinds of text were written in hieratic?

What were scribal schools?

Who was allowed to attend scribal schools?

How long was the Egyptian “alphabet” made of unilateral signs? How long is our alphabet?

Define hieratic.

Why did ancient Egyptians start using the hieratic script in tandem with hieroglyphs?
Did you know? Naming Egypt

A country with a history as long as Egypt has had multiple names over time. The ancient Egyptians referred to their country as Kemet, meaning ‘black country,’ in reference to the rich dark soil along the River Nile. The western term ‘Egypt’ is derived from the ancient Greek term Αἴγυπτος (Aiguptos). This derives from the Egyptian Hu(t)-ka-ptah, ‘temple of the soul of Ptah,’ the name for the ancient capital of Memphis. The Greeks used this term for the whole country.

The modern Arabic term for Egypt is ‘Misr,’ derived from Mizraim, the name of a son of the Biblical Ham. The modern country of Egypt is known as the Arab Republic of Egypt, جمهورية مصر العربية (Gumhūriyyat Maṣr al-‘Arabiyyah).

Why do you think the ancient Egyptians named their country Kemet to honor the Nile River?

How did ancient Egyptians refer to their country?

Why do you think our founding fathers named our country The United States of America?
Look at the picture of the large pillars in this room. What do you notice about their color and design? The Houston Museum of Natural Science designed the pillars in this hall to represent the passage of time in one of Egypt’s Temples. As time passes, the pillars that once were beautiful and vibrant - like they are shown at the beginning of the room – have now eroded or worn down – like they are shown towards the back of the room.

Other than the passage of time, why do you think the colors and design deteriorated?

Extend your knowledge! Choose a monument in Washington, D.C. and draw what you think it could look like in 1,000 years if they were in the dry desert conditions like in Egypt.
Dressing for Eternity

Looking good did not just imply a temporary change in appearance, but also preparation for an afterlife where the dead person would be reborn and ever-youthful. The dead person was buried with the clothes and cosmetics needed to further this aim, and representations of the dead person showed him or her in an idealized form: men with dark skin and broad shoulders; women with paler skin and child-bearing hips.

Mirrors were typically female attributes in representations, as seen on the stela of Sheditef and Henet, but were buried with men and women alike. The handle of the mirror shown here takes the form of a divine standard, transforming the viewer into a god.

Read the description on the text panel about how ancient Egyptians like to be shown at their best appearance. Have you ever dressed to impress? Name a time that they have dressed up for special occasions.
The most powerful person in ancient Egypt was the King. He was a living god, the incarnation of the falcon god Horus on earth. His responsibility was to uphold Maat—the cosmic balance which kept Egypt safe.

As ‘Lord of the Two Lands’ the king was the ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt. He owned the land, made laws, collected taxes, and defended Egypt.

As high priest of every temple, the king represented the gods—his fellow gods—on Earth. He performed rituals and built temples to honor the gods. Although he deputized his work to full-time priests, custom dictated that the king was always shown offering to the gods in temple scenes.

Many pharaohs went to war when their land was threatened or when they wanted to control foreign lands. Military victories and subsequent tribute payments were often depicted in carved stone temple walls, showing the king offering the spoils of war to his fellow gods.

The word Pharaoh comes from the Greek transcription of the Egyptian per aa, ‘great house’. This originally referred to the palace, but later came to mean the man and institution who ruled from it, just as we now say ‘The White House’ to mean the building, the institution of the presidency, or even the President himself.
What was maat?

To whom would the king offer the “spoils of war”? How do we know?

What three things was the king responsible for?

1.

2.

3.

Extend your knowledge! Which branch of government in the United States makes the laws?

Who was the most powerful person in ancient Egypt?

What did the word “Pharaoh” originally refer to?

Extend your knowledge! As ruler of the land it would be up to the King to set rules for their people. Research a modern day King or Queen. Discover what they were responsible for in their country.
Egypt is littered with the ruins of ancient temples. For the Egyptians, these were the homes of their gods and goddesses. There the cult statue of the god would live as though he or she was a human being: would be woken up with hymns, dressed, fed, taken on processions, and sent to sleep with lullabies.

Unlike mud-brick houses and palaces, temple buildings were made of stone to last forever. Their walls were covered with brightly painted carved scenes, often showing the pharaoh who constructed the temple performing rituals with the gods and goddesses. These rituals could include scenes of battle, where the king then donated the spoils of his victories to the gods.

Access to much of the sacred area of a temple was carefully restricted to priests and other authorized personnel; those less privileged would be able to approach the gods in special areas in the outer part of the temple precincts, or when the gods were taken out in procession in the city on festival days.

It was a king’s duty to keep the temples in good repair, and to expand them and alter them as needs changed. An older temple would thus be demolished to make way for a new one; but the blocks of the old temple would usually be carefully recycled as fill for the new building. These fragments have often retained their brightly painted surfaces; one can only imagine the eye-dazzling impression a newly constructed temple complex must have made.
Who had access to the temples?

What would happen to older temples?

Why were temples made of stone?

What major building in our capital is made of stone?

Why do you think Egypt is “littered” with the ruins of ancient temples?
Mummification

"The mode of embalming, according to the most perfect process, is the following: They take first a crooked piece of iron, and with it draw out the brain through the nostrils; next they make a cut along the flank with a sharp Ethiopian stone, and take out the whole contents of the abdomen, which they then cleanse, washing it thoroughly with palm wine, and again frequently with an infusion of pounded aromatics. After this they fill the cavity with every sort of spicery except frankincense, and sew up the opening. Then the body is placed in natrum for seventy days, and covered entirely over. After the expiration of that space of time, which must not be exceeded, the body is washed, and wrapped round with bandages of fine linen cloth, smeared over with gum, and in this state it is given back to the relations, who enclose it in a wooden case, shaped into the figure of a man. Then fastening the case, they place it in a sepulchral chamber, upright against the wall. Such is the most costly way of embalming the dead." (Adapted from Herodotus, Histories 2:86-89)

When the Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt around 450 BC, the Egyptians had been mummifying their dead for over 2500 years. Preserving the body was of utmost importance. The mummified remains of an individual were considered the anchor for the soul. Mummification was not just preservation, but transformation: it turned the mortal, vulnerable body into something eternal and divine. The physical transformation was carried out using natron—a mixture of salts collected from dried up desert lakes—which desiccated the body. Oils and resins gave the body suppleness and a precious sheen. Yards of linen bandages—sometimes recycled from the dead person’s sheets and clothes—wrapped it, and wooden or stone coffins protected the mummy. The mortal body had been re-booted and turned into an eternal home for the soul.

As important as the physical protection of the body was its magical protection. To achieve this, spells were spoken as the body was mummified. The right magical amulets, made from the right material, were tucked in the wrappings over the right parts of the body. Finally, the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony animated the mummy.

Herodotus indicated that the quality of the mummification process was directly related to the dead person’s status and the fashion of the period. A well-off family was able to bury its dead in a series of coffins nestled one into the other like a series of Russian dolls. Less affluent people had to make do with cheaper materials, with the poorest ending up burying their dead in the desert without any preparation at all. We might consider it an irony that the expensive oils and resins used in the most expensive treatment do not preserve the body as well as dry desert sand; but then, mummification had never been just about that.
List two types of protection that was important in the mummification process.

1. 

2. 

What class of person would end up buried in the desert without any preparation?
The Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3 – 6, 2682 – 2181 BC)

The vast size of the pyramids of the Old Kingdom, built near the capital Memphis, reflects and projects the immense power held by the pharaoh and the elite who supported him. At this time, the Egyptian state was built around by a centralized bureaucracy which redistributed goods and surplus labor, together with materials obtained from expeditions to Nubia, Libya, and the Levant. Excess manpower and resources were channeled into projects like the pyramids, tombs for the god-kings of the time.

The first pyramid is the Step Pyramid of the 3rd Dynasty ruler Djoser at Saqqara. This was the first major stone monument ever built, and stood some 200 feet high. The official in charge of the project, Imhotep, was worshipped as a god by later generations.

The Great Pyramid, built at Giza by the 4th Dynasty king Khufu, stood over 480 ft (146 m) tall when complete. It was built about 100 years and 6 or 7 pyramids after the Step Pyramid. The exact way in which the pyramids were built is still debated, but instead of assuming that they relied on secret technologies, esoteric wisdom, or even alien assistance, it is clear that ancient Egyptian architects progressed carefully and steadily through experimentation, progress, and occasional setbacks.

Later pyramids, after the 4th Dynasty, were more modest. Instead of having solid masonry cores, they were built with stone veneers over rubble, mud brick, or sand cores which have not survived so well. This may also reflect a changing state structure, and economic difficulties. Many high officials and provincial governors were formerly close members of the royal family, but they were gradually replaced by local families who had stronger loyalties to their hometowns than to the capital.

A series of poor harvests, a foreign invasion, and the 90-year rule of the 6th Dynasty king Pepy II (ca. 2278 BC–2184 BC) have all been suggested as triggers for the collapse of the Old Kingdom.
When was the Step Pyramid built?

Where was the Great Pyramid built?

Who was the Great Pyramid built to honor?

Use the space below to draw simple scaled models of the Step Pyramid and the Great Pyramid - use triangles to represent your pyramids. Scale your model using the measurement of 100 feet equals 1 inch.
The Late Period (Dynasties 26 – 31, 664 – 332 BC)

The Late Period is the time from the end of the Third Intermediate Period (664 BC) to the beginning of Greek rule (332 BC). Egypt was no longer the most significant power in the region, as it had been before. Other cultures—such as the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians—were better able to smelt and work iron. Egypt, which still relied on softer bronze tools and weapons, suffered from this technical disadvantage.

Psamtek I (26th Dynasty) used Greek mercenaries to gain power in the vacuum left by the withdrawal of Assyria and the Kushite 25th Dynasty from Egypt. The 26th Dynasty was based in the Delta city of Sais, and the local deity, the goddess Neith, became increasingly important.

The 26th Dynasty ended in 525 BC with the invasion of the Persians led by their emperor Cambyses. Later tradition emphasized the brutality of the Persian 27th Dynasty; Cambyses was said to have stabbed the sacred Apis bull to death, and to have dug up and destroyed the mummies of the 26th Dynasty kings. Egypt was too important a part of the Persian empire to be treated too badly, and these stories are best taken with a grain of salt. The evidence on the ground shows that the Persian kings carried out building projects in Egypt, and did so in accordance with Egyptian traditions of art and architecture.

The Egyptian 28th, 29th and 30th Dynasties rebelled against Persian rule, and ruled from 404–343 BC. The second Persian period ended in 332 BC with the defeat of the Persians by Alexander the Great. Alexander styled himself Pharaoh and son of the god Amun, and was hailed as a liberator. All his successors, however, would be other Greeks. Some people view Nectanebo II, the last king of the 30th Dynasty, as the last truly Egyptian ruler of Egypt until the revolution of 1952 AD.

Artistic styles in the Late Period are varied: some tombs were decorated in an “archaizing” style which combined a grab bag of elements from earlier periods, while finely defined faience shabti figures are characteristic of this period. In the temples, statues of worshippers could recall Old Kingdom prototypes or display startlingly life-like qualities, while less rich donors contented themselves with offering small bronze figures of gods or mummified animals. Large quantities of both were buried in sacred complexes.

What technical disadvantage did the Egyptians suffer from during this time period? Who was better at it?

Extend you Knowledge! Learn more about the goddess Neith and why she was important to Psamtek I.
The end of the New Kingdom was marked by poor harvests, the loss of Egyptian influence abroad, and a gradual decline in central authority. The kings of the 21st Dynasty ruled Lower Egypt from Tanis in the Delta, while the High Priests of Amun—the Theban branch of the ruling family—controlled the South. New Kingdom rulers had increasingly relied on nomadic mercenaries from Libya to bolster the strength of the army, rewarding them with land in the Delta and Middle Egypt. By the 21st Dynasty, Libyan families had married into royal and priestly lines, but retained their clearly Libyan names, such as Osorkon and Sheshonq.

In 945 BC the throne passed to a powerful Libyan family, ruling in the eastern Delta as the 22nd Dynasty. Egypt's western enemies now became its rulers for the next two centuries. The first of them, Sheshonq I, was the most powerful. He appeared in the Bible under the name Shishak, the Egyptian ruler who sacked Jerusalem in Year 5 of the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Sheshonq's descendants were rather less mighty, and the 23rd and 24th Dynasties ruled concurrently from rival capitals.

During the 22nd Dynasty, the power of the Nubian kingdom of Kush increased, and under Shabaka and Taharqa of the 25th Dynasty it took direct control of the whole country. The Nubian pharaohs were careful to minimize the shock to the Egyptians of being dominated by 'vile Kush'. In many aspects they were more Egyptian than the Egyptians, ruling from the ancient site of Memphis, restoring dilapidated shrines, and creating works of art in an archaising style recalling the work of the New Kingdom and the Old Kingdom. Although a time of political division, the Third Intermediate Period was one of artistic and technical innovation.

Burials in the Third Intermediate Period became less rich, perhaps as a result of the nomadic background of the Libyan ruling class. Decorated tombs were no longer built, and New Kingdom tombs were often reused for mass graves. The coffin became the main focus of funerary attention. The wooden coffins of the Third Intermediate Period are covered with vignettes of the hereafter, becoming in effect a miniature universe centred on the occupant. Painted body covers made of cartonnage—moulded resin-soaked linen covered in plaster—were another popular part of the burial equipment. Shabti figures were produced in large numbers from inexpensive bright blue faience.
Why do you think historians believe the Nubian Pharaohs were more Egyptian than Egyptians?

Write an argument agreeing or disagreeing with historians and give two reasons. Site one source to defend your answer.

List two innovations the Intermediate Period was known for.

1. 

2. 

Coffins became the main focus during the Intermediate period. What was painted of the coffins?
Giant Coffin with Green Face vs. Coffin of Tjefut

Look at both coffins pictured above. Give two examples of how they are the same and how they are different.
The word **sarcophagus** is derived from the Greek words σαρξ (‘sarx’—flesh) and φαγεῖν (‘fagein’—to eat). The ancient Greek term *sarkophagos*, and the ancient Roman term *sarcophagus* both refer to the same phenomenon: a limestone body container that ‘eats’ human flesh. This idea would have horrified the Egyptians, for whom the preservation of the body was the main purpose of the burial, but the name has stuck.

The term sarcophagus should only be used for a stone coffin, rather than a wood coffin. All sarcophagi are coffins, but not all coffins are sarcophagi…

Are all coffins sarcophagi? Why or why not?
Egypt became a province of the Roman Empire when Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII were defeated by Octavian, who later became the first Roman emperor Augustus, at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC.

The province of Egypt was a vital part of the Roman Empire, providing Rome with much of its grain. Ruling from Alexandria, the Romans installed their own administrative system. They did not attempt to introduce Latin as the main administrative language in place of Greek. Papyri of the period, thrown away in rubbish heaps, survive to document the society of the time.

Like the Ptolemies before them, the Romans left Pharaonic Egyptian religion and culture unmolested, while adding their own traditions to the range of possibilities open to people. Several temples were completed by Roman emperors, who followed the style of their predecessors and had themselves represented in the Egyptian manner.

Christianity in Egypt became increasingly popular during the 3rd century AD, and Alexandria became a major Christian centre following the official toleration of Christianity in 313 AD; pagan worship was outlawed in 435 AD. The monastic tradition was especially strong in Egypt, and churches and monasteries were set up in the ruins of pharaonic temples and tombs.

In 395 AD, the Roman Empire was divided into the Western and Eastern Empires. Egypt was part of the Byzantine Empire of the east. Egypt remained a vital supplier of grain to the new capital, Constantinople, but was an increasingly disaffected part of the empire. The Coptic (Egyptian) church split from the Churches of Rome and Constantinople in 451 AD in a dispute over the nature of Christ, and Coptic Christians were persecuted. As a result of this, when the Arab army led by Amr ibn al-As invaded Egypt in 639 AD, they received a relatively warm welcome from the inhabitants.

People living and dying in Roman Egypt could pick and choose from a number of belief systems and social models. People who felt strongly Greek or Roman might choose cremation, which might horrify someone who felt strongly Egyptian and wished to be mummmified. Within this category, there were further options—a completely Pharaonic-style coffin or cartonnage with gilded mask, or a classical-style painted portrait depicting the dead person in a more naturalistic style.

When did Egypt become a province of the Roman Empire?

What religious belief became popular during the 3rd century AD? How did this affect the burial process?
What major event caused Denys Bower to become fascinated with Egypt?

Chiddingstone Castle in Kent, half an hour’s drive south of London, houses one of the most eclectic, eccentric collections in Britain, a testimony to the taste and tenacity of Denys Bower (1905–1977).

Denys was a born collector. Egypt entered his life in 1922, when Howard Carter’s discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun captured headlines worldwide, and he began to collect Egyptian objects. At the time, these were much more plentiful on the market, and less appreciated, than they are today. Over the next forty years or so, Denys was able to acquire a fine collection of Egyptian objects, many coming from some of the most distinguished collections of earlier generations. Some pieces even belonged to the American media mogul William Randolph Hearst—Citizen Kane himself.

Denys’s accumulation of Egyptian objects was the last of the great antiquarian private collections: formed with an eye not just for beautiful objects, but also to illustrate changes in culture, to group like objects together, and also to acquire and ponder the strange and unusual.

Many pieces from Chiddingstone Castle are highlights of the displays of Egyptian culture; others are shown here in a way intended to evoke collections of Denys’s period and earlier—jostling together in wooden cases, ready to surprise the viewer.

Denys collected more than just Pharaonic Egyptian objects. His collections also include Japanese lacquer; Samurai suits of armor and swords; Buddhist objects; and Royal Stuart and Jacobite paintings and memorabilia. He purchased Chiddingstone Castle in 1955 as a home in which to store and exhibit his collections. He paid a mere £6,000 (US$9,000 today) for this unique castle, the origins of which can be traced back to the early 16th Century. The Castle remains open to the public today, as Denys would have wished.

www.chiddingstonecastle.org.uk
Look at the U.S. dollar bill, what do you see that reminds you of Egypt?

What does the unfinished pyramid, on the US dollar bill, possibly mean?
The inscribed Rosetta Stone is the key to the decipherment of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The text itself is obscure, and of little interest to the non-specialist. It deals with the establishment of a cult honoring the reigning king Ptolemy V in 196 BC, and lists a series of tax breaks the king had offered the priests. Inscriptions like this are common in Egyptian culture, but what makes the stone so important is the last line of each of the inscriptions:

“...the decree should be written on a stela of hard stone, in sacred writing, document writing, and Greek writing...”

This explains the format of the stone. The same text is written in two versions of the Egyptian language—the formal Hieroglyphic script (at the top) and the cursive Demotic script (in the middle)—and also in the Greek script and language (at the bottom). The Ptolemaic dynasty was founded in 305 BC by Ptolemy I, a general of Alexander the Great who had conquered Egypt in 332 BC. Ptolemy and his successors were of Greek descent and spoke Greek, but ruled a country where most business—especially religious business—was conducted in Egyptian language and scripts. While hieroglyphs and demotic were no longer understood by people after about 400 AD, Greek remained firmly in western consciousness.

The stone was discovered in 1799 by French soldiers from Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt while digging the foundations of an addition to a fort near the town of el-Rashid (Rosetta) in the Nile Delta. The well-educated French officers could read the Greek text easily, and instantly realized its importance. If the inscription was correct it would be possible to compare the Egyptian versions with the Greek versions, and to work backwards from this to decipher the hieroglyphic script. On Napoleon’s defeat, the stone became the property of the British under the terms of the Treaty of Alexandria of 1801; it entered the British Museum in 1802, where it has stayed ever since.

Plaster casts, prints, and engravings of the stone circulated among museums, libraries, and scholars in the West. In spite of this, it took over 20 years for the hieroglyphic text to be deciphered. The first significant breakthrough was made by Thomas Young, a British polymath. Young worked on the hunch—correct—that the hieroglyphic groups within ovals gave the name of Ptolemy, the King mentioned in the Greek text. Another Greek and Egyptian inscription on an obelisk named Ptolemy and Cleopatra, so comparing letters that each of the names had in common allowed Young to identify several signs as individual sounds, and to make intelligent guesses as to the translation of several groups of signs. Young took his work no further, but shared it with Jean-François Champollion, a French professor of languages.

Champollion already knew Coptic, the language of the Egyptian church. He believed—correctly—that this was a later version of the language of the Rosetta Stone. Mixing this insight with Young’s identification of a number of signs, he was able to produce a convincing hieroglyphic ‘alphabet’ and principles of writing in 1822, to decipher names from other inscriptions in 1824, and to draft an Egyptian grammar before his untimely death in 1832.

Champollion’s achievement was one of the great scholarly breakthroughs of the nineteenth century. Understanding Egyptian writing gave impetus to study Egyptian culture independently of the partial Classical and Biblical texts which were previously the only way into Egyptian culture. It gave a firm literary and chronological context to objects and monuments that previous generations had viewed largely as dumb curiosities, and encouraged further study and exploration.
How did historians learn to “decode” hieroglyphics using the Rosetta Stone?

What three languages are written on the Rosetta Stone?

1.

2.

3.

Which of these three languages did historians use to unlock the mystery of Egyptian writing?