

## PYRAMIDS

Hi there, my name is John Green and this is Crash Course World History. Today we're going to talk about Egypt. No, not that Egypt. Older. Older. Older, west fictional. Yes, that one. Ancient Egypt is probably the most influential with the River Valley Civilizations. You may not recognize any Assyrian kings or Assyrian language but you probably do know King Tut and you may recognize that the Eye of Horus is right now staring at me and judging me. I can feel your judgment. (lively music) When we think of ancient civilizations we think of Egypt. There are a few reasons for this like the fact that the pyramids are the last man standing among these 7 ancient wonders of the world. But more importantly, ancient Egyptian civilization lasted from 3,000 BCE to 332 BCE. That's a period that historians call a long ass time. And I will remind you it is not cursing (donkey sound) if I'm talking about donkeys. There are many approaches to the study of history. You can view history as a millennial-long conversation about philosophy or as clashes between great men or you can see history through the lens of traditionally neglected populations like women or indigenous peoples or slaves, and we're going to try to take many approaches to our study of history during Crash Course. Mr. Green, Mr. Green, Mr. Green. Which approach is right, I mean for the test? Oh me from the past. Remember how you spent all of 3rd year French writing notes back and forth to that girl and she eventually agreed to go out with you and you did make it to second base but now you can hardly [unintelligible]? Historical lenses are like that my friend. With every choice something is gained and something is lost. Right, so in discussing agriculture and early River Valley Civilization we've been approaching history through the lens of resource distribution and geography. and just as the violent and capricious Tigris and Euphrates River shaped the world view of early Mesopotamians (faint bubble sound) then Nile shaped the world view of the Egyptians. Let's go to the thought bubble. The Nile was regular, navigable and benign making for one of the safest and richest agricultural areas in the world. Each summer the river flooded the fields at precisely the right time leaving behind nutrient-rich silt for planting season. Planting was so easy that Egyptians just tossed seeds around the silty earth [cow mooing] and then let their cattle or pigs walk on it to press the seeds into the ground [exploding sound] and then boom, bran and figs and wheat and pomegranates and [melvins] and joy. Unlike most River Valley Civilizations, Egyptian communities existed only along the Nile. Which was navigable enough to get valuable resources downstream from timber to gold which the Egyptians considered the divine metal thereby introducing an idea that would eventually culminate in Mr. T. The Nile was also easily tamed. While other river valley civilizations needed complicated and labor intensive hydraulic engineering projects to irrigate

crops, the Nile was so chilled that Egyptians could use a simple form of water management called "basin irrigation" in which farmers used flood waters to fill earth and basins and canals for irrigation. In short, the awesomeness of the Nile meant Egyptians could create big food surpluses with relatively little work allowing time and energy for some pretty impressive projects. Also the Nile may help explain Ancient Egypt's general optimism. While ancient Sumerian religion for instance [gong sound] saw the afterlife of this gloomy dark place. Egyptians were often buried with things that were useful and pleasurable to them in life because the afterlife was seen as a continuation of this life. Which at least if you lived along the Nile wasn't half bad. Thanks thought bubble. Now my dear pupils I shall terrorize you with the oppression of dates. No, dates. Yes, thank you. Historians have divided Egyptian history into 3 broad categories each with their own number of dynasties but only hardcore Egyptologists know the dynasties and we're not trying to become hardcore Egyptologist. The Old Kingdom lasted from 2649 to 2152. The Middle Kingdom from 2040 to 1640 and the New Kingdom so called because it is only 3,000 years old lasted from 1550 to 1070 BCE. In between you have a couple so called the intermediate periods. Okay, Old Kingdom. This is really the glory age of Ancient Egypt. When you got all the stuff that would later make Indiana Jones possible like the pyramids at Giza and the sun King Ra and the idea of divine kingship. The king or pharaoh was either a god or very close to a god which seems like a good gig except that it meant he wasn't expected to act like a person. He was expected to act like a god which in Ancient Egypt means acting like the Nile. Calm, cool, benevolent. There's no fun in that. Then of course there are the pyramids which aside from remaining impressive to behold represent a remarkable degree of political and social control over the population because it is not easy to convince people to devote their lives to building a sarcophagus for someone else. The most famous pyramids were built between 2575 and 2465 BCE. The one with the sphinx was built for Chephren. The largest, The Great Pyramid was built for the pharaoh Khufu. The pyramids were built partly by peasants who were required by Egyptian law to work for the government a certain number of months per year and partly by slaves. This leads to an overwhelming question. Why? Why in the sweet name of Ra would anyone ever build such a thing? Well, let's start with Ra.