

Grade Eight Sample Test Item—Reading

Achievement Level: Standard Nearly Met

Marks the Spot!

It was official. Khufu had been crowned king of Egypt, and one of his first duties was to find a place to build his tomb. It would be his own special site, a new place that was away from the pyramids of the kings that had ruled before him.

Khufu had plans to build an enormous complex, one that would include smaller pyramids for his mother and his wives, and many tombs for the rest of his family and the members of his court. To do so, he needed a very large area. He also had to follow religious tradition and choose a site that lay on the west side of the Nile River, in the direction of the setting sun. According to the ancient Egyptians, the sun died every night in the west and was born again in the east the next morning. Therefore, it was customary to bury people on the west bank of the river so that they could travel with the sun god through the night and be reborn with him at dawn.

Exactly What Was Needed

For the Egyptians, the desert was the perfect cemetery. As it lay beyond the reaches of the Nile's floodwaters, the tombs and bodies remained safe and dry. The desert was also the best place to find stone to build tombs. Equally important was the fact that by using the desert, the Egyptians kept the fertile strip of land along the eastern bank of the Nile for farmland.

But why pick Giza? When choosing a site, Khufu had had to keep other requirements in mind as well. The pyramid had to be near the city of Memphis, Egypt's capital at the time and the center of his government. Memphis traced its origins to the beginning of Egyptian history. It had been founded by a king named Menes, who chose the area because it was at the point where Upper and Lower Egypt met.

As the meeting point for many trade routes, Memphis was filled with government offices, temples, and houses for the officials who ran the country. The city's chief deity was Ptah, the creator god. The Egyptians also honored Ptah as the patron of craftsmen—the people who made pottery, carved statues, and painted the pictures that covered the walls of tombs and temples.

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Achievement Level: Standard Nearly Met (continued)**Near a God's City**

The pyramid also needed to be near Heliopolis. Located on the east bank of the Nile, the city was sacred to the sun god Re, the most important deity in Egypt at the time. Re was worshipped in a temple at Heliopolis that was surrounded by statues and obelisks. Obelisks are tall pillars that are topped by small pyramids and acted as symbols of the sun. The Egyptians often covered the tops with gold so that they would reflect and shine in the sunlight. Egyptologists think that there might have been a special large obelisk in the temple at Heliopolis. Perhaps Khufu thought that his pyramid had to have a view of the temple and its obelisk.

Giza, however, was not the only site in the western desert that was near Memphis and had a view of Heliopolis. Khufu chose Giza because it had a large, flat plateau that was high above the floodplain and because there was a lot of good-quality building material in the area. Giza was also close enough to the Nile for Khufu's construction teams to transport additional building materials and supplies to the site by boat. Excavations offer evidence that workers dug a huge harbor at the foot of the Giza Plateau so that the imported goods could be brought as close as possible to the pyramid site.

A Family Affair

While his own tomb complex was being built, Khufu planned for the burials of his family and courtiers. Three small pyramids were erected to the east of his pyramid, perhaps for his mother and two of his wives. Two huge cemeteries were laid out like miniature towns to the east and west of Khufu's pyramid. Arranged in rows along narrow streets, the tombs were houses for the dead. Members of Khufu's immediate family were given tombs in the eastern cemetery. The western cemetery was mostly for courtiers.

The tombs in these cemeteries are solid rectangles with sides that slope inward. Egyptologists call them mastabas, because they look like benches (mastabas in Arabic) found outside traditional Egyptian homes. The mastabas were built of limestone, just as the pyramids were. The small rooms inside were decorated with images of the dead person in front of tables piled high with food. Relatives of the dead person came to these rooms to visit their loved ones, to say prayers for their souls, and to bring their spirits more food and drink. The bodies of the deceased were placed in huge stone coffins that were in rooms dug into the stone below the mastabas.

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Khufu ordered the construction of a great many tombs in these two cemeteries. Only after they were built did he assign them to specific people: Some were family members, others were courtiers and officials who had proved themselves worthy of a burial site near that of the king. Every person who was given a tomb then placed his or her name in the tomb chapel and chose the decorations. After Khufu died, the cemetery remained in use for hundreds of years.

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Grade Eight

This question is based on the text above, “Marks the Spot!”

What is the **most likely** reason the author included subheadings in the text?

- A. to decrease the time it takes to read the text
- B. to make clear the author’s purpose for writing the text
- C. to inform the reader what each section of the text is about
- D. to help the reader quickly determine the main idea of the text

Area

Reading

Demonstrating understanding of literary and nonfiction texts

Standard(s)

Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

Answer

C