Ancient Egyptian Pyramids

Genre: Nonfiction **Reading Level:** 490L

The pyramids of ancient Egypt are among the most recognizable structures in the world. Built thousands of years ago, these massive stone monuments continue to amaze people today. The largest and most famous is the Great Pyramid of Giza, which was constructed around 2560 BCE as a tomb for Pharaoh Khufu.

Building the pyramids required incredible planning and effort. Workers had to cut enormous limestone blocks from quarries, with each block weighing about two and a half tons—as much as a large elephant. Then they transported these heavy stones to the building site, sometimes from miles away. Historians believe that workers used wooden sleds and rollers to move the blocks, and may have wet the sand in front of the sleds to reduce friction.

Once the stones arrived at the pyramid site, workers faced another challenge: lifting them into place. The Great Pyramid stands 481 feet tall and contains approximately 2.3 million stone blocks. Researchers think the ancient Egyptians built long ramps that spiraled around the pyramid, allowing workers to drag the blocks up to higher levels as the structure grew.

The pyramids weren't just impressive feats of construction. They also demonstrate the ancient Egyptians' advanced understanding of mathematics and astronomy. The sides of the Great Pyramid are almost perfectly aligned with the four cardinal directions: north, south, east, and west. This level of precision, achieved without modern tools, shows the remarkable skills of these ancient builders.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was the main purpose of the pyramids?
2. Describe two challenges that workers faced when building the pyramids.
3. How did ancient Egyptian builders demonstrate their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy?
4. According to the passage, approximately how many stone blocks were used to build the Great Pyramid?