

Ramses II

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,064

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

Ramses II

Connections

Writing

Research one of the monuments or temples commissioned by Ramses II. Write a report about the structure, including its purpose and the meaning behind its design.

Social Studies

Research the hieroglyphic writing system of ancient Egypt. Create an informational poster describing the language. Include samples of hieroglyphs on your poster.

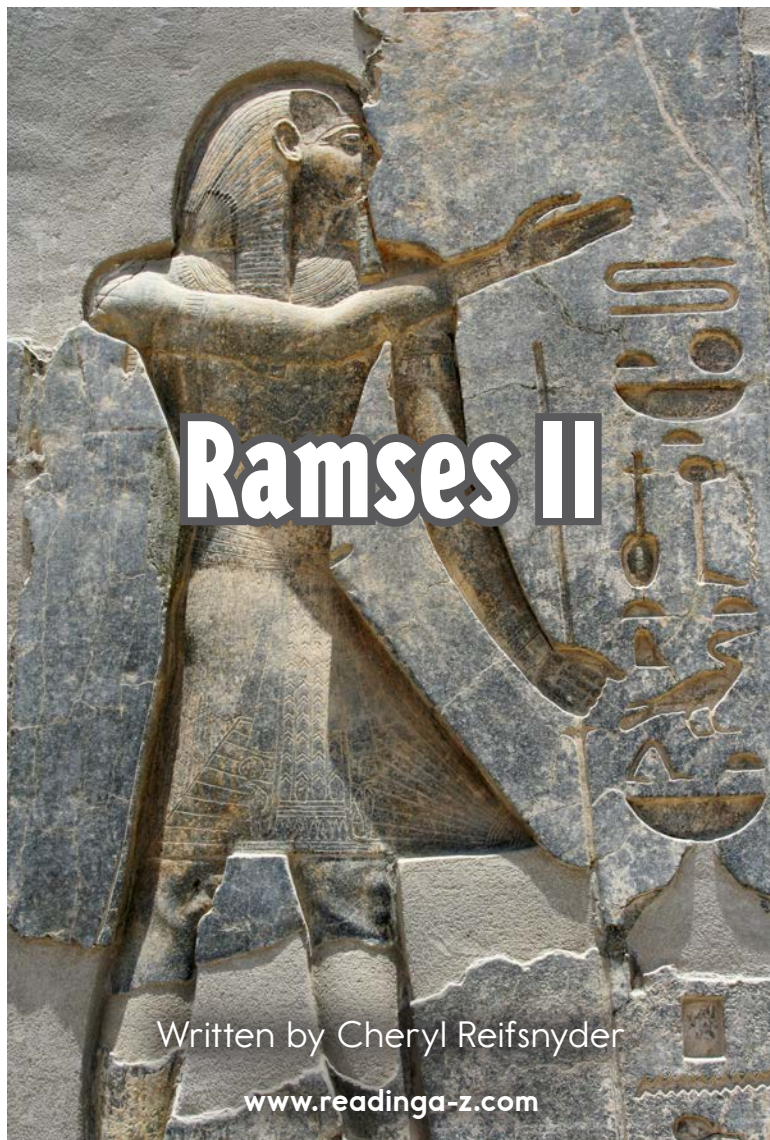

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Written by Cheryl Reifsnyder

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Focus Question

In what ways did Ramses II strengthen ancient Egypt?

Words to Know

campaigns	pharaohs
diplomacy	propaganda
dynasties	pylons
hieroglyphs	successor
legacy	truce
mortuary	vizier

Front cover: A painting on papyrus shows Ramses II making an offering of flowers to a goddess.

Title page: A carving shows Ramses II at the Ramesseum in Luxor, Egypt.

Page 3: A colorful image shows Queen Nefertari, Ramses II's first wife.

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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



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This colossal statue of Ramses II weighs 6.58 mt (7.25 t.). Currently in the British Museum, it was originally found in Ramses II's temple, the Ramesseum, in Thebes, Egypt.

Egypt's Famous Pharaoh

Pharaoh Ramses II (also written Ramesses II) came to power during Egypt's golden age, a period of about five hundred years (1550–1080 BC) known as the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom saw the rise and fall of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Egyptian **Dynasties**. The reign of Ramses II, third king of the Nineteenth Dynasty, was near the middle of this time period and lasted about sixty-six years, from 1279 to 1213 BC—an astonishingly lengthy reign during a time when most people died before age forty-five.

During these years, Ramses II became one of Egypt's most famous **pharaohs**, earning him the title of Ramses the Great.

A Royal Surprise

Ramses II was born around 1303 BC to the military commander Seti I and his wife, Mut-Tuy (MOOT TOO-ee). Ramses may have had an older sister named Tia and a younger sister named Henutmire (he-nuht-MEE-ray).

Ramses's parents most likely didn't expect their baby to become pharaoh, since they weren't even members of the royal family; but the pharaoh at the time—King Tutankhamun—died without an heir. Tutankhamun's **vizier**, a man named Ay, briefly took over as pharaoh, only to be replaced by Horemheb, Tutankhamun's commander of the army, a few years later.

At that time, Ramses II's grandfather, known as Paramessu, was a general who had served in the army with Horemheb. When Horemheb became pharaoh, he named Paramessu as his heir, and Paramessu became pharaoh several years later. He changed his name to Ramses and established his family as the new royal line—the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egyptian royalty.

Ramses's grandfather became ruler of Egypt probably around Ramses II's tenth birthday. His father, Seti I, became pharaoh a few years later, which put Ramses in line for the throne.



Growing Up

Not much is known of Ramses's early life. What we do know comes from artwork and carvings discovered in structures he later built. Ramses II probably grew up in his family's home in the Nile River delta. There, he would have been educated in reading, writing, history, geography, mathematics, science, and medicine. He would have

learned from the “Books of Instruction,” texts used to teach Egyptian children principles for living well. When he was older, he may have also attended the Prince’s School, a school for children of the royal family, nobles, and officials.

Ramses was named as Seti I’s **successor** and appointed crown prince at an early age, which meant that much of Ramses’s education was training obtained by accompanying his father as he performed the work of a pharaoh.

As crown prince, Ramses would someday lead Egypt’s army into battle. He needed to develop physical strength and endurance, so he most likely began training while still a young child. Physical challenges, such as roping bulls and riding wild horses, were meant to prepare him for fighting.



Carved reliefs in the Temple of Seti I in Abydos show the prince making an offering to the god Amun (left) and roping a bull (below).



At an early age, Ramses was named a captain in the army, a position that may have been in name only. By giving young Ramses titles and authority, Seti I helped prepare the nation for Ramses’s eventual rule.

Later, as a teenager, Ramses was considered an adult in many ways. He accompanied his father on military **campaigns** to gain experience with **diplomacy** and war that would prepare him to be pharaoh. He had his own household; he even married, probably when he was only fifteen. His first and favorite wife was named Nefertari. The lavish tomb he built for her is evidence that he cared for her more than others. An inscription there states that the tomb was “for the Chief Queen Nefertari . . . for whom the sun shines.”



Nefertari

At the time, it was common for rulers to have many wives, and Ramses was no exception. Over the decades of his life, historians think Ramses married eight or more royal wives—plus several “minor wives.” Nefertari remained his chief wife until her death. They had at least five children, including Ramses’s oldest male child and heir, Amen-her-khepeshef (ah-muhn-hair-KE-pe-shef).

The Young Warrior and King

Seti I ruled for thirteen years, probably taking Ramses as his co-ruler during his final years as pharaoh. Co-ruler or not, it's clear that Ramses played an important role in Seti I's rule. He was in charge of military campaigns and became known as a courageous warrior.

Artwork shows one such military campaign at the Beit el-Wali (BAYT EL WAH-lee) temple in southern Egypt (then Nubia). The scene depicts Ramses charging into battle on his chariot with his two oldest sons, Amen-her-khepeshef and Khaemwaset (kahm-WAH-set), following him in smaller chariots. Historians think the battle took place during a rebellion in Nubia, a country located south of Egypt. Nubia had gold and other riches; Egyptians and Nubians frequently warred for its control.



Egyptian artwork usually shows kings larger than others to make clear who was in charge.

Ramses was about twenty-five when Seti I died. Ramses became pharaoh—the military, religious, and judicial leader of the land.

Because the pharaoh served as a religious leader as well as a political leader, Ramses II's reign began with a yearlong series of religious festivals and coronation ceremonies. He received four new names to add to his birth name.

Four Divine Names of the King

Ramses's four new names had religious importance shown with symbols.

1. Horus name: Kanakht Merymaat



Horus (falcon) resting above the pharaoh's palace

Horus was the god of kingship.

3. Golden Horus name: Userrenput-aanehktu



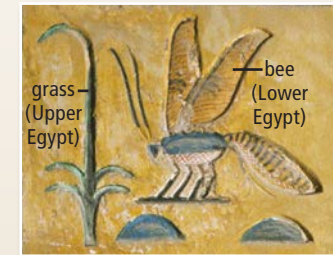
Horus perched on gold indicated eternal life of the king.

2. Nebty name: Mekkemetwafkhasut



Nebty represented the goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt.

4. Prenomen: Usermaatre-setepenre

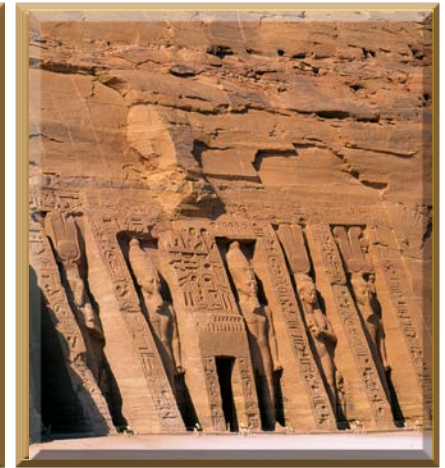
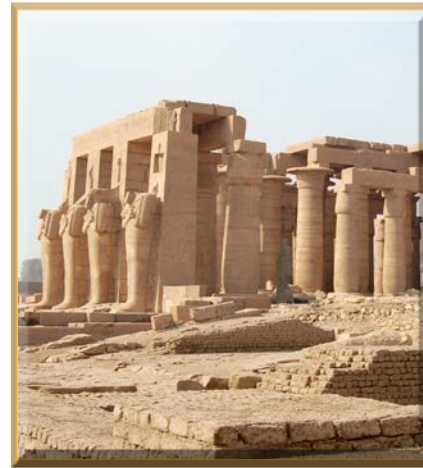


This represented the king ruling Upper and Lower Egypt.

Egyptians believed new names showed that the pharaoh had the protection of the gods and was himself divine.

Early in his reign, Ramses restarted work on several architectural projects his father had commissioned. Seti I had ordered stoneworkers and artisans to build an immense religious hall at Karnak containing 134 columns, each at least 21 meters (69 ft.) high. Walls were painstakingly decorated with raised relief, also known as *bas-relief*—a process in which a scene's background is carved away, leaving behind raised images. Soon, Ramses directed his workers to start using a faster technique known as *sunk relief*, carving images directly into the stone rather than removing the background. He doubled the previous rate of temple building and ended up building more temples than any other pharaoh in ancient Egypt.

Immense columns dwarf visitors at the Great Hypostyle Hall of Karnak. The hall covers 5,000 square meters (53,820 sq. ft.).



The Ramesseum (left) was designed to honor Ramses II and keep the memory of him alive for eternity. Workers carved into a solid rock mountain to create Nefertari's temple (right).

Ramses II ordered important construction during his life. Among the most impressive are his **mortuary** temple, known as the Ramesseum, in Thebes, and a beautiful temple at Abu Simbel to honor his beloved Nefertari.

Ramses II also commissioned a new capital city to take the place of Memphis, which served as capital during the Old Kingdom period 2649–2150 BC, and Thebes, the capital and religious center of New Kingdom Egypt 1550–1070 BC. He named the new city Pi-Ramesse, which could be loosely translated as “Ramsesopolis.” Located in the far north of Egypt, it covered 18 square kilometers (7 sq. mi.). The new capital allowed Ramses to keep closer track of Egypt's long-standing enemies, the Hittites, who lived east of Egypt in a region that is now Syria.

Battles

Prior to the Nineteenth Dynasty, Hittite forces to the east had taken over some of Egypt's territory. Seti I had begun to reestablish Egypt's power by planning to retake some of this land, but the Hittites decided to test the mettle of Egypt's new king when Ramses took the throne. They attacked and recaptured the city of Kadesh, which was important because of its position on the region's primary trade route along the Orontes River.

At first, Ramses successfully battled the Hittites and reclaimed many small provinces taken by them. Some were areas his father was unsuccessful at reclaiming. Then, in the fifth year of his reign, Ramses led an immense force—about 20,000 soldiers and 2,000 chariots—to retake Kadesh. The battle of Kadesh has become one of the most famous events from Ramses II's reign. The attack by the Hittites was the first recorded military ambush. Hittite forces included 2,500 chariots, for a grand total of about 4,500 chariots, which is the world's record for the largest chariot battle.

Ramses had the story of the battle inscribed on **pylons** and temple walls all across Egypt and Nubia. As a result, the Egyptian version of this battle is one of the best-documented events

in ancient Egypt. Artwork shows Ramses, larger than all the other figures, soundly defeating the enemy. More than that, Ramses's account of the battle suggests that he faced the enemy all by himself.

However, some of the Kadesh battle scenes are unusual because unlike most battle scenes, which tended to show the pharaoh's enemies collapsing in fear or death, illustrations of the battle of Kadesh show Ramses surrounded by a powerful Hittite army made up of many soldiers with weapons, horses, and chariots. They show the Hittite army as equal adversaries.

Why would Ramses have the battle illustrated in such a different style? The answer, it turns out, is because it wasn't quite the victory that Ramses wanted people to think it was. In fact, Ramses was nearly killed, and the battle itself was more a draw than a clear Egyptian victory.

The true story, pieced together from both the Egyptian and Hittite records of the battle, seems to be more complex than Ramses II's official version. Scholars believe that Ramses's army separated as they approached the city. Ramses traveled with the front division, the Army of Amun, while one division followed about a day's journey behind and another (experts think) circled around to attack the city from the other direction.

After Ramses was led to believe (likely by spies) that the Hittites were many miles away, he soon learned that they were dangerously close—and preparing to attack.

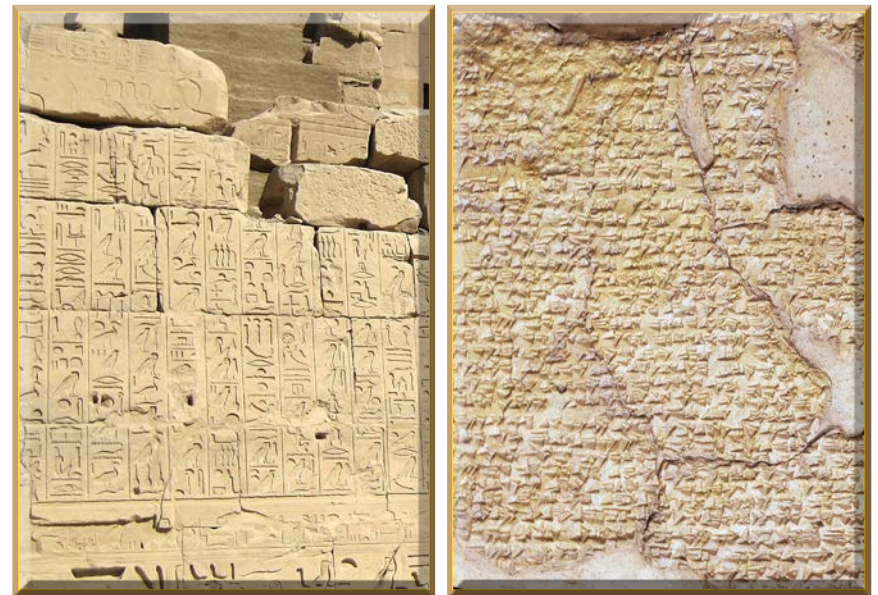
Ramses sent word to his other divisions, but the Hittite ambush overran his would-be reinforcements. The Hittites then charged Ramses and his much smaller force. According to Ramses, he held off the enemy single-handedly while the rest of his army fled; but other records tell us that an elite division of Ramses's army, called the Ne'arin, arrived just in time to save the pharaoh. The two sides declared a **truce** after heavy losses on both sides, and Ramses withdrew his forces back to Egypt.



Detail from artwork taken from accounts of the Battle of Kadesh (Qadesh) shows the Hittites surrounding Ramses.

Over the following year, Ramses commissioned inscriptions about the battle—at least seven bulletins and eight poems—all portraying him as a hero. According to some experts, he'd begun history's first known **propaganda** campaign.

The Battle of Kadesh did not end hostilities between the two nations, though, and about fifteen years later the two nations were again on the verge of war. However, fighting a war so far from Ramses's base was difficult, which made a diplomatic solution more attractive than battle. In the twenty-first year of Ramses II's reign, Ramses and the Hittite king agreed to a peace treaty.



Two versions of the peace treaty survive, one in Egyptian hieroglyphs (left) and the other in Akkadian (right), the language of the Hittites.

In the treaty, Egypt gave up its right to Kadesh and the surrounding land, ending the war and creating a clear boundary between the two nations. The treaty included clauses used in modern peace treaties, such as a provision for alliance against foreign attacks and the mutual agreement not to attack one another's territories. A copy of this treaty now hangs on the wall of the United Nations General Assembly building.

Thirteen years later, Ramses married a Hittite princess to seal the agreement.

The End of the New Kingdom

Ramses II ruled until 1213 BC, a reign of sixty-six or sixty-seven years, before dying of natural causes at the age of ninety-one. At the end of his life, Ramses suffered from arthritis, dental issues, and arterial disease, which may have contributed to his death. He outlived his oldest son and original heir, Amen-her-khepeshef, as well as the next eleven sons in line for the throne.

His thirteenth son, Merneptah, became pharaoh after Ramses II. He ruled for the next decade, but the Nineteenth Dynasty was already beginning its decline. Egypt lost control of Nubia, and many of Ramses's magnificent temples were abandoned to the desert sands. Only 150 years after Ramses's death, the New Kingdom came to an end.

Ramses the Great

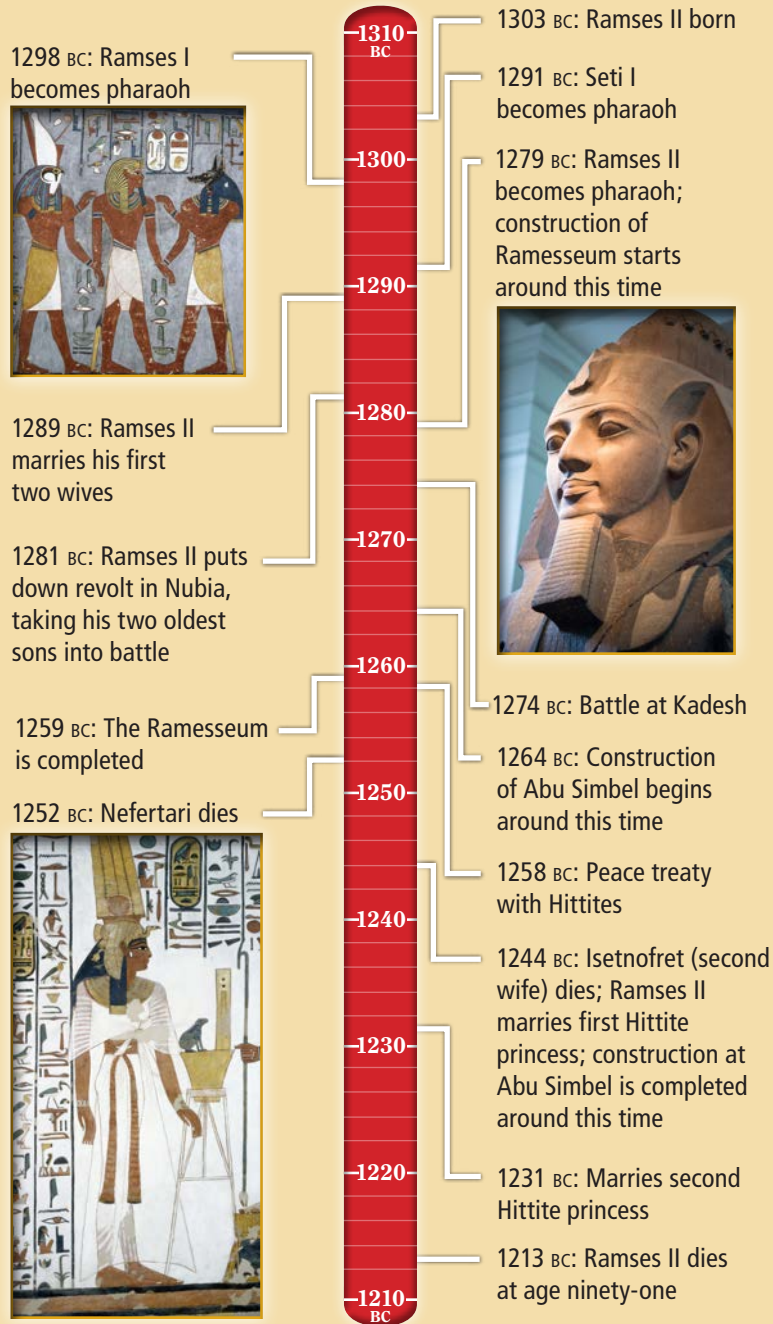
Ramses II was so famous in ancient Egypt that at least nine pharaohs were named after him. Today, he is known as Ramses the Great due partly to his military accomplishments. Under Ramses's leadership, Egypt took back many of the territories lost under previous pharaohs, and the country controlled more territory than ever.

Ramses was also responsible for building more monuments and temples than any other pharaoh—structures that people still admire and study today. The many statues, elaborate illustrations, and many **hieroglyphs** that decorate them provide historians with a wealth of information about life in ancient Egypt. From a modern perspective, these are the true reasons behind Ramses II's greatness: he left behind a **legacy** of art, architecture, and historical records that allow us to better understand the people and culture of his time.



Giant sculptures of Ramses II are on either side of the entrance to the larger of two sandstone temples at Abu Simbel.

Ramses II



Glossary

campaigns (<i>n.</i>)	planned series of actions designed to reach certain goals (p. 8)
diplomacy (<i>n.</i>)	the skill or practice of negotiating between representatives of different countries (p. 8)
dynasties (<i>n.</i>)	series of rulers from the same families in a country (p. 4)
hieroglyphs (<i>n.</i>)	symbols or pictures used as writing, especially in ancient Egypt (p. 18)
legacy (<i>n.</i>)	something handed down from the past to the present (p. 18)
mortuary (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to burial (p. 12)
pharaohs (<i>n.</i>)	rulers in ancient Egypt (p. 4)
propaganda (<i>n.</i>)	news, arts, or other media that often use false or exaggerated information to influence people (p. 16)
pylons (<i>n.</i>)	tall towers or other upright structures, often used as supports (p. 13)
successor (<i>n.</i>)	a person who follows another in a job or elected position (p. 7)
truce (<i>n.</i>)	an agreement not to fight (p. 15)
vizier (<i>n.</i>)	a high-ranking official in ancient Egypt or in some Muslim countries (p. 5)