Geography of Egypt: The Gift of the Nile - Cataracts, Delta, Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt

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Cataracts, Delta, Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt
Ancient Egypt Unit

Egypt is mostly desert. Looking out across its wide landscape, you will see sand . . . and then more sand . . . and still more sand. And yet, Egypt was the home of one of the most important cultures the world has ever seen. How? How does something so important grow in the middle of a desert? Among all of that sand, there is a lifeline, a river that runs north through the East side of the country and then empties into the Mediterranean Sea. This means that all of Egypt is broken up into two different kinds of land: dark dirt near the river, where the soil is nice and wet and filled with silt that's good for growing crops; and light dirt, which is the waterless sand. Let's stay near the dark dirt, shall we? If you look at a map, the Nile looks like a big branching tree, with leaves at the top and a trunk that cuts a line of green through the endless desert. We're going to start from the top of the tree. Follow on your map if you can.

We sail in from the Mediterranean Sea, coming to the river from the north. You will see land ahead and the river running into the sea we are in. The big river breaks up into many branches, like the top of a tree. A **delta** is the triangle shaped part where a river pours into a sea, ocean, lake, or large body of water. The soil is very rich here. That's why you will see so many farms as we sail off the sea and on to the river.

The food from these farms feed the people of Cairo, the capital of Egypt, which we are now sailing through. You can see that the land here has many green parts. We are at the top of the tree, so to speak. **Lower Egypt** is the delta and north part of the Nile River. It may sound like I got that backwards, but the north part of the river is called lower because the Nile river flows north. You can see wide valleys stretching on either side of the river. Go any farther east or west though, you will come to more sand.
As we leave the delta, we have to go up the river. It's a big river and we'll have to paddle for hundreds of miles. I hope you have been doing lots of push ups . . . Here, take this oar. I need your help! The Nile goes for hundreds of miles through the desert here. We are now coming into the south part of Egypt, and even though it's lower on a map, it's named for the upper part of the river we are in. Your arms will tell you that we have been going up the river for the last few hours. **Upper Egypt** is farther up the Nile from the delta, starts at the first cataract, or rocky part of the river, and goes farther South from there. Again, that's not backwards. Remember, this river flows from south to north, so we have been moving up the river.

We keep sailing south, leaving Upper Egypt. How do we know when we have left? There's a very clear sign. We can't go any farther! **Cataracts** are rock-filled rapids that are very hard to pass through in a boat. You have seen these white fast-running waters if you have ever been on a raft or seen a picture of parts of a river like these. There are a few of these rocky parts of the river in the southern part of the Nile River. They make a barrier to the south and kept the people on both sides safe from attacks. It's ok, we do not have to worry about any of that today. We get to turn around and float down 500 miles of river, through Upper and Lower Egypt, right back to the sea.

We sail north back through Upper Egypt, past the low mountains. We come to Lower Egypt which is in the north, and see the valleys stretching out on either side, and then come to the capital city Cairo. We sail through the delta, the mouth of the river, past the many farms, and finally, back into the Mediterranean Sea. Maybe you can visit Egypt in person, one day. If you do, you should stay near the river.

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