



VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

## Over the Top: The Annual Flooding of the Nile

A Creative Movement Workshop for Elementary School Students

### Goal of Lesson:

This exercise will help students understand the annual flooding of the Nile River in Egypt through a creative movement activity. By recreating the movement of the waters of the Nile, students will better understand the importance of the rich soil that the annual flooding left behind in Egyptian fields as the floodwaters receded.

### Virginia SOLs Addressed:

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English: K.1, 2.2,

Science: K.5, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1, 3.6, 3.7, 3.9

History: 2.4, 2.5, 2.7

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### Elements of Creative Drama:

1. Creative Movement
  2. Vocalization
  3. Props
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### Materials Needed:

1. A fairly large, open space
  2. 40-60 participants
  3. Compass
  4. Red and green crepe paper streamers
  5. Optional: picture of the statue of Rameses the Great at Abu Simbel
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### Activity Description

(Time Required: 15-20 minutes):

The activity leader first uses a compass to help the participants determine which direction is north. The Nile flows toward the North, so the group should face north. Next, 12 participants form two single lines of six people each. The line to the west (the group's left side) represents the White Nile that rises in Uganda. The line on the east (the group's right side) represents the Blue Nile that rises in Ethiopia. The two lines should meet at their northern end. This represents the two tributaries meeting at Khartoum, in Sudan.

From there, the participants should line up three abreast, standing close together. This line should stretch as far as the group allows. (The group leader should hold three people aside: two to represent the statues of Rameses and one to help with the splitting of the Nile into branches in the delta.)

The leader should pick a row about a third of the way down the line from Khartoum. This row will represent the cataract at Abu Simbel. The giant statues of the Pharaoh Rameses stood at Abu Simbel, marking the border of ancient Egypt (or Kemet). Two imposing people should stand beside the river at this point to represent the statues of Rameses the Great.

The people in the last three rows of the line should stand a little further apart. Add the last extra participant into the final row. This spreading out represents the way the Nile splits into many small branches that flow into the Mediterranean Sea. Above the delta lies Upper Egypt, known as *Ta-mehu*, land of the papyrus plant. The delta area was Lower Egypt, known as *Ta-shema*, land of the reed.

Once everyone is in place, the leader should pass out two streamers to each of the people forming the White and Blue Niles and to the people on the ends of the other rows. When the river was low, the water had a greenish color. When the water was high during the flood season, the water had a reddish color.

At this point the group may want to practice little burbling sounds to represent the sounds of the river during the season of the *Shomu*, the time of low water and harvesting. They should also practice stronger wooshing sounds to represent the sounds of the river during the season of *Akhet*, the time of flooding (or inundation). In between, the Egyptians had the season of *Peret*, the time of planting and growth.

The leader may want to have the group practice the small, peaceful movement of the low-water season (undulating the green streamers) and the more turbulent movement of the flood waters (undulating the red streamers). The cataracts should have fairly turbulent water all the time. The delta, on the other hand, stays marshy and relatively peaceful all the time; there's just more water during the flood season.

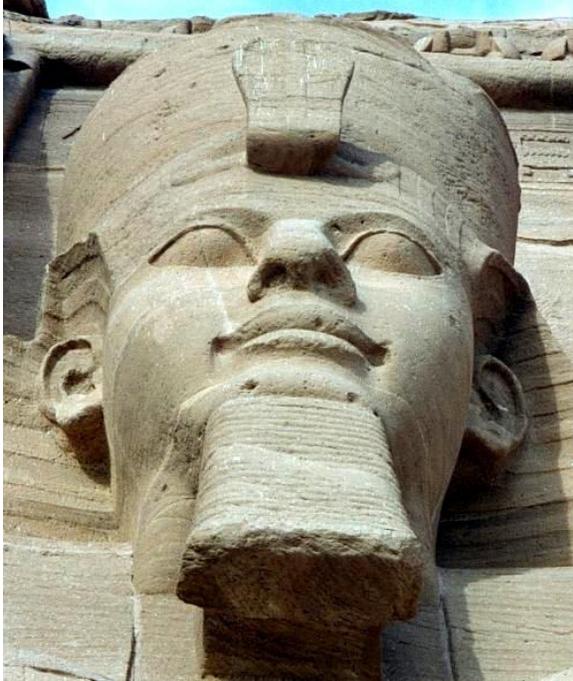
Once everyone is comfortable with the movements and the sounds, the group should be ready to begin. The process begins just as the rainy season begins in Africa near the headwaters of the Nile. (In some areas, melting snow also adds to the volume of water that makes its way into the Nile.) At the outset everyone should be slowly waving the green streamers.

Then, the Blue Nile and the White Nile should begin to move more energetically and spread their arms wider. This movement should begin at the southern end of the lines and move slowly toward the northern end where the tributaries meet at Khartoum. As each new line begins the more energetic movement, the wavers should switch from green to red streamers.

As the waters rise, the wider Nile formed by the two rivers should begin to rise and spread apart. The people in the lines should spread apart (to one arm's length between people), switch to red streamers and begin to wave more energetically. This movement should also spread slowly from the southern end and move toward the northern end of the line. The people in the delta should wave a little less dramatically, but they should spread out until they are separated by two arm's length. Once the flood has reached all the way to the Mediterranean Sea, the flood can begin to recede. The people in the White Nile and Blue Nile lines should calm their movements, pull their arms in and switch back to green streamers. This change in movement should spread slowly down the line from south to north. The wavers should slow their movements, pull back toward the center and switch back to green streamers. If they want to, the people can make squishy sounds to represent the rich silt being left behind on the Nile flood plain. It was this silt that allowed the ancient Egyptians to grow the grain that made the country wealthy.

Once the process has reached the beginning stage again, the cycle is complete. Planting now begins. The Nile actually gets lower and lower through this season until the cycle

begins again in mid-summer. The group will probably want to repeat the exercise a couple of times until it goes smoothly.



Rameses II: one of four external seated statues at Abu Simbel;

Image from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramesses\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramesses_II)

This activity was adapted from resources developed in partnership with the Science Museum of Virginia in 1999.