

The Sphinx

Name _____

The Great Sphinx of Giza is a 4,500-year-old limestone statue with the body of a lion and the head of a human. The Sphinx is 240 feet long and 66 feet high, and has existed in Egypt for thousands of years. It is a familiar face in Egyptian, Greek, and Asian mythology, and has been depicted as everything from a spiritual guardian with the headdress of an Egyptian king to a winged beast that ate travelers who could not answer its riddles while on the road.

The most widely-accepted theory for the Sphinx's construction dates back to around 2603 to 2578 BC; it is said that the Sphinx was built for the Egyptian king, or pharaoh, Khafre. While we call it a sphinx today, the word itself originates from Greek mythology almost 2,000 years after its construction—so we do not know what ancient Egyptians may have called the half-lion structure in its early days. After the end of Egypt's Old Kingdom era, the sphinx faded into obscurity; but legend states that it was resurrected thanks to Prince Thutmose.

According to fable, Prince Thutmose of Egypt fell asleep near the Sphinx; in a dream, the Sphinx complained to Thutmose about its lack of importance and struck a deal with the young prince. The Sphinx would assist Thutmose in becoming pharaoh of Egypt if the prince promised to restore the Sphinx to its former glory. While it is impossible to discern between the fact and fiction of this story, Thutmose did later become pharaoh, and when he did, he created a sphinx-worshipping cult in his new kingdom. Thanks to Thutmose, the Sphinx once again became a symbol of royalty and regard.

After the fall of Egypt, the Sphinx once again found itself on the forgotten side of history and was buried in the sand up to its shoulders. A Genoese adventurer tried to dig it up in the 1800s, with little success; restoration efforts eventually began in the mid-1900s. Today, the Sphinx still falls victim to wind, humidity, and pollution, but restoration efforts remain ongoing and the half-lion, half-man statue is once again an iconic symbol of ancient Egypt and a top tourist destination.

1. The Great Sphinx of Giza...

- a. has the body of a human and the head of a lion.
- b. was thought to have been built about 2,000 years ago.
- c. has been portrayed in many cultures.
- d. Is unique to Egyptian culture.

2. The name “sphinx”...

- a. was a name first used by the Egyptians after its construction.
- b. was a name first used by the Greeks during its construction.
- c. was a name first used by the Egyptians during its construction.
- d. was a name first used by the Greeks well after its construction.

3. Why did Prince Thutmose honor the sphinx?

- a. Because the sphinx was an eternal symbol of Egypt
- b. Because the sphinx helped him become pharaoh
- c. Because he created a sphinx-worshipping cult in Egypt
- d. Because the sphinx complained to him

4. What question is NOT answered?

- a. How old is the sphinx?
- b. What are threats to the sphinx today?
- c. Did Prince Thutmose follow through with his promise to the sphinx?
- d. What was one of the riddles of the sphinx?

5. When did the sphinx fade from history for the second time?

- a. 4,500 years ago
- b. Before Prince Thutmose came into power
- c. When Egypt fell
- d. When restoration efforts began in the 1900s.

6. What word could replace “restoration” in the following sentence?

A Genoese adventurer tried to dig it up in the 1800s, with little success; restoration efforts eventually began in the mid-1900s.

- a. repair
- b. discovery
- c. translation
- d. control

7. Which of the following best describes the history of the sphinx?

- a. Only recently has the Sphinx become an important cultural icon
- b. Throughout its history, the Sphinx has endured periods of neglect and periods of honor
- c. Throughout its history, the Sphinx has been one of the world’s most iconic symbols.
- d. Throughout Egyptian and Greek Symbols, the Sphinx has remained a cultural icon and symbol of the past