Document Based Question

A Trip to the Houston Museum of Printing History

In the heart of Houston, Texas you can find a quaint and cozy museum. Don’t let the simple exterior fool you; for when you enter the doors of the Houston Museum of Printing History you enter the realm of thousands of years of history (which by definition is a written account of the past). But how did communication exist before the age of technology, computers and word processors? Before the age of modern pencil and paper.

The following documents are exhibits and supporting placards from the Houston Museum of Printing History. Read/view the documents and answer the questions for each. Following your document analysis, complete a written response to the following writing prompt. While your essay is opinion based, it must be supported by research including evidence from the documents. Be sure to reference the included rubric to include all necessary components.

Were early forms of communication (including materials) integral in the development of civilizations (both in which they occurred in as well as the future)? Why or why not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplary Response</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Approaching Proficient</th>
<th>Well Below Proficient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Student is able to explain how early communication played a role on the development of civilizations with 2 or more pieces of evidence (explained in detail and quoted from the documents)</td>
<td>• Student is able to explain how early communication played a role on the development of civilizations with 1 to 2 pieces of evidence (quoted from the documents) and including less detailed explanation</td>
<td>• Student is able to explain how early communication played a role on the development of civilizations with 1 or no pieces of evidence (quoted from the documents) and with little explanation.</td>
<td>• Student is unable to explain how early communication played a role on the development of civilizations using evidence (explained in detail and cited from the documents)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Proper Grammar, Sentence structure, Word Usage, and Punctuation used.</td>
<td>• Few Errors made with regards to Grammar, Sentence structure, Word Usage, and Punctuation.</td>
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100-76 Points | 75-51 Points | 50-26 Points | 25-0
The Rosetta Stone, 196 BC

The stela (slab) of black basalt, called for nearly two centuries the Rosetta Stone, is perhaps the most famous hieroglyphic inscription known. Not only is it a beautiful example of ancient writing, but it was the key to deciphering the Egyptian language and unlocking the history of one of the world’s greatest ancient civilizations.

The stone was found in 1799 by one of Napoleon’s soldiers at Rosetta near the town of Rashid. On its surface, the same text is inscribed in three different scripts: in Hieroglyphs, Demotic, and Greek.

Ceded to the British government by the terms of the treaty of Alexandria in 1801, it has remained in the British Museum since 1802. Several people worked on deciphering the hieroglyphic inscriptions, including Thomas Young an English physicist who deciphered the names of people and places. A key element in the translation was the oval “cartouche” which was assumed to contain the name of a king or queen, in this case Ptolemy V and Cleopatra. The young French scholar Kean Francois Champollion, who in 1822 successfully laid the foundations of our knowledge of the ancient Egyptian language, worked from a copy of the stone in France.

The actual text relates to honors bestowed by the priesthood on Ptolemy V in 196 BC. Although part of the hieroglyphs had been broken away, enough of the inscription remained to match it with the identical copies of the text found elsewhere in Egypt. Its importance is not in its content, but its impact on our knowledge of an ancient civilization.

This example is a cast of the original in the British Museum.

Gift of the Houston Museum of Natural Science


What is the definition of “deciphering” in the context of the excerpt above?

________________________________________________________________________

What is the script on the Rosetta Stone about?

________________________________________________________________________

According to the excerpt, why is the Rosetta Stone so important?

________________________________________________________________________

Inference: what knowledge might we be lacking if it weren’t for the Rosetta Stone? (*hint: think about the civilization that it unlocked for us and historians)

________________________________________________________________________
What is revealed about the ancient civilizations that used these seals regarding their choice of materials?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

How did the use of seals progress and advance over time? How does this relate to other communication?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

The excerpt references “growing movement of goods in the urban civilization”. What is an example of something we keep record of today and how do we do so?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

Ancient Near Eastern Seals
c. 3000-1000 BC

Seals were produced for about 5000 years in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) beginning between 5000-4500 BC. The seal design was made by engraving in reverse on a small stone using metal tools and simple bow drills. These seals were made from a variety of stones and the magical quality inherent was a factor in choosing the stone. For example, lapis lazuli offered protection. The design of the seal does not become apparent until it is rolled across a piece of damp clay.

At first, seal designs were abstract, then came animals and later human forms. The earliest seals were probably used by officials to authenticate tablets recording the growing movement of goods in the urban civilization. By about 2600 BC, cylinder seals were used as personal seals by individuals. As seen here, the seals were perforated lengthwise, so that a wire or string could be passed through the hole and then fastened to a necklace of a bracelet.

Scenes represented on seals could be ritual, mythological, or contest scenes. This group of seals appears to show combat or contest between bearded men and horned animals. It is possible that these bearded men were considered heroes and these images intended to protect the seal owner in a supernatural way.

Gift of Don and Nancy Piercy

Papyrus was an early form of…

What was the status of an Egyptian scribe and why?

What are some things that might have been written on papyrus (consider the time period, civilization, and the example seen in the image here)?

You weigh in: do you think paper and print is essential to our current society (why or why not)?
Upon transitioning from the front lobby/gift shop of the Houston Museum of Printing History into the exhibit hall, you will find the following single quote displayed on a wall:

To emancipate the mind is the great task which printing came into the world to perform.

- Abraham Lincoln


What is the definition of “emancipate” in the context of the quote above?

Consider the time period of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency: what else was occurring during this time in America and what roll might printing have played?