Introducing the Lesson

Vocabulary for the Selection

Before students begin reading the selection, refer them to the definitions of vocabulary items from the selection. These are located in the Glossary beginning on page 100 of the student text.

adoration, n. Worship; great love, as for a perfect being
ascend, v. Move upward; rise
chambers, n. Rooms, especially, bedrooms
deeds, n. Acts, especially great acts (of courage, prowess, etc.)
dispel, v. Drive away by scattering
dominion, n. Supreme authority
emerging, pres. part. Coming forth
exclusive, adj. Set apart for a certain purpose
fodder, n. Food for animals
frisk, v. Leap about playfully
mediator, n. Peacemaker, negotiator
radiant, adj. Giving off rays of light or other radiation
rejuvenated, adj. Made new or young again

Prereading

Discuss with students the Prereading note on page 2 before they begin reading the selection. Make sure that students understand the following concepts before they begin reading:

• Polytheism and Monotheism. Explain that polytheism means “belief in many gods” and monotheism means “belief in one god.” Explain that the ancient Egyptians were polytheists. The Atenism imposed by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV was an attempt to replace traditional polytheism with worship of a single god, Aten, associated with the sun.

• Traditional Egyptian Religion. You may want to have your students do some research on Egyptian religion, or you may wish to share with them this basic overview: Egyptian religion was extremely complex and evolved over a three-thousand-plus-year history. There were many gods, associated with aspects of nature, and the leader, the Pharaoh, was considered a divine descendent of the gods. Primary among the gods was Ma’at, a personification of the order of the universe, and proper observance of rituals was believed to preserve Ma’at and thus to keep the universe from falling into chaos. Important Egyptian deities included the creator god Amun or Atum; the sun god Ra; the goddess of motherhood and fertility, Isis; the fertility god Osiris; the brother of Osiris, Set; Osiris’s son, Horus; the goddess of the sky, Nut; the god of the Earth, Geb; and the god of the dead, Anubis. However, there were many, many other gods and goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon, such as Bast, a lunar goddess; Bes, God of war and music; and the fertility goddesses Hathor and Heqet. Many of these deities were associated with animals—Hathor with cattle, Heqet with frogs, Bast with cats. Anubis was portrayed as having the head of a jackal.

Close Reading

Have students glance through the questions under Key Ideas and Details on page 9 and answer these questions as they read through the selection. (See the answers given below under “Answer Key.”)

Checktest

After students have read the selection, administer
the multiple-choice checktest to ensure that they have done the reading.

**Discussing the Selection**

After students have finished the checktest, hold a class discussion of the selection.

Choose a student to read aloud *A Reading of the Selection* on page 8. Explain that a praise song is one whose purpose is to express admiration, typically for a ruler, a deity, a family, or a family member, such as a parent or elder or the founder of a lineage. Explain that in West Africa, to which most African-Americans can trace their ancestry, the praise song was an extremely important form. Praise songs were often performed at important events, such as weddings, by traditional singers known as griots. One of the greatest of traditional West African works is the oral epic poem *Sundiata*, which is an extended song in praise of the legendary founder of the Mali Empire, Sundiata Kieta, the Lion King. In cultures with strong oral as opposed to literary traditions, praise songs often included lineages—records of the ancestors within a family. Often these records would be a mixture of factual and legendary material.

Advanced students: Explain that the area of philosophy that deals with the ultimate nature of reality is called *metaphysics*. One branch of metaphysics, *ontology*, deals with the nature of being and what is, or exists. The ontological view that all reality is ultimately reducible to a single type of thing, to a single substance, to a single reality, or a single source is called *monism*. *Materialism*, which holds that only one type of thing, matter, exists is a non-theological variety of monism. A number of the world’s religions hold that the world that we see around us—the material world—is really an illusion masking an underlying single reality, which is God. For example, a standard view in Hinduism is that the world is Maya, or illusion, and that the underlying reality that unites all things is the one god, Brahma, who takes many forms. Atenism and Hinduism are alike in this monistic view, that the underlying reality that gives rise to all things is one deity.

Choose a student to read aloud the note on the *Cultural/Historical Context* of the selection, on page 8. Explain that Amun was a name of the creator god in traditional, polytheistic Egyptian religion. Ask, “Why did the Pharaoh change his name?” Answer: Because his name meant “Amun is satisfied,” and the Pharaoh was replacing worship of the traditional gods, of whom Amun was one, with worship of a single god. The name that the Pharaoh took, Akhenaten, reflects this change and means “Effective spirit of Aten.”

Read the note under *About the Author* on page 8. Ask, “After whom was the Pharaoh’s new capital city named?” Answer: After the one god whose worship the Pharaoh was promoting, Aten. Ask, “Why were works from Amenhotep IV’s reign destroyed after this death?” Answer: The people returned to their previous polytheism and wished to erase the memory of what they then considered to have been a blasphemous departure from traditional belief.

Refer students to the questions raised under *Key Ideas and Details*, *Craft and Structure*, and *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas* on page 9. Discuss the questions raised in these sections, in turn. (See the answers given below under “Answer Key.”

**Answer Key**

**Key Ideas and Details**

1. Many ancient peoples worshipped gods or goddesses associated with the natural world. With what objects in nature is the Aten primarily associated? What benefits does this object provide to humans?
Great Hymn to the Aten, p. 2

The Aten is primarily associated with the sun. Answers regarding benefits provided by the Aten will vary. In the poem, the Aten is referred to as the one who fills the land with beauty, created all things, dispels the dark, causes roads “to lie open” (in the sense that they are clearly seen), animates the various animals, makes “the seed grow in women,” feeds the child in the womb, gives breath to all creatures, supplies food, “set everybody in his place,” supplies all needs, counts out a person’s lifetime, “distinguished the peoples,” brings the life-giving waters of the Nile, nurses crops in the fields, creates the seasons, created the sky, shines in the sky in the form of the sun, sees all, brings rest at sunset, and, importantly, orders all things according to Maat (the principle of divine order in the universe).

2. According to the hymn, what are some of the accomplishments of the Aten? What are some of the Aten’s greatest deeds, or actions?

Answers will vary. See the list under Item 1, above.

3. What line of the poem suggests that the Aten is the only god? How do you think the priests of the many gods of ancient Egypt might have felt about being told by the Pharaoh that there was only one god?

The poem refers to the Aten as “sole God without equal.” Answers regarding the priests’ reactions will vary. Some may feel that because the Pharaoh was an absolute ruler, the priests would not have had any choice but to go along with his views. Others may point out that the priests, previously committed to a different view, might have found acceptance of the new view challenging, difficult, disturbing.

4. What lines in the poem suggest that the Aten cannot be completely known or understood by ordinary human beings?

The speaker, Pharaoh Akenhaten, says, “And there is no other who knows You.”

5. What special relationship, according to the poem, exists between the Aten and the Pharaoh? How would it benefit the Pharaoh if his subjects believed in this relationship?

Answers will vary. The speaker says that the Aten is in his heart, that no other knows the Aten, that the Aten has taught him the ways of the Aten, that he is the Aten’s only son, that the Aten makes “all arms firm for the King” (that is, to serve the king’s purposes). The King is said to live “by Maat,” by the principle of divine order, truth, and law in the universe. In other words, this order derives from the Aten, and the Pharaoh, as the Aten’s son and representative on Earth, enforces this order. In other words, the Pharaoh’s rule is divinely sanctioned and the Pharaoh is himself divine. Obviously, if people believed this to be true, then they would be awed by and subservient to the Pharaoh and would not question his authority.

Craft and Structure

Answers will vary. Epithets used to refer to the Aten include “living Aten”; “creator of life”; “Re”; “doer: un-saying, solitary, omnipotent”; “sole God without equal”; “Lord of All”; “Lord of All Lands”; “Aten of daytime”; “Lord of Eternity” and “living Aten.” The Pharaoh is referred to by the epithets “your son,” “Nefer-kheperu-Re, Sole-one-of-Re”; “Lord of the Two Lands”; “Son of Re who lives by Maat” and “Lord of Crowns.” The queen is referred to as “great Queen”; “Lady of the Two Lands”; and “Nefer-neferu-Aten Nefertiti,” meaning “beautiful is the Aten’s beauty.”

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Answers will vary. Some students may argue that the poem sounds sincere and point to various lines
that express what seems to be genuine thanks to the Aten such as “even then You are in my heart.” Others might point out that the concluding section of the poem is at pains to point out that the sole interpreter of the will of the Aten is said to be the Pharaoh, an assertion that confers upon the Pharaoh enormous power, making him the sole representative of the sole God, completely unchallenged and unchallengeable.

The astronomer and writer Carl Sagan famously said in his television series *Cosmos* that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” The video shows techniques by which a few people, without assistance, could have moved and placed the enormous stones that make up the pyramids and other ancient monumental works. There is a general rule in science, called Occam’s Razor, or the law of parsimony, which says that one should always seek the simplest, least extraordinary explanation consistent with the evidence. The video suggests that there is a simple explanation for how those enormous stones were moved and placed and that far-fretched, complex explanations (like, “They were moved by people using alien technologies) are unnecessary.

**Writing Practice**

Use the Writing Rubric: Argument to assess the student’s work. This rubric is available at http://callistoeducation.com/Teacher11.htm.

**Speaking and Listening Practice**

This activity presents an opportunity to teach students to use a rough outline form and abbreviations for taking notes. In a rough outline, one jots down main ideas as phrases and, under these, other phrases that present related or subordinate ideas, like this:

- Mars rover *Curiosity*
- Purposes of mission
  - Look for signs of life
  - Study Martian climate
  - Study Martian geology
  - Prepare for human explor.
- Signs of ancient or existing life
  - Water
  - Organic molecules
  - Fossilized traces (of bacteria, etc.)

Explain to your students that they can use symbols and abbreviations such as the following when they take notes.

& or + for and
Amer. for American
w/ for with
→ for not
> for greater than
∧ for change

**Language Practice**

Answers will vary somewhat.

1. culture: The arts, technologies, and other attainments of a group of people—those creations of a group of people that are learned and transmitted from generation to generation
2. artifact: an object made by a human being, as opposed to one that is naturally occurring
3. strata: distinct layers of rock and/or earth in the ground
4. excavation: a site, such as an archaeological dig,
that has been uncovered meticulously; the act of performing an excavation

5. linguistics: the study of language

6. human universal: a characteristic that is found in all (or most) humans and human cultures worldwide and across time

7. Neolithic: of or relating to the later part of the Stone Age, beginning in around 10,000 BCE in the Middle East, characterized by the development of agriculture and the making of polished stone implements (from neo–, “new” and lithos, “stone”)

8. demographics: the study (generally statistical) of populations and their characteristics, particularly, of their make-up

9. genetics: the study of heredity and of variation in inherited characteristics via genes

10. animism: the attribution of a living soul to plants, animals, and inanimate features of nature such as rocks, rivers, or the sun

11. clan: a closely related group of people; a group of interrelated families

12. kinship: family relations, relation “by blood”

- Divide your class into study groups and have each group choose, with your assistance, a gifted reader to introduce (and read aloud) each part of the study apparatus.

**Additional Resources**

Here are some additional resources for teaching the lesson:

- [A Timeline of Ancient Egyptian History](http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/time/explore/main.html)

**Differentiating the Instruction**

Here are some ideas for differentiating your instruction for the selection:

- Ability with spoken language generally outpaces reading and writing ability. You may wish to read aloud part or all of the Prereading and other study apparatus for the selection to your English language learners.
- Consider reading part of the selection aloud to your class and having them then complete the reading on their own.