Text 2: The Old Kingdom

Topic 2 Lesson 4 Egyptian Civilization
The history of ancient Egypt is divided into three main periods:

**The Old Kingdom** about 2575 B.C.E. –2130 B.C.E.

**The Middle Kingdom** about 1938 B.C.E. –1630 B.C.E.

**The New Kingdom** about 1539 B.C.E. –1075 B.C.E.

During these periods, power passed from one dynasty to another.
Government

During the Old Kingdom pharaohs organized a strong, centralized state.

Pharaohs claimed divine support for their rule, and were believed to be a god.

Pharaoh had absolute power, owning and ruling all the land.

Pharaoh was also seen as human and was expected to behave morally.
Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom took pride in maintaining justice and order.

A pharaoh depended on a vizier, or chief minister, to supervise the government.

The vizier headed the bureaucracy that looked after matters such as tax collection, farming, and the irrigation system.

Thousands of scribes carried out the vizier’s instructions.
About 2450 B.C., a wise vizier, Ptah-hotep wrote a book, *Instructions of the Vizier Ptah-hotep* which is based on his vast experience of government. He advised ambitious young people to be humble and honest, obedient to one’s father and superiors, and fair in dealing with other officials of all ranks.
The Pyramids

The Old Kingdom is sometimes called the Pyramid Age.

During this time, the Egyptians built the pyramids that still stand at Giza.
Tombs within the pyramids were considered homes in which the deceased would live for eternity

Because Egyptians believed in an afterlife, they preserved the bodies of their dead rulers

Provided them with everything they would need in their new lives
The Pyramids

Workers hauled and lifted millions of limestone blocks, some weighing as much as 15 tons each to build the pyramids.

Workers quarried each stone by hand, pulled them on sleds to the site, and hoisted them up earthen ramps to be placed on the slowly rising structure.
The Pyramids

Building a pyramid took so many years that often a pharaoh would begin construction on his tomb as soon as he inherited the throne.

The pyramids suggest the strength of ancient Egyptian civilization.

They were costly projects and took years to complete.
The Pyramids

Required enormous planning and organization

Thousands of farmers, who had to be fed each day, worked on the pyramids when not planting or harvesting crops