The Mystery Language

Grade Level: Elementary

Purpose: Students will understand how communication has developed and how it has affected society and civilization.

Objectives: 1. Students will work in pairs to make their own message in hieroglyphics.
2. Students will present and translate their messages in an oral presentation.

Materials: hieroglyphic alphabet and translation sheet
butcher paper
colored pencils

Background Information:
Hieroglyphics were an early way of writing used in ancient Egypt. This language was a mystery for a long time. In 1799, Napoleon and his soldiers went on an expedition throughout Egypt and came across a stone, four feet high, that was carved in 196 B.C. The Rosetta Stone, as it became known, had an inscription written in three languages – Greek, hieroglyphics and demotic.

Efforts to decipher the stone were unsuccessful before 1800. A French scholar, Jean Francois Champollian, was the first to actually read longer passages. He realized that the stone contained the same names, Cleopatra and Ptolemy. By comparing the names in the three languages and using hieratic, from which demotic writing was developed, he began to figure out the mystery. He realized that the signs represented sounds just like our alphabet does, and through a complicated process of comparison and elimination, he solved the mystery.

Hieroglyphics could be written either right to left or left to right and are read according to the way the characters are faced. The characters represent both sounds and words, which makes it very confusing to read. Scholars added characters for ‘O’, ‘U’, ‘W’, ‘E’, and ‘I’ because the Egyptians did not have characters for all of the sounds that we use.

Included is a part of the hieroglyphic alphabet. Remember that most of the vowels are missing.

Procedure:
1. Instructor will read to the class the background information: “The Mystery Language.”
2. Instructor will then form class into pairs and give each pair the hieroglyphic alphabet with translation sheet.
3. Pairs will then translate the message on the sheet and write their own message or the title to a favorite song.
4. The students will then present their work in an oral presentation to the class.
Benchmarks:
SS.A.2.1.1- Knows the method of communication from long ago and the technological developments that facilitated communications.
SS.A.2.2.1- Knows the significant scientific and technological achievements of various societies.
GEOGRAPHY STANDARD 10-HUMAN SYSTEMS: The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth’s cultural mosaics.
The Mystery Language

A  L  U or W
B or V  M  X
K or C  N  Y
D  O  Z
I or E  P
F  Q
G  R
H  S
J  T
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Translate:

Now you try some. Make up your own message in hieroglyphics using the title from your favorite song or movie.