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## A Second Aswan Dam

By Jane Runyon

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For thousands of years, the Nile River has flowed through Egypt. Each year the waters from East Africa would flow toward the Nile. Each year these waters brought minerals and nutrients with them. These nutrients and minerals were left on the banks of the Nile when all the water gathered at the river and flooded. This was good for the people of Egypt.

What the waters left behind made the land wonderful for farming.



More and more people came to the Nile area to farm and build cities. At the first waterfall on the Nile, the city of Aswan was built. As the city grew, so did the problems that were created. When the waters from the eastern part of Africa were high, the floods caused farmers to lose crops. When the waters were too low, a drought caused the farmers to lose their crops. The drought often caused a famine in the area. A famine is a very serious shortage of food. When there isn't enough water for crops, crops don't grow. When crops don't grow, no food is produced. When no food is produced, people go hungry.

In the late 1800s, it was decided that a dam should be built on the Nile to help control the flooding. The British began to build this dam near Aswan in 1899. They finished their work in 1902. It didn't take long before people realized that the dam was too low to control the high waters. The height of the dam was raised in 1912. It had to be raised a second time in 1933.

The Aswan Dam almost overflowed again in 1946. A study was done to decide what needed to be done to make sure the dam would be effective in controlling flooding in the area. It was decided that a second dam was needed. Unfortunately, the country of Egypt didn't have the money it needed to build this new dam. The United States and Great Britain offered to loan Egypt the money. They changed

their minds when word got out that Egypt had made a deal with some Communist countries for weapons.

President Nasser of Egypt decided to charge cargo ships wanting to go through the Suez Canal. He would use the money earned from this to build the new dam. The Suez Canal is a one-hundred-mile-long canal in Egypt that allows shipping traffic to go between Europe and Asia without having to sail around the entire continent of Africa. The countries that regularly used the Suez for trading were not happy with Nasser's decision. A crisis occurred when Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt in an attempt to gain control of the canal.

The United Nations stepped in and settled the crisis. In the end, the attacking countries withdrew. Egypt promised to pay for the new dam some other way. Construction on the new dam was begun in 1960. This dam would be called the Aswan High Dam. The older dam would now be called the Aswan Low Dam. Construction on the High Dam was completed in 1970.

Enough water passes through the High Dam to generate electricity for Egypt. In the early stages, the electricity generated from this dam provided about fifty percent of all the power used in Egypt. Dangerous potential floods have been stopped. The reservoir created by the dam has been responsible for saving crops during drought years. Fishing in this reservoir, called Lake Nasser, has provided a new industry for the people in the Aswan area.

Not all of the effects of the dam were positive, however. Building the dam caused areas behind the dam to flood. These areas had not been flooded before. Ninety thousand people had to find new homes because theirs were lost in this new flooding. Fish in the Mediterranean Sea started to disappear. They didn't have enough to eat. The nutrients that had come into the sea from the Nile were now kept in Egypt by the dam. These same nutrients can no longer reach the soil they once helped. Erosion has now become cause for concern for the farmers in the area. They have had to resort to using artificial fertilizers that are polluting other water supplies and the land.

Egypt has had to weigh the pros and cons of building the two dams. Time will tell whether their decision have been helpful or harmful.

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### Questions

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The Aswan Dam is located in eastern Africa.  
A. false  
B. true
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Why was the original Aswan Dam built?  
A. to stop flooding  
B. to provide electricity  
C. to stop erosion  
D. to create a place for fish to grow
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Why did a crisis develop over the building of the second Aswan Dam?

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4. What is a famine? What causes it?

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What is the newest Aswan Dam called?  
A. the Big Dam  
B. the Little Dam  
C. the Low Dam  
D. the High Dam
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Who offered to loan Egypt the money to build the second Aswan Dam?  
A. Israel  
B. the Soviet Union  
C. Japan  
D. the United States and Britain
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What is one problem that has been caused by the building of the second Aswan Dam?  
A. Flooding is controlled.  
B. A new lake was formed.  
C. Electricity is produced.  
D. People have lost their homes.

### How can damming a river be useful to a country?

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