

Mini-Q™s in World History  
Volume 1, Unit 2

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# How Did the Nile River Shape Ancient Egypt's Society?

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## MINI-Q™ LESSON PLAN

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**DAY 1 – 45 minutes**

**Step One: Hook** Refer to the Step One teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Read the directions aloud. The purpose is to get students engaged, talking, and wanting to do the Mini-Q.

**Step Two: Background Essay** Refer to the Step Two teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Students can write out answers to the BGE questions or the questions can simply be discussed.

**Step Three: Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing** The task of recognizing and defining key words in the question is a crucial habit of mind. The second task of pre-bucketing based on clues in the question and in document titles is a huge categorization skill.

**Step Four: Document Analysis** Do Document A with the whole class, modeling the kind of detail you expect in student answers to the Document Analysis questions.  
Homework: Analyze the remaining documents and answer the questions that follow.

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**DAY 2 – 45 minutes**

**Step Four (continued): Discussion of Documents**

Option One: Working in pairs or threesomes, have students discuss the answers to the first set of Document Analysis questions they did for homework. Using a different-colored pen than they used for homework, they may add to their answers. After five minutes, open the discussion of that document to the full class. Then proceed to the next document and repeat. Option Two: Proceed as above, but have a volunteer group lead each of the three or four different document discussions. Students at their desks may add to their notes, again in a different pen.

**Step Five: Bucketing and Chicken Foot** Have students complete the bucketing and chicken foot work page. This step will help students clarify their thesis and road map.

**Step Six: From Thesis to Essay Writing** For Homework: Have students fill out the Outline Guide Sheet or write their multi-paragraph essay.

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**DAY 3 (Optional)**

**Step Six (continued):** Conduct an in-class Writing Workshop.

## MINI-Q™ LESSON PLAN: CLEAN VERSION OPTION

If students are ready, use the Clean Version of the Mini-Q, which requires them to handle more of the analysis on their own. Estimated time to complete is 1-2 class periods.

# How Did the Nile River Shape Ancient Egypt's Society?

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A wall painting from the tomb of Sennefer, mayor of Thebes and Overseer of the Royal Gardens during the reign of Amenhotep II, 1426-1400 BCE.

**Overview:** The glory days of Ancient Egypt lasted almost 3,000 years. They began about 2920 BCE with the unification of Egypt under the first pharaoh and ended when the Romans conquered the kingdom in 30 BCE. Through this rich and vibrant civilization flowed the longest river in the world. The Nile, which meanders 4,126 miles across east Africa before ending its journey in Egypt, brought life-giving water to the desert kingdom. This Mini-Q is about the importance of the Nile to the people of Ancient Egypt.

## The Documents:

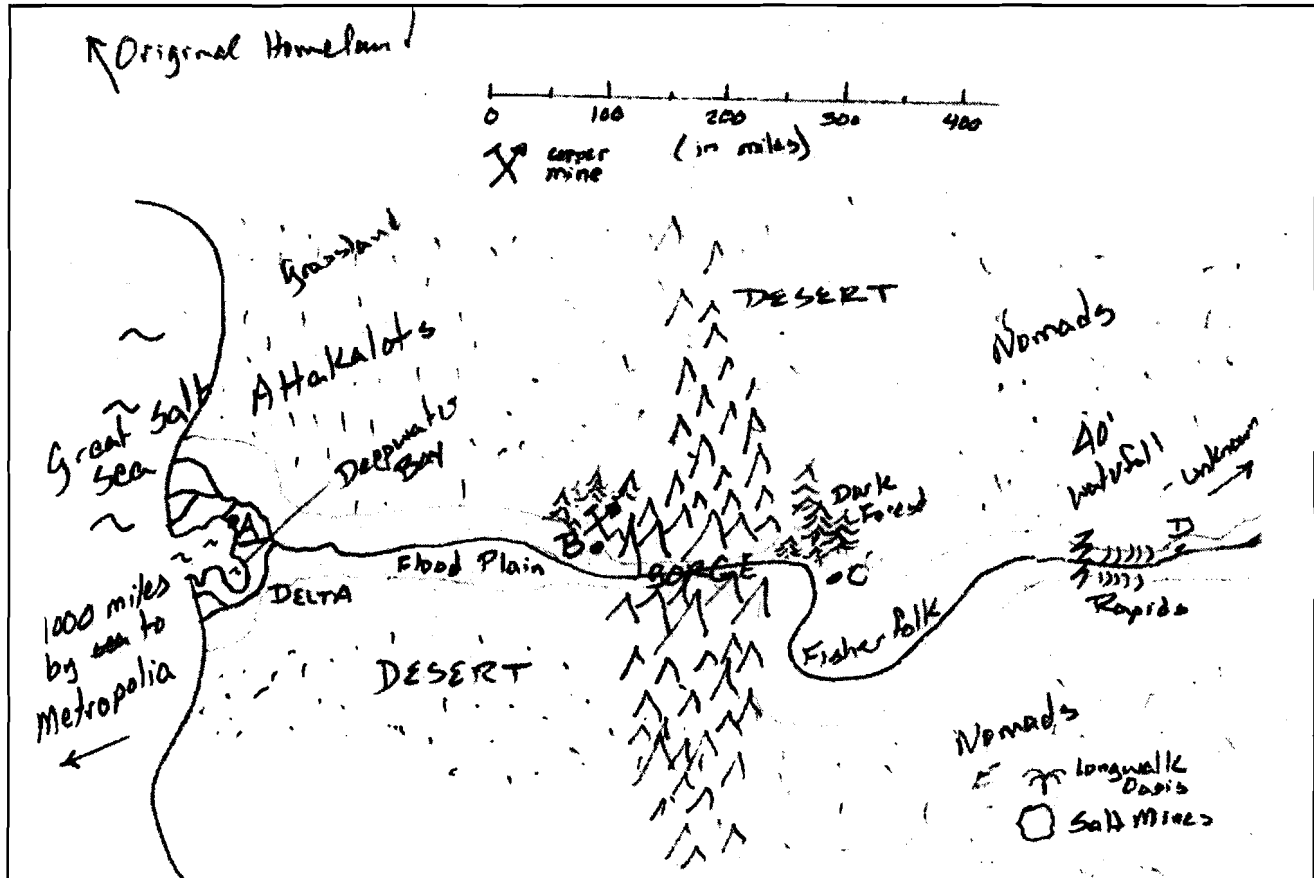
- Document A: Ancient Egypt (map)
- Document B: The Nile River Flood Cycle (chart)
- Document C: Transportation on the Nile
- Document D: Field of Reeds (tomb painting)
- Document E: Hymn to the Nile

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

## Hook Exercise: Finding a New Homeland

**Directions:** It is several centuries before the time of Jesus Christ. You are an elder in a goat-herding tribe of 500 people. Unfriendly raiders from the north, the Attakalots, are forcing you off your land. You send out a small party of men, armed mostly with your prayers, to search for a new homeland. Six months later, they return. That evening, around a large bonfire, the scouting party presents a rough map to the Council of Elders with four possible settlement sites. Examine the map with a fellow elder and discuss the pros and cons of each option. Which site will you recommend to the council?

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Site A: Pros

Site B: Pros

Cons

Cons

Site C: Pros

Site D: Pros

Cons

Cons

## How Did the Nile River Shape Ancient Egypt's Society?

In today's fast-paced, digital society, it is easy to forget the importance of rivers. Ours is a world of highways and airports, of supermarkets and shopping malls. When we travel or want food, we don't think "river." When we make a list of life's necessities, rivers don't make the cut.

This has not always been the case. Four of the world's most important ancient cultures are known by historians as the "river civilizations." These were Mesopotamia (on the Tigris-Euphrates River), China (on the Yangste River), India (on the Indus River), and Egypt (on the Nile). They are called the river civilizations because of the powerful influence a large river system had on the lives of the people. Nowhere was this more true than in the ancient kingdom of Egypt.

Ancient Egypt was a world of contrasts and opposites, a place of hot, sunny days and cold nights, of crop-laden fields and empty desert. In its early time, the kingdom was actually two distinct lands called Upper Egypt (the higher ground of southern Egypt, where the Nile flows out of the mountains) and Lower Egypt ( where the river spreads into a delta before emptying into the Mediterranean). Ancient Egypt was also described in terms of contrasting colors: "**Black Land**" (kemet) referred to the fertile Nile valley, and its opposite, "**Red Land**" (deshret), referred to the deserts east and west of the river. Life in the black land was orderly and predictable, while the desert represented chaos and danger. For Egyptians, the Nile literally meant the difference between life and death.

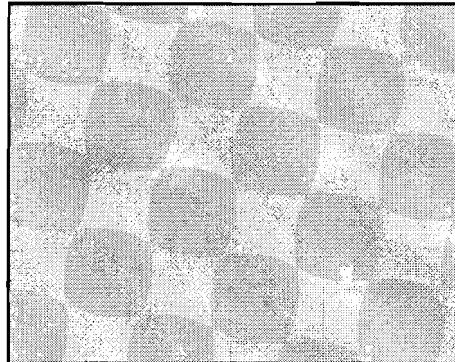
The source of the Nile was a mystery to the ancient Egyptians. Now we know that one branch, called the Blue Nile, begins in Lake Tana and the highlands of Ethiopia. The other main branch, the White Nile, begins with the waters that flow into and then out of Lake Victoria in Kenya. Every year, when heavy rains fall

in these regions of central Africa, the **tributaries** of the Blue and White Nile grow full and flow into the main stream. The mother Nile, its waters replenished, flows north and into Egypt. There, the water spills over its banks and covers the low-lying flood plain. For thousands of years this flooding cycle has provided a seasonal rhythm for the Egyptian people.

The flooding cycle determined the planting season for farmers. Their main crops were barley and emmer-wheat for making bread and beer. People paid their taxes in wheat, and wheat was a main export. Farmers also grew flax, for producing fine linen, and harvested **papyrus** from the marshy areas along the river and in the delta. **Irrigation** channels from the Nile flowed to smaller gardens where farmers grew vegetables such as onions, beans, and cucumbers. Date, fig, and pomegranate trees were tended along the river.

While fruits, grains, and vegetables might sound like the makings of a healthful diet, one ingredient of Egyptian meals was definitely not good: desert sand. Sand was everywhere, easily settling into the dough for flat bread, a basic food eaten by everyone. Once the ever-present sand ground down a person's teeth, infection and pain set in; thus, dental disease became a common medical problem in ancient Egypt.

Let's time-travel to this fertile yet hostile land where life revolved around the ebb and flow of a single waterway. On the following pages are five documents that provide a glimpse of how Egyptians lived their lives thousands of years ago. As you read the documents, think about how the Nile gave rise to a civilization that, all this time later, continues to fascinate. Then answer the question before us: *How did the Nile River shape Ancient Egypt's society?*



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## Background Essay Questions

1. Name four important river civilizations of the ancient world.
2. List two or three pairs of contrasts that describe ancient Egypt.
3. What are two of the sources of the Nile?
4. How did the flooding cycle provide a seasonal rhythm for the Egyptian people?
5. Why was sand a health threat for Egyptians?
6. Define these terms:

Black Land

Red Land

tributaries

papyrus

irrigation

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### Timeline

- 2920-2575 B.C.E.** – Early Dynastic Period: The first pharaohs unify Egypt into a powerful kingdom
- 2575-2134 B.C.E.** – Old Kingdom: big advances in technology and architecture; pyramids built at Giza
- 2040-1640 B.C.E.** – Middle Kingdom: Egypt's population, religion and the arts flourish
- 1550-1070 B.C.E.** – New Kingdom: kingdom expands into Syria and Nubia; international trade routes established
- 712-332 B.C.E.** – Late Period: Persians invade and annex Egypt
- 332-304 B.C.E.** – Alexander the Great defeats Persians; establishes new capital called Alexandria
- 304-30 B.C.E.** – Reign of Cleopatra
- 30 B.C.E.** – Egypt falls to Roman Empire

## Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

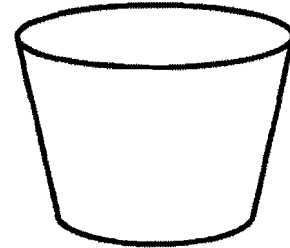
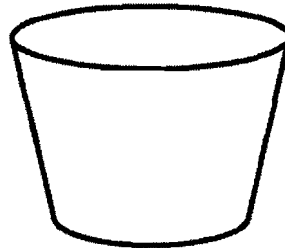
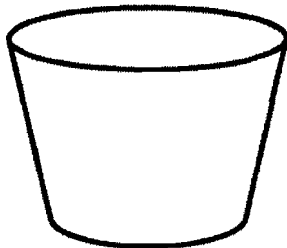
### Understanding the Question

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-Q?
2. What terms in the question need to be defined?
3. Rewrite the question in your own words.

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### Pre-Bucketing

**Directions:** Using any clues from the Mini-Q question and the document titles on the cover page, guess the analytical categories and label the buckets. We suggest a three-bucket format.



## Document A

**Source:** Map created from various sources.

**Note:** An estimated 94 percent of the Egyptian population lived in the Nile River floodplain.

## Document Analysis

1. The Nile is the world's longest river, --4,160 miles. If we consider the southern boundary of Ancient Egypt to be at Aswan (the first cataract, or rapids), how many miles of the Nile are actually in Egypt?
2. Why is the delta region to the north called "Lower Egypt"?
3. What are the eastern, western, and northern boundaries of Egypt?
4. Given the geography of this area, do you think Egypt was vulnerable to foreign invaders? Explain your thinking.
5. What do you notice about population distribution and settlement location in Ancient Egypt? List three or four reasons for this.



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## Document B

**Source:** Chart adapted from Katherine Hinds, *Life in Ancient Egypt: The Countryside*, Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2007.

### The Nile River Flood Cycle

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When	Season	What Happens_
Mid-June to mid-October rainy in Upper Nile	akhet (flooding)	Fields in the Nile floodplain covered in water and fertilized by the new batch of rich silt. Time when many farmers worked off their public-labor tax, doing jobs like canal repair or quarrying.
Mid-October to mid-February	peret (planting and growing) mild weather	Waters receded but Nile high enough to fill irrigation canals; crops were planted and tended
Mid-February to mid-June	shemu (harvest) very hot	Crops in the Lower Nile were harvested and sent to market

**Note:** Average rainfall, historically and today, has remained about the same. The Nile delta receives about four inches per year. The Nile Valley south of Cairo receives less than one inch. In comparison, Atlanta, Georgia, gets about 50 inches of rain annually and Phoenix, Arizona, about eight inches.

### Document Analysis

1. What similarities and differences do you see between the Egyptian calendar and the one we use today?
2. Usually the flood season produced a “good Nile,” just the right amount of water. What might be the consequences of a “bad Nile”--too much or too little water?
3. The population of Ancient Egypt was probably about one million, 95 percent of whom were farmers. According to the chart, when were farmers busiest?
4. When would this large work force of farmers be available to work on government projects, like building palaces and tombs?
5. How does this document help you answer the question: How did the Nile River shape the society of Ancient Egypt?



## Document C

Source: Illustration by Oliver Frey in *Living in Ancient Egypt*, Norman Bancroft Hunt, editor, Thalamus Publishing, 2009.



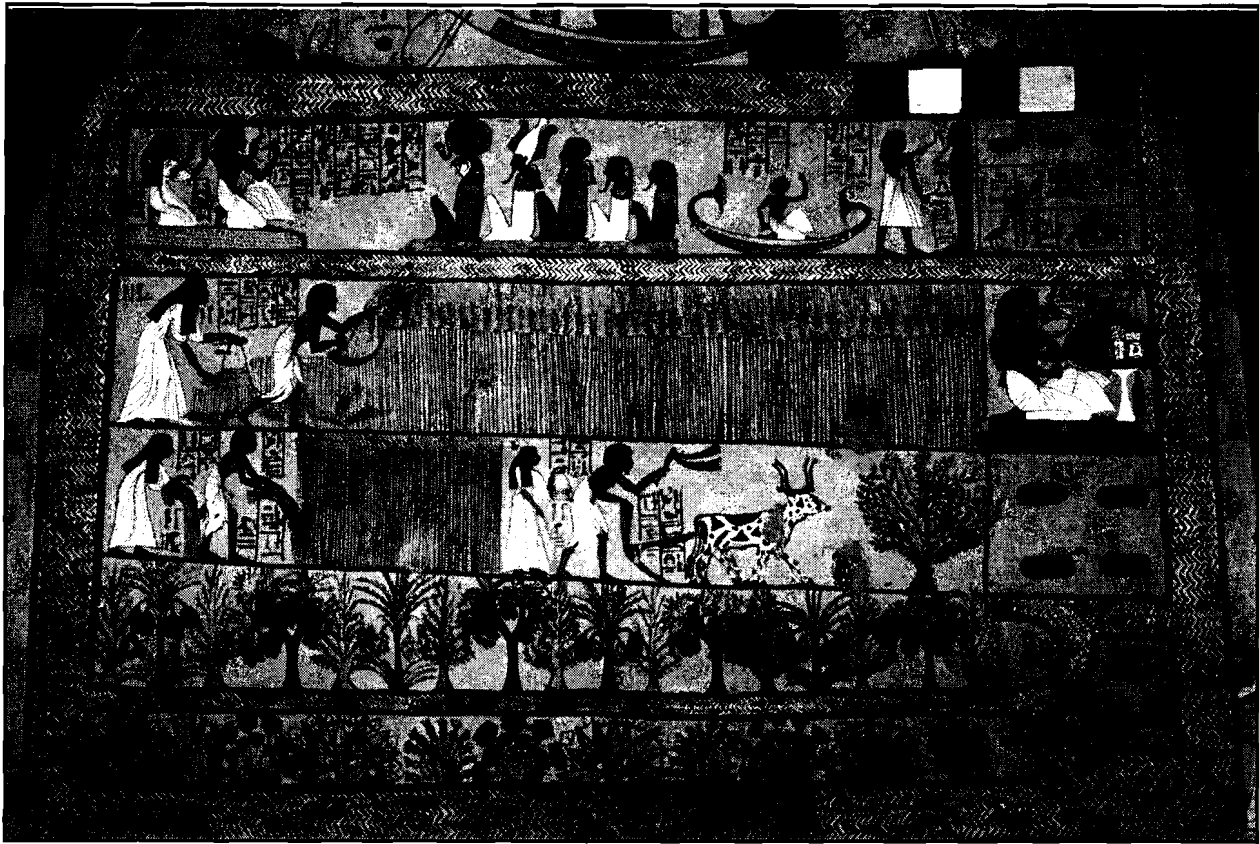
**Note:** The Nile River flowed south to north against a prevailing northerly wind. Boats traveling upstream against the Nile current used a sail or rowers or both. Boats traveling downstream to the north often just floated with the help of steering oars. The Nile current was about four knots (4 mph) during flood season. It slowed to a sluggish one knot (1 mph) during the rest of the year.

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## Document Analysis

1. What is being transported by the barge?
2. What is likely being carried by the barque?
3. What direction are the barque, barge, and tugs traveling? Explain your reasoning.
4. Drawing from evidence in the painting, what are five occupations in Egypt that depended in some way on the Nile River?
5. How does this document help you answer the question: How did the Nile River shape the society of Ancient Egypt?

## Document D



A painting from the tomb of an artisan named Sennedjem, who lived sometime between 1307 and 1196 BCE.

Top panel: The sun god, Ra, traveling across the sky in his barque. Baboons, because they were so noisy in the morning, were believed to be worshipping Ra.

Middle panels: Harvesting emmer wheat Harvesting flax to weave into linen cloth

Bottom panels: date palms and ornamental plants

Borders: The Nile River and irrigation canals

**Note:** The afterlife of Ancient Egypt was a paradise called the Field of Reeds, depicted in this tomb painting. Those whose heart had the correct weight at death could, after a long journey, live in the Field of Reeds for eternity. The Field of Reeds was believed to be somewhere in the east, near the rising sun.

### Document Analysis

1. The middle panels of this tomb painting shows the deceased and his wife engaged in various activities. What kind of activities are they?
2. What natural and manmade objects can you identify in the bottom three panels?
3. According to these scenes, how did the Egyptians see the relationship between life on earth and life after death?
4. How does this document help answer the question: How did the Nile River shape the society of Ancient Egypt?

**Document E**

**Source:** From the song "Hymn to the Nile," circa 2100 BCE. The author is unknown. [true??]

Hail to you, oh Nile,  
spring from the ground, come to keep the land alive . . .  
who floods the fields that Ra has created  
to make all the animals live . . .  
who produces barley and makes wheat grow,  
that the temples might be in festival.

If he is sluggish, noses suffocate,  
everyone is impoverished. . . .  
If he rises, the land is in exultation,  
and everyone is in joy.

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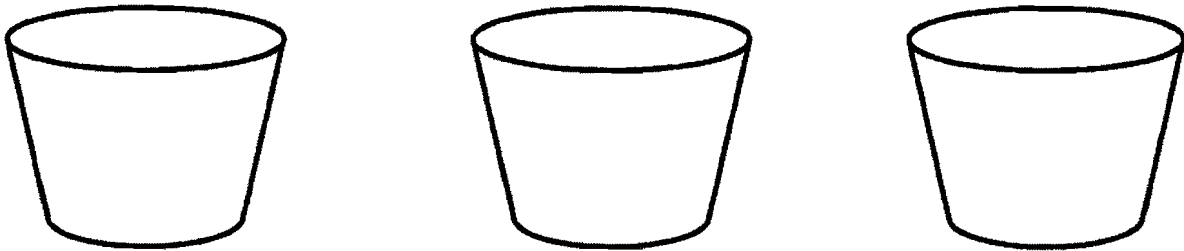
**Document Analysis**

1. What is a hymn?
2. According to the "Hymn to the Nile," why do the Egyptian people praise the river?
3. What is the one "bad" behavior of the river that is mentioned? What is the result?
4. The famous Greek historian Herodotus once wrote that "Egypt . . . is, so to speak, the gift of the Nile." What did he mean and was he right?
5. How does this document help you answer the question: How did the Nile River shape the society of ancient Egypt?

## Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

### Bucketing

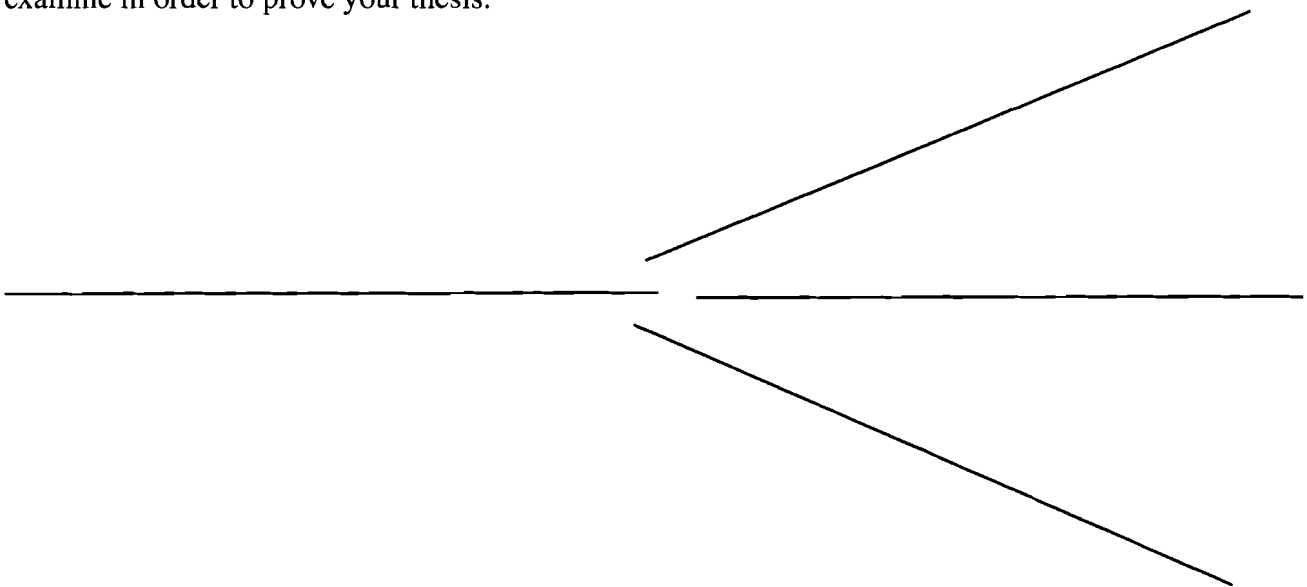
Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write bucket labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. It is OK to put a document in more than one bucket. That is called multi-bucketing, but you need a good reason for doing so. Remember, your buckets are going to become your body paragraphs



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### Thesis Development and Road Map

On the chicken foot below, write your thesis and your road map. Your thesis is always an opinion and answers the Mini-Q question. The road map is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.



# From Thesis to Essay Writing

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## Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

### Working Title

### Paragraph #1

Grabber

Background

Stating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and road map

### Paragraph #2

Baby Thesis for bucket one

Evidence: supporting detail from documents with document citation

Argument: connecting evidence to the thesis

### Paragraph #3

Baby Thesis for bucket two

Evidence

Argument

### Paragraph #4

Baby Thesis for bucket three

Evidence

Argument

### Paragraph #5

Conclusion: Restatement of main idea along with possible insight or wrinkle

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Lined paper with 20 horizontal lines for writing.

