

The Stone With Three Writings

PASSAGE · NON-FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Inference

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 15 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about four minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

For hundreds of years nobody in the world could read ancient Egyptian writing. The little carved pictures covered temple walls, stone coffins and statues. People could see them perfectly well. They simply had no idea what any of them said.

Then, in 1799, French soldiers were repairing an old fort near the Egyptian town of Rashid. One of them noticed a slab of dark stone built into a wall. It was broken along the top, roughly the size of a tabletop, and covered in neat carved lines.

The lines were the treasure. The very same message had been cut into the slab three times over, in three different kinds of writing. At the top were the carved pictures, which we call hieroglyphs. In the middle was a quicker, flowing Egyptian script used for everyday notes. At the bottom was ancient Greek.

Scholars across Europe could already read ancient Greek easily. That meant the stone had handed them an answer sheet.

Even with the answer sheet, the puzzle took more than twenty years to crack. The man who finally managed it was a young Frenchman called Jean-François Champollion. He had taught himself a whole shelf of languages, including Coptic, which grew out of the old Egyptian tongue.

In 1822 Champollion announced what he had worked out. Hieroglyphs were not just pictures of things, the way a drawing of an owl means an owl. Many of the signs stood for sounds, rather like the letters in your own name. Once he understood that, the silent walls began to speak.

The slab is now known as the Rosetta Stone, after the other name for Rashid, and it sits in a museum in London. The message on it is surprisingly dull — a public notice about a boy king named Ptolemy. A dull notice unlocked an entire language.

Cover the passage before you start.

Looking back turns this into a copying exercise. Getting it slightly wrong from memory is what makes it work.

PART A Tell it back

Write down everything you can remember about the Rosetta Stone and how it was read.

PART B 5 questions

1 Where was the stone found, and who found it?

2 What were the three kinds of writing carved on the stone?

3 What did Champollion work out about hieroglyphs in 1822?

4 Why was the ancient Greek part of the stone so useful to scholars?

5 The passage says the carved lines “were the treasure”. What does the word “treasure” mean there?

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 · In a wall of an old fort near the town of Rashid in Egypt, by French soldiers repairing it in 1799.
- ☐ 2 · Hieroglyphs at the top, an everyday flowing Egyptian script in the middle, and ancient Greek at the bottom.
- ☐ 3 · That many of the signs stood for sounds rather than for the things they looked like.
- ☐ 4 · They could already read ancient Greek, so it told them what the message said. They could then match it against the Egyptian writing and begin to work out which sign meant what.
- ☐ 5 · It does not mean gold or jewels. It means the carved lines were the valuable part — the thing that made the stone worth having.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 5

DATE

THE STRATEGY Chunk and retell

Do not read the whole passage in one go. Stop at the end of each paragraph, look away, and say its main idea out loud in a single sentence. Seven short retellings will hold far better than one long read, and the paragraphs that feel hardest to retell are exactly the ones worth doing twice.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

When you tell someone about a film you have seen, how do you break it up so you do not forget a part?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains recall, not reading speed. Let your child read the passage twice if they wish, then cover it completely before Part A begins — do not prompt, and do not let them look back. The vocabulary question asks what a word meant in the passage, so an answer in their own words is better than a dictionary definition.