Think about a story involving tomb raiders, a journey into the underworld, and a romance between a glamorous queen and a powerful king. This may sound like the latest Hollywood blockbuster, but it's a script pulled straight from the history books. The story begins with Ramesses the Great, who is known to have ruled Egypt from 1279 B.C. to 1213 B.C. Ramesses had many consorts, but his most beloved wife was Queen Nefertari. She was known for her beauty and for the many Egyptian monuments built in her honor. Nefertari had many nicknames including "beautiful face," "pretty with two feathers," and "appeasing the Gods." When Queen Nefertari died, Ramesses ordered the building of one of Egypt's most extraordinary tombs for her.

Nefertari's tomb is located in Egypt's Valley of the Queens, which hosts more than 70 lavishly decorated tombs belonging to queens, princesses, and other members of the nobility. Queen Nefertari's tomb is considered the most impressive of them all. It's known as the Sistine Chapel of ancient Egypt because of its beautiful decorations and detailed artwork. When it was discovered in 1904 by an Italian Egyptologist, Nefertari's tomb had long before been looted by tomb raiders. They had stolen nearly all of the precious treasures buried with the queen, including her sarcophagus and her mummy. Still, the tomb was an extremely important discovery. The magnificent paintings on the tomb walls are some of the most detailed and well-preserved in all of ancient Egypt. The stories these paintings tell about Queen Nefertari's journey into the underworld shed light on ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife.

The ancient Egyptians developed elaborate burial rituals and ornate tombs because they believed in a life after death. These rituals were designed to help the deceased travel safely into the netherworld.
and hopefully find paradise in the world beyond. (This is one of the reasons grave robbing was considered such a heinous crime in ancient Egypt. Looters not only took material goods, but, it was believed, stole the deceased's chance at a peaceful afterlife.) Ancient Egyptians believed that when people died, they rode across a lake of fire on the boat of the god Ra. Once they crossed to the other side, they were faced with many challenges and tests on their journey into the underworld.

If you were to tour Nefertari's tomb today, you would first descend steps down into the rock where the tomb was built. Next, enter the antechamber, or vestibule, and notice the grand ceiling painted dark blue and flecked with golden five-pointed stars. On the east wall, notice a huge doorway. The god Osiris stands to the left and Anubis to the right of that opening. These gods are associated with mummification and the afterlife, and, in Egyptian mythology, play an important role in the journey of the deceased. Then cross the threshold into the next room, and examine the paintings of Nefertari being presented to the welcoming gods.

Walk around the room and take a moment to examine a splendid painting of the queen playing a game of senet against an invisible opponent. Perhaps her opponent is fate? (Senet is an ancient Egyptian board game, and sometimes senet game boards were put into graves to provide protection for the journey in the afterlife.) The queen wears a white gown of sheer linen, a gold bracelet, thick collar, and what are probably silver earrings. Her head is adorned with the vulture headdress of a queen. Other paintings in the room depict Nefertari giving special offerings to the gods.

Walk back to the antechamber, and then cross to the north wall, where you will see a stairway. Walk down the stairway, and you will find yourself in the large burial chamber. At one time, the queen's red granite sarcophagus lay in the middle of this chamber. Now carefully study the motifs and decorative pictograms about death and the afterlife on the walls and ceiling. Some of them illustrate ideas from The Book of the Dead, an ancient Egyptian funeral text that contained magic spells used to help dead people on their voyage to the underworld. Some of the scenes tell the story of Nefertari's meetings with gods and monsters, and in some cases they offer information about ceremonies concerning the afterlife. These images also provide information on the special roles of many major and minor gods that were important during Nefertari's time in Egypt's period called the New Kingdom. On the door of the burial chamber, notice an image of Nefertari emerging from the horizon, reborn as a sun disc.

Before leaving the burial chamber, look closely at the walls. They're decorated with poetry that Ramesses wrote for his wife. He is believed to have penned the line, "My love is unique-no one can rival her, for she is the most beautiful woman alive. Just by passing, she has stolen away my heart."
Name: ___________________________________ Date: _______________

1. Who was Nefertari?
   A. a king who ruled Egypt from 1279 B.C. to 1213 B.C.
   B. a queen whose tomb is located in Egypt's Valley of the Queens
   C. a looter who stole goods from tombs in Egypt
   D. an Egyptian god who was associated with the afterlife

2. What does the author describe in the second half of this text?
   A. the journey of an Italian Egyptologist
   B. a king's journey into the netherworld
   C. the art inside Queen Nefertari's tomb
   D. the plot of a Hollywood blockbuster

3. Ancient Egyptians wanted to help the deceased to travel safely into the underworld and find paradise in the afterlife. What evidence from the text best supports this conclusion?
   A. "Ancient Egyptians believed that when people died, they rode across a lake of fire on the boat of the god Ra."
   B. "On the east wall, notice a huge doorway. The god Osiris stands to the left and Anubis to the right of that opening."
   C. "[S]ometimes senet game boards were put into graves to provide protection for the journey in the afterlife."
   D. "The stories these paintings tell about Queen Nefertari's journey into the underworld shed light on ancient Egyptian beliefs."

4. How can ancient Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife best be described?
   A. detailed and elaborate
   B. simple and minimalistic
   C. solemn and negative
   D. celebratory and thankful

5. What is this passage mostly about?
   A. a looting trend by tomb raiders impacting many Egyptian tombs
   B. a tomb that gives insight into ancient Egyptian beliefs
   C. the poetry a king wrote for his beloved wife after she died
   D. the remarkable beauty and kindness of Queen Nefertari
6. [Queen Nefertari's tomb] is known as the Sistine Chapel of ancient Egypt because of its beautiful decorations and detailed artwork. The magnificent paintings on the tomb walls are some of the most detailed and well-preserved in all of ancient Egypt. The stories these paintings tell about Queen Nefertari’s journey into the underworld shed light on ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife.

The ancient Egyptians developed elaborate burial rituals and ornate tombs because they believed in a life after death.

Based on these sentences from the text, what does the word "ornate" mean?

A. simple and plain
B. heavily decorated
C. highly expensive
D. bright and colorful

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

The Valley of the Queens hosts more than 70 lavishly decorated tombs. ________, Queen Nefertari's tomb is considered the most impressive of them all.

A. However
B. Meanwhile
C. Therefore
D. Finally

8. Some scenes in Nefertari's tomb illustrate ideas from The Book of the Dead, an ancient Egyptian funeral text that contained magic spells. What was the purpose of these magic spells?

9. Why are the well-preserved paintings in Nefertari's tomb so important to people who want to learn about ancient Egyptians?

10. What does Nefertari's tomb tell us about ancient Egyptian beliefs regarding burials and the afterlife? Support your answer with at least one example of a painting or decoration in her tomb that illustrates these beliefs.
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The well-preserved paintings in Nefertari's tomb are important because they shed light on ancient Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife.

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Answers may vary as long as they are supported by the passage. Responses should reflect the idea that the tomb showed ancient Egyptians had elaborate beliefs and rituals surrounding burials and the afterlife. For example, there are paintings of Nefertari being presented to the gods, and giving them special offerings. There are also pictograms that illustrate ideas from The Book of the Dead, depicting Nefertari's meetings with gods and monsters and offering information about ceremonies.