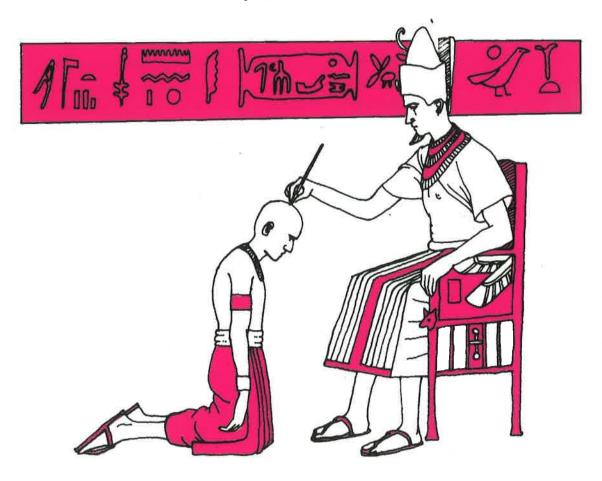# THE FIRST SECRET MESSAGE

by Louis Slobodkin

1   There was once a king who lived in Egypt. He wanted to send a message to a friend who lived far away in Greece.

2   Now the king wanted his friend to read the message. But he didn't want anyone else to see it. He wanted it to be a secret message.

3   How could he send his friend a secret message? The king thought and thought. Then, at last, he had an idea. He knew how he would send his friend the secret message.

4   The king called in his most trusted servant. "I want you to shave all the hair off your head," he said to the servant.

5   So the servant shaved all the hair off his head.

6   "Now," said the king, "I'm going to write a message on your head."

7   The servant bent down, and the king wrote a message on his head.

8   "Now," said the king, "I want you to stay alone until your hair grows back. Your hair will hide what I have written. I'm going to put you in a locked room for a month."

9   The month passed. The king went to see the servant. "I see that your hair has grown back," the king said. "Now I have a very important task for you.

10   ."I want you to go to see my friend in Greece. And I want you to show him the message on your head. He is the only one who should see it."

11   When the servant got to the king's friend, he shaved his head. The friend read the message. Then the servant washed his head. And when he washed his head, he washed off the message.

12   No one but the king and his friend ever knew what the message said. It was a secret between them. It may have been the first secret message ever sent.

How Well Did You Understand?

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a* or *b*.

1 Another good name for this story is
  a "Using Your Head"
  b "How People Wrote in Egypt"

2 The king wanted the servant to stay alone after his head was shaved because
  a he didn't want people to laugh at him
  b he didn't want anyone to see the message

3 The message stayed a secret because
  a it was under the servant's hair
  b it was written in the king's secret words

4 The servant couldn't tell the secret message because
  a he couldn't see his own head
  b he didn't know how to read

5 From this story you can tell that
  a the king had known the servant for a long time
  b the king had just met the servant a few days ago

Learn about Words

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Directions: Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning below. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

1 note or letter from one person to another (1)
2 helper; someone who works for another person (4)
3 cut with a razor; cut closely (4)
4 went by (9)
5 job (9)

C Read each sentence. Which word that you found in *B* makes sense in the blank? Write the word.

6 The king needed someone to do a ____ for him.
7 He wanted to send a secret ____ to his friend.
8 The king asked his ____ to come in.
9 "Please ____ your hair off," said the king.
10 Time ____ slowly while the servant was locked up.

Think about It

D Tina is going to write about Egypt of long ago. Read each item. If it fits her main topic, write *yes*. If it doesn't, write *no*.

1 kings and their servants
2 what Egyptians wore long ago
3 who lives in Egypt today
4 what people in Egypt eat now
5 where old cities were in Egypt

E Most verbs add *ed* to show that something happened in the past.

Last week he *liked* his red hat best. This week he *likes* his blue hat.

Directions: Read each sentence. If it could be happening now, write *now*. If it happened in the past, write *past*.

6 Time passes slowly.
7 The servant lived all alone.
8 The king wanted help.
9 He called the servant.
10 The servant washes off the message.

Learn More About It

A **code** is a secret way of writing. The king could have sent his message in code. Have you ever sent a secret message in code? Go to your library and get a book about codes. Pick one of them and try to write your name in code. Then see if a friend can figure out what you wrote!