Medical Practices in Ancient Egypt

Learning from the Dead

To find out why people have died, today's medical examiners perform autopsies (AW-top-seez). They cut open the body and study its parts. Ancient Egyptians also performed autopsies to help understand causes of death. In addition, autopsies helped ancient Egyptians study the human body. By comparing the hearts of people who were different ages, for example, Egyptians could determine what a young, healthy heart was supposed to look like.

Keeping a Written Record

The Egyptians not only studied the human body, but they also kept detailed records of what they discovered. They wrote and drew their observations on papyrus, a form of paper. The papyrus records became the medical textbooks of that time. Their observations allowed Egyptian doctors to share their knowledge, including how to treat various diseases.

Edwin Smith Papyrus

In 1862, an American named Edwin Smith purchased a medical papyrus in Luxor, Egypt. Smith was not a medical expert, but he knew a lot about old documents. He knew that what he had found was valuable. The papyrus turned out to be an ancient textbook on surgery. The papyrus was probably written around 1600 BC, but it was based on information from a thousand years before that. The papyrus presents the information as case studies, including an analysis of how patients survived or died.

How did autopsies help ancient Egyptians learn about the human body?

Read each question. Fill in the bubble next to the correct answer.

1. Which one best describes what the headings do?
   A. They tell the main idea of the passage.
   B. They describe when events happened.
   C. They tell what each section is mostly about.
   D. They compare modern and ancient medicine.

2. What is the passage mostly about?
   A. Edwin Smith made an important discovery.
   B. The ancient Egyptians cut open bodies to study their parts.
   C. The ancient Egyptians knew a lot about the human body.
   D. Detailed records were written on papyrus.

3. Choose the detail that best supports this idea:
   Autopsies helped the Egyptians learn about the human body.
   A. Egyptians were able to compare body parts.
   B. Today's medical examiners perform autopsies.
   C. Medical examiners learn a lot about bodies.
   D. Egyptians made records of their findings.

4. What are doctors in the year 3020 most likely to learn by reading a medical textbook from 2020?
   A. how to perform the best surgery
   B. ancient Egyptian medical practices
   C. how to preserve bodies
   D. early twenty-first century medical practices
Ishmael and Isadore

Brothers Ishmael and Isadore were complete opposites. People who knew them both could hardly believe they were from the same planet, let alone the same family. The boys were not unkind toward one another, but their personalities were so different that it was difficult for them to reach a decision they both liked. Their mother frequently played the referee in their disagreements.

Ishmael, the older brother, was tall and athletic, and he loved sports. He played baseball, football, and basketball. Isadore, the younger brother, hated sports. He was quieter and less active than his brother. He preferred spending his time on the computer, making short videos and writing blog entries.

The brothers’ taste in music was completely different, too. Ishmael loved classic rock. He listened to bands like the Beatles, the Who, and the Rolling Stones. Isadore didn’t care much for those bands. He preferred spending his time streaming world music, especially music from Central Africa. Luckily for their parents, both boys enjoyed listening to music through headphones.

One other thing the brothers did agree on was that they wanted a pet. Mom had resisted getting one, but after both brothers had pleaded and begged, she finally agreed.

“We can get a pet, as long as you two take care of it,” she said. “That means you do the feeding, you do the training, and if it needs to be walked, you do the walking.”

“No problem, Mom,” Ishmael and Isadore said together.

“Good, we all agree,” Mom said. “Now, what kind of pet are we going to get?”

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Was there any part of the passage that you didn’t understand right away? How did you figure it out?

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Read each question. Fill in the bubble next to the correct answer.

1. Which best describes what the passage is about?
   A  two brothers who argue with their mother
   B  two brothers who love sports
   C  two brothers who are very much alike
   D  two brothers who mostly disagree

2. Which of these details supports the main idea of the passage?
   A  The brothers have different tastes in music.
   B  Mom says they must take care of the pet.
   C  The brothers have a lot in common.
   D  The brothers’ names are Ishmael and Isadore.

3. Based on information about the brothers, which of these do you predict will happen next?
   A  They will have trouble deciding what kind of pet to get.
   B  They will both want a dog to play sports with.
   C  They will both want to get a snake.
   D  They will agree on their pet’s name.

4. If the brothers get a dog, which of these is least likely to happen?
   A  Ishmael will run with the dog.
   B  Isadore will make videos of the dog.
   C  They will always agree on what to do with the dog.
   D  They will argue about who walks the dog.