

Name: _____

Date: _____

THE SUEZ CANAL

The Suez Canal is one of the most important waterways in the world. The 101-mile canal connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. The Suez Canal is often called the “crossroads to Europe, Africa, and Asia” because the route is used to transport goods to and from all three continents.

The idea of connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea is as old as the pharaohs. The first canal in the region seems to have been dug about 1850BC, but that attempt, like many others, failed. Desert winds blew in and clogged the canal. About 150 years ago, Great Britain had a thriving trade with India, but without a canal, British ships had to make a long journey around the entire continent of Africa in order to trade with India. A canal through the Isthmus of Suez would cut the journey from Great Britain to India by 6,000 miles. An isthmus is a narrow strip of land connecting two larger pieces of land.

A French company led by Ferdinand deLesseps made a deal with Egypt to build the Suez Canal. After ten years of work, the canal opened in 1869. The Egyptian ruler, Ismail, celebrated the opening of the Suez Canal by building a huge palace in Cairo. Ismail treated royalty from around the world to a celebration in honor of the new canal. The heavy spending for the celebration came at a time when the price of Egyptian cotton plunged. Egypt had gone into debt to pay for the Suez Canal. Ismail took out loans from European banks, but he was unable to repay the loans.

Consequently, Egypt was forced to sell its share of the Suez Canal to Great Britain.

The Suez Canal made it easier to trade with

faraway nations. The canal also made it possible for European armies to colonize East Africa. In 1936, the British stationed soldiers along the Suez Canal in order to protect their investment. The canal became very profitable for the British, but the Egyptian people were unable to share in most of the profits. This angered many Egyptians.



Ferdinand deLesseps

In 1956, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser planned to build a great dam to control the annual flooding of the Nile River. Nasser asked the United States and Great Britain for financial assistance, and when the two powerful nations refused, Nasser seized the Suez Canal and declared it to be the property of the Egyptian people. Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt. World War Two had ended a decade earlier, but many people feared the Suez Crisis would lead to a another World War. A third world war might be even more dangerous than the previous wars because by 1956, scientists had discovered how to use nuclear weapons. Several nations voted to authorize the United Nation to send peacekeeping forces to the Suez and to call for Britain, France and Israel to leave the region. Egypt gained control of the canal, but because of damage inflicted by the war, the waterway remained closed for many months.

The Suez Canal closed again during a 1967 war with Israel. Fourteen ships passing through the canal were forced to anchor at a lake in the middle of the canal. The canal did not reopen for international trade until 1975, which meant that some of the ships were stranded in the Suez Canal for more than eight years. Egypt continues to control the Suez Canal, but now international treaties assure that the canal may be used "in time of war as in time of peace, by every vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag."



It's easy to float in the Dead Sea.

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Fill in the Blanks

The 101-m_____ Suez C_____ is one of the world's most important w_____. It is often called the "c_____ of Europe, Africa, and A_____" because the route is used to t_____ goods to all three c_____." The idea of building a canal through the isthmus of Suez is *t_____ of years old, but the canal was not completed until a F_____ company led by Ferdinand d__L_____ completed the task in 1869. The canal saved ships traveling between the Mediterranean Sea and India from having to circumnavigate Africa, and cut the journey by 6,000 miles.

The B_____ purchased control of the S_____ Canal when Egypt fell into d_____. The British sent s_____ to Egypt because they said they wanted to *p__o__e__t their interests. In 1956, E_____ president Gamel Abdel N_____ seized the Suez C_____ and declared it to be the p_____ of the Egyptian people. Egypt denied I_____ the right to use the canal for many years, but today it is open to e__e__y nation.

Answer in complete sentences

1. What is an isthmus?

*2. The idea of building the Suez Canal is thousands of years old, but the waterway was not completed until 1869. Suggest some reasons why the idea of a canal connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea took so long to accomplish. Be creative and try to think of reasons nobody else will consider.

*3. In 1956, Gamel Abdel Nasser seized the Suez Canal and declared it to be the property of the Egyptian people. Many years earlier, the British government had purchased the canal from Egypt. In your opinion, who do you think is the rightful owner of the Suez Canal? Explain your answer.
