THE CLICKING OLD FILM PROJECTOR ALMOST LULLS YOU TO SLEEP. Mr. Cooper, your social studies teacher, has decided, for some odd reason, to show an old educational film made in the 1950s. The topic is ancient Egypt. Suddenly, your best friend, Rhana, gets up from her seat and jumps “into” the screen. Pool! You can’t believe your eyes!

"I have to save her," you shout, and jump into the screen after her.

You fall a short distance and land upon ... sand. Lots of warm sand. You are in a desert. Nobody is in sight, but you see large pyramids to the left and a river to the right. Where is Rhana? Which way should you go?

* If you choose to go to the pyramids, turn to page 5.
* If you would rather search along the river, turn to page 7.

So begins another quest in ancient Egypt, a classroom project that combines creative writing, basic book design, and social studies content. During this project, my seventh grade students (1) research a variety of ancient Egyptian archaeological sites while reviewing course material from a unit of study on ancient Egypt, (2) practice project management skills needed to complete an assignment that extends over several days, and (3) learn some basics about the craft of book making. Students who are ready for an additional challenge can (4) design their book as an "interactive" adventure, as suggested in the opening paragraph above.

This article gives an overview of the project and discusses the pedagogy of guiding middle school students through its various phases. When first describing the book project, pass around a model or a sample of a student-made book, with the staples removed, so students can observe how the sheets of paper are folded and stacked to make a coherent whole. Many of the step-by-step instructions for doing this project are contained in Handouts 1 through 4. For some students, it may be necessary to read aloud from a handout, pausing for questions and discussion. The adventure book option (Handout 5) is described in more detail toward the end of the article.

1. Researching Archaeological Sites

Searching for a hidden tomb or long-lost civic center, deciphering hieroglyphs found on a wall, or reconstructing a city from crumbled sandstone--these are not simple, one-dimensional tasks. A working archaeologist uses interdisciplinary knowledge to guide her intuition and inform her deductions. Writing creatively about specific archaeological digs in Egypt, while basing their descriptions on fact, is a great way for students to apply the knowledge they acquire from a unit of study about ancient Egypt.

I provide a "research center" on the topic of ancient Egyptian archaeological sites. This center is a table supplied with books and magazines, like National Geographic, that my young researchers can use as sources of information. Handout 1 lists some books that could be included in the center. I've also listed several of the major archaeological sites and guiding questions to help students take thorough notes and make quick sketches. (The...
So begins another quest in ancient Egypt, a classroom project that combines creative writing, basic book design, and social studies content. During this project, my seventh grade students (1) research a variety of ancient Egyptian archaeological sites while reviewing course material from a unit of study on ancient Egypt, (2) practice project management skills needed to complete an assignment that extends over several days, and (3) learn some basics about the craft of book making. Students who are ready for an additional challenge can (4) design their book as an "interactive" adventure. However, Ancient Egyptian architecture did not become what we think of today until roughly 2649 BCE. Structures that survived the Old Kingdom, which lasted until about 2150 BCE, include mastabas, the Great Pyramids and the Great Sphinx. All of these structures were built from stone. The earliest example of a burial pyramid in Ancient Egypt was the step pyramid, which was stacked in such a way that the sides formed steps. The first known of these was the Pyramid of Djoser, designed by Djoser's vizier Imhotep and constructed around 2667 to 2648 BCE. This large structure, like those to come...