Caste System in India

1. About 3,600 years ago, a group of cattle herders from Central Asia settled into India. This group of people, called the **Aryans**, brought with them their beliefs, customs, and writing system (Sanskrit). They introduced a rigid **caste system** that divided people into 4 classes.

2. Aryans brought **Hinduism**, a very important **religion**, to ancient India. **Hindus** believed that people must follow the **dharma**, or the divine law, and perform the duties of their caste. The consequences of how a person lives are known as **karma**. If you do your duty and live a good life, in your next life you will be born into a higher caste.

3. Under this setup, **Brahmins** or priests made up the highest caste. They held a tremendous amount of power over everybody else. They were the only ones who could both study and teach Hinduism’s holy texts, known as the **Vedas**. Because of their authority, people of other castes often gave them generous donations. By giving **Brahmins** (also spelled as Brahmans) valuable goods, people of other castes believed that they would be rewarded in their next life.

4. Next to the Brahmin class was the **Kshatriya** (pronounced "shuh-TREE-uh") class. It consisted of warriors and rulers. **Kshatriyas'** main duties were to govern and defend the country. Though they could learn the Vedas as Brahmins did, they could not teach the holy texts. They were the experts in archery, swordsmanship, and hand-to-hand combat.

5. The Aryans categorized farmers and merchants as their society's third caste, called the **Vaishya** (pronounced "VYSH-yuh"). **Vaishyas** were expected to tend cattle, to farm, or to trade. Like Kshatriyas, they could only learn, but not teach, the Vedas.

6. The next caste was the **Shudra** (also spelled as Sudra) caste. The **majority of people were Shudras.** People in this caste did **labor-intensive work.** They took on the duties of **servants, craftsmen, or laborers.** Shudras received little education. They were not allowed to learn the Vedas, so they could not participate in the initiation ceremony that boys of the three upper castes were entitled to when they began learning the holy texts.

7. The people with the least power in ancient Indian society were the **Untouchables, or the Dalit (Da-leet).** They did not belong to any of the four castes; they were **outcasts.** They **did work that nobody else wanted to do.** They swept the streets. They collected garbage. They cleaned up toilets. And they disposed of dead animals or humans. The outcasts could not live in cities or villages. When they ate, they could only take meals from broken dishes. When they traveled, they needed to move off the path if someone from a higher caste was approaching. When they entered a marketplace, they had to strike a piece of wood to announce their presence, so that other people could avoid them. The outcasts were not allowed to drink from a public well. They were not allowed to enter a temple. And they were not allowed to study. Nobody in the ancient Indian society wanted to see, hear, or touch them.
Directions: Below is the pyramid for ancient India’s Caste System. Based on the reading passage, fill out roles, responsibilities, and types of jobs of each caste based on the reading passage in the pyramid below:

Guiding Questions

1. What are the main differences between each caste? How would the lifestyles of a Brahmin and Sudra differ? Give several examples.

__________________________________________________________________________________________
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2. How would a Hindu (a person who follows Hinduism) change their caste?
Reading Comprehension - Caste System in India

Introduction: About 3,600 years ago, a group of people called Aryans introduced a strict caste structure that divided people into four classes. This was the social structure of India.

1. Aryans brought Hinduism, a very important religion, to ancient India. Hindus believed that people must follow the dharma, or the divine law, and perform the duties of their caste. The consequences of how a person lives are known as karma. If you do your duty and live a good life, in your next life you will be born into a higher caste.

2. Brahmins or priests made up the highest caste. They had a lot of power over everybody else. They were the only ones who could both study and teach the holy texts, known as the Vedas. They were also the only ones who could perform sacrifices and other religious ceremonies. Brahmins were given donations by people from a different caste. They believed they would have rewards in their next life.

3. Next to the Brahmin class was the Kshatriya (pronounced "shuh-TREE-uh") class. They were warriors and rulers. Kshatriyas’ main duties were to govern and defend the country. Though they could learn the Vedas as Brahmins did, but not teach. They had a lot of military training, like archery and hand-to-hand combat.

4. The Aryans were farmers and merchants as their society’s third caste, called the Vaishya (pronounced "VYSH-yuh"). Vaishyas were expected to tend cattle, to farm, or to trade. Like Kshatriyas, they could only learn, but not teach, the Vedas.

5. Next was the Shudra (also spelled as Sudra) caste. It represented the majority of the populace. They took on the duties of servants, craftsmen, or laborers. Shudras received little informal education. They were not allowed to learn the Vedas.

6. The Untouchables, or Dalit (Da-leet) were people who did not belong to any of the four castes. They did work that nobody else wanted to do. They swept the streets, collected garbage and cleaned up toilets. They had a lonely life. No one wanted to see or touch them.

The Untouchables could not:

a. Live in cities or villages.
   b. Drink from public water.
   c. Enter a temple.
   d. Study.

Name__________________________________________ Period_____ Date________________________

Directions: Below is the pyramid for ancient India’s Caste System. Based on the reading passage, fill out roles, responsibilities, and types of jobs of each caste based on the reading passage in the pyramid below:
Guiding Questions

1. What are the main differences between each caste? How would the lifestyles of a Brahmin and Sudra differ? Give several examples.

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2. How would a Hindu (a person who follows Hinduism) change their caste?

Name: ___________________________ Period: _______ Date: ______________

**Ancient India: Caste System Diary Entry**

You will select 1 caste from the caste system and write 1 journal/diary entry describing your life as member of that caste.

**Guiding Questions:** Here are some questions that will guide your writing...
- What caste are you in?
- What is your job or responsibility in society? **Describe in detail.**
- Which castes are higher than you, and which are lower than you?
- How do you view people from other castes; how do they view you?
- Are you happy with the caste you are in? **Why or why not?**
- What are the positives/negatives of being in your caste?

### Graphic Organizer for Diary Entry

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<tr>
<th>Which caste are you in? <strong>Circle the caste below:</strong></th>
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<th>Job or service you provide to society:</th>
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<th>Castes that are <strong>higher</strong> than you:</th>
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<th>Castes that are <strong>lower</strong> than you:</th>
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