

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the passage “My Life as a Scribe,” and answer numbers 12 through 16.

## *My Life as a Scribe*

by Rimun-ilani



My name is Rimun. I am an old man. My sight fails me in poor light now. My body no longer bends easily over the tablets I have written on all my life. My work is finished, and I will live out my days retelling the stories of my family and our culture to anyone who will listen. But my life has been long and interesting. I am part of a brotherhood that has done its part to change the world. Like my father Akiah before me, and my grandfather Shamkhatum before him, I am a scribe.

The men of my family have been scribes through the ages. Before schools to train scribes were built, before scribes used wedge-shaped reeds as tools, the scribes of my family lived and worked in the great cities of southern Sumer. Over time they moved north on the trade routes along the rivers from the great city of Ur, north to Larsa along the Euphrates, past Uruk where the use of ancient picture writing began, past Lagash and Nippur and on to Babylon, where I live now. I know this because they have passed their important tablets from one generation to the next, and now I am the keeper of a small library that describes our history as archivists. Soon I will pass this on to my own son Likua who teaches young scribes at the temple school located at Mari on the mighty Euphrates River.

From early childhood, I showed a talent for my family's profession. As a youngster I took a reed in my hand and began to draw. I sat long hours by my father's side, imitating him as he worked. He taught me the basics of writing before I was old enough to begin school. Competition for admission to the edubba – the tablet house – was fierce because the skill of writing assured a respected position in society and a financially successful career. When my time to enroll came, however, my family's history, wealth and social position assured me a place in the school.

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At the edubba a “school father” and a “big brother” instructed us. To learn writing, we pressed reeds with wedge-shaped ends into wet clay to make symbols. First we learned to make individual signs, and then we combined them to make words. To learn our language, we copied the epics of our literature and the sacred myths of our religion. We memorized the stories of the King Gilgamesh and the gods Enki and Enlil. We also learned numeration, first as accounting and later as mathematics.

We sat all day on rows of hard brick benches while we practiced our lessons. The hours were long and the mood was serious. The punishment for misbehaving or turning in careless work was often beating, and in the worst cases, caning. I managed to escape the wrath of our teacher and his assistant because for me the lessons came easily. Even so, my training to become a scribe took many years.

I left school with a wide knowledge of many subjects. I could have specialized in medicine or mathematics or astronomy. But I believe I was born to be a scribe, and I used my talents to see the world. I traveled the rivers with merchants and traders and kept accounts of their expeditions. In the cities, I drew up contracts between petty functionaries. I followed soldiers into battle and chronicled military exploits. During one of these adventures, I came to the attention of Hammurabi, King of Babylon. Under his direction, I did my most important work.

Hammurabi was a good ruler, dedicated to fairness. He was determined to have his code of laws recorded in one place and used to govern all Babylonians. The project was broad in scope, covering his judgments in cases of false witness, theft, adoption, inheritance, medical treatment, agriculture, town planning, commerce, debts, marriage, disposal of assets, slavery, adoption, hiring and labor, and marriage and divorce – 282 laws in all.

I was still a young man with much to see when I received his offer. To take the job meant state work was finished. I would probably never see Nineveh or Damascus or Jericho, but I could not say no. So with many other scribes I began the work of preserving Hammurabi’s judgments on a seven-foot high stele made of black basalt. I married and raised a family. I worked on the project for many years. I never left Babylon again.

Old men look back over their lives to take stock. We wonder about what we will leave behind us for the world. For a student with my gifts there were many choices. I could have solved numerical problems as my friend Appa did. I could have studied the heavens like my friend Minani. I could have moved through the hierarchy into a government office where the rewards often outweighed the value of the work. The name of Rimun will not stand in history next to those of Kings like Ur-Nammu or Sargon of Akkad or Hammurabi. But given the chance to go back, I would not take a different path. I was born to be a scribe. I etched our stories in clay. I chiseled our laws into stone. With my reeds and my carving tools, I preserved a part of history.

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**DIRECTIONS: Based on the passage “My Life as a Scribe,” answer numbers 12 through 16.**

12. What was the author’s purpose for writing the article?
  - (A) to explain the family history of Rimun-ilani
  - (B) to share Rimun’s thoughts about his life’s work
  - (C) to describe the skill involved in preserving history on tablets
  - (D) to emphasize the competitiveness of entering into scribe school
  
13. What was the most likely reason Rinum-ilani became a scribe?
  - (A) He wanted to live in the great cities of southern Sumer.
  - (B) His forefathers wrote epics of literature and sacred myths.
  - (C) He was part of a brotherhood that has historically changed the world.
  - (D) Rimun-ilani was born into a family where men had been scribes for generations.
  
14. Which statement best supports the idea that the lessons to become a scribe came easily for Rinum-ilani?
  - (A) He finished school with a deep understanding of science and mathematics.
  - (B) He had a talent for the profession and from childhood he practiced with his father.
  - (C) It was difficult for Rimun-ilani to enter the tablet house because the competition was fierce.
  - (D) The tablets he wrote on were passed from one generation to the next and he was the keeper of a small historical archive.

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15. What does the passage reveal about the narrator's view of his life?

- (A) Rimun-ilani was satisfied with his role as a scribe throughout his life.
- (B) Rimun-ilani was hopeful that this name would be remembered in history.
- (C) The narrator regretted not being able to travel to Nineveh, Damascus or Jericho.
- (D) The narrator could have solved numerical problems, specialized in medicine, or studied the heavens.

16. What word best describes Rimun-ilani?

- (A) brave
- (B) careful
- (C) boastful
- (D) confident



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