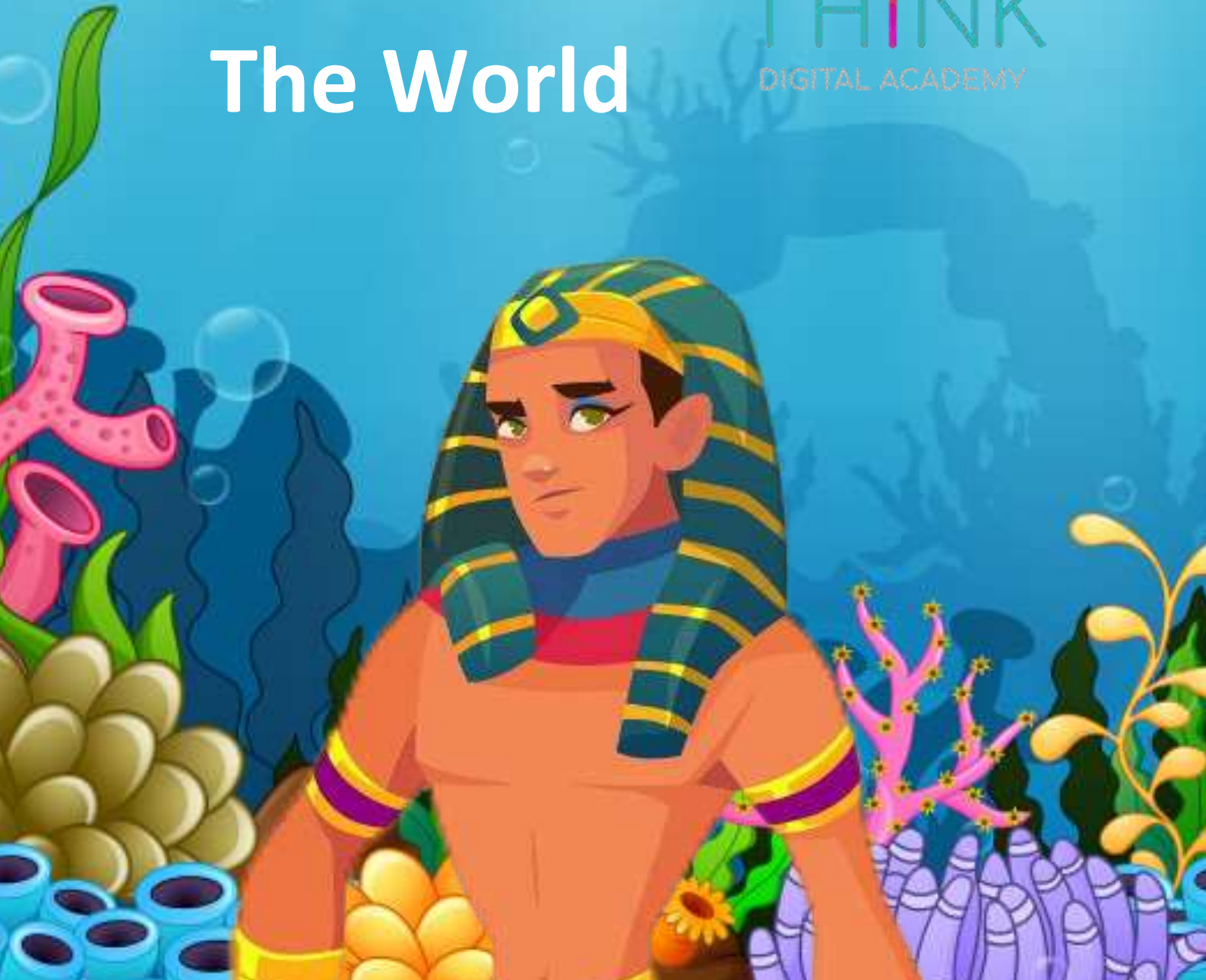




Stories of the Ancient World

Enki and Atrahasis Save The World



The humans were being far too loud and Enlil, the king of the gods, was annoyed. At night, he struggled to sleep and during the day, he had a headache that felt like bolts of lightning hitting the inside of his skull. What annoyed Enlil most was this was his own family's fault.



The gods had created humans because they were tired of working the land themselves. They had even given them the ability to speak. As he tossed and turned in his bed, Enlil regretted this very much.



When he did manage to get a few minutes' sleep, he imagined a world of silence where there were no humans at all, just like the beginning of time before they were created. He wondered if it would be better to get rid of the humans altogether. Enlil called his brother Enki.



Enki was the god of fresh waters and lived in a place called Abzu, a freshwater ocean below the ground. Enki had always liked the humans. Enlil suspected that part of the reason Enki liked the humans so much was that the sea muffled the noise that they made.



When Enki arrived, he called to his brother in greeting. 'Please don't shout like that', Enlil said. 'The humans kept me awake all night.' Enki was about to say that he found it so interesting that the humans made so many different noises and he had noted down their words and the sound of their hands clapping together when they danced... but then Enlil continued. 'We should never have created them in the first place, Enki. Help me destroy them.'



For a moment, Enki was silent. Destroy the humans? He could not imagine it. It had been his idea for the mother goddess to mould them out of clay, rolling out their arms and legs between her fingers. But Enlil continued.



'You are the god of water, Enki. I want to send a huge flood across the world.' Enki gulped. As calmly as he could, he explained that he would not help.



Enlil turned on Enki: 'So, you choose the humans over your own brother. I will flood the Earth myself – I don't need you!' There was a huge clap of thunder and then all fell quiet.



Enki felt sorry for his brother, but he could not agree to killing. Enlil asked him to promise that he would not tell any of the humans about his plan, and Enki reluctantly agreed.



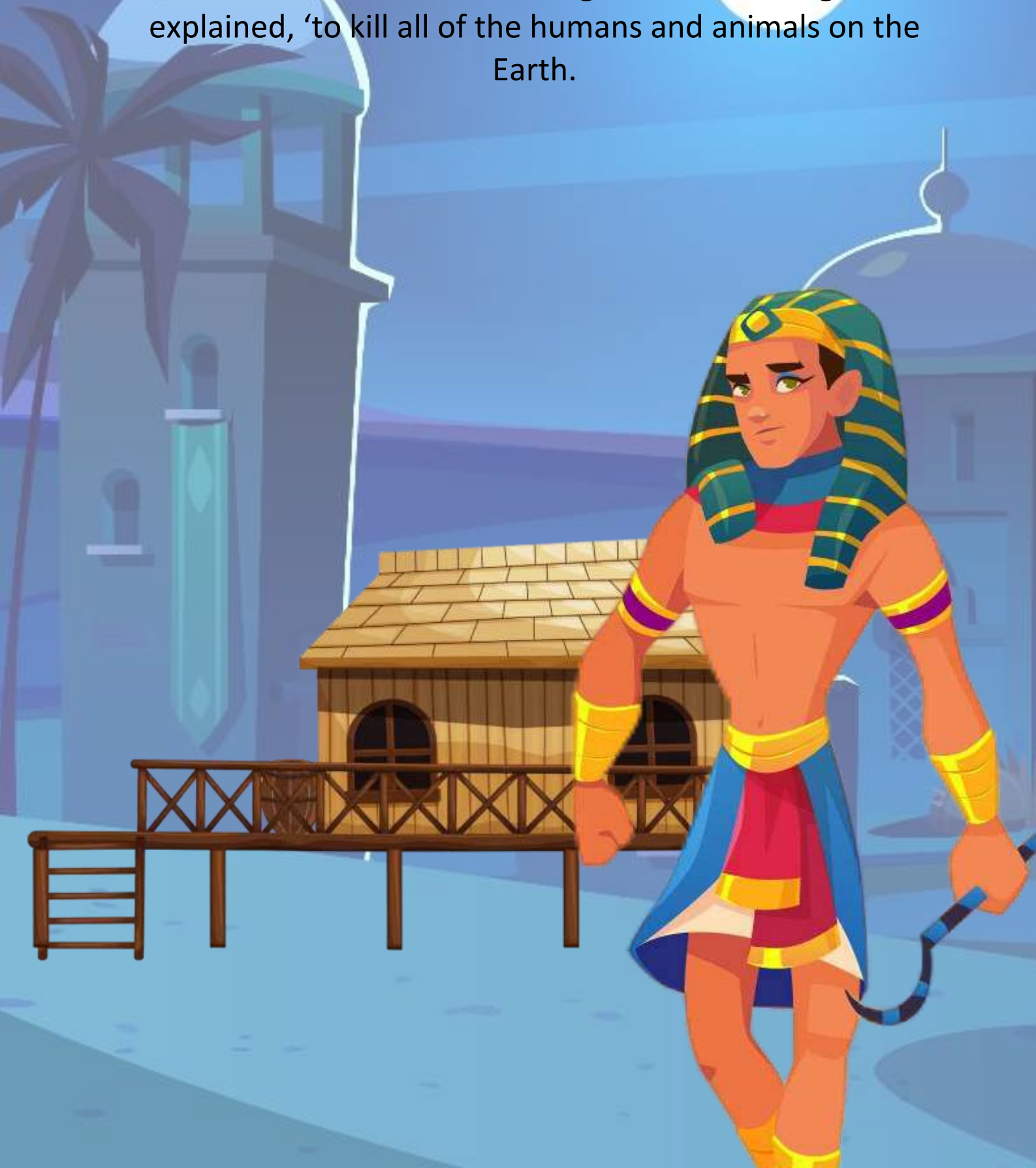
Now it was Enki who could not sleep. He got out of bed and went back to the Earth, straight to the house of Atrahasis. He was the wisest of the humans and lived in a house made of reeds. Enki felt a few drops of rain as he walked towards the reed house.



He felt sure that Enlil's flood was coming. Enki suddenly had an idea. He had promised his brother that he would not tell the humans about the flood. But Enlil hadn't said anything about telling his secret plan to animals, or trees, or ... reeds.



Enki cleared his throat and spoke: 'Reeds that make up the walls of this house, listen to me!' Enki felt a little ridiculous starting a conversation with walls, but he continued. 'I have something very important to tell you.' Within the reed walls, Atrahasis listened. 'A huge flood is coming,' Enki explained, 'to kill all of the humans and animals on the Earth.'



You need to be knocked down, reed walls and rebuilt into a ship. And the people who live within your walls need to bring with them a pair of as many animals as they can find. This is the only way that they will survive the floor.'



The reed walls said nothing in response, but inside the house Atrahasis started gathering together the tools that he would need to build the ship. The rain was falling harder. Atrahasis and his wife, Eanna built the ship together, and when it was finished, they loaded as many animals as they could find, and waited. The water rose and rose. They breathed a sigh of relief as the ship started to float.



Meanwhile in Nippur, the gods and goddesses were upset.

When she realised what was going to happen to the humans, the mother goddess started to cry. Enlil realised he had made a huge mistake. He called off the rain and eventually the water flowed away into the rivers – but it was too late for most of the humans.



The goddess Ishtar was convinced that all of the humans had drowned when suddenly she saw, over the horizon, a boat made out of reeds with two tiny humans standing on its deck. Rather than destroying all humans, the gods and goddesses agreed that from now on, they would control the number of people in other ways – the humans would die one by one and not all at once.

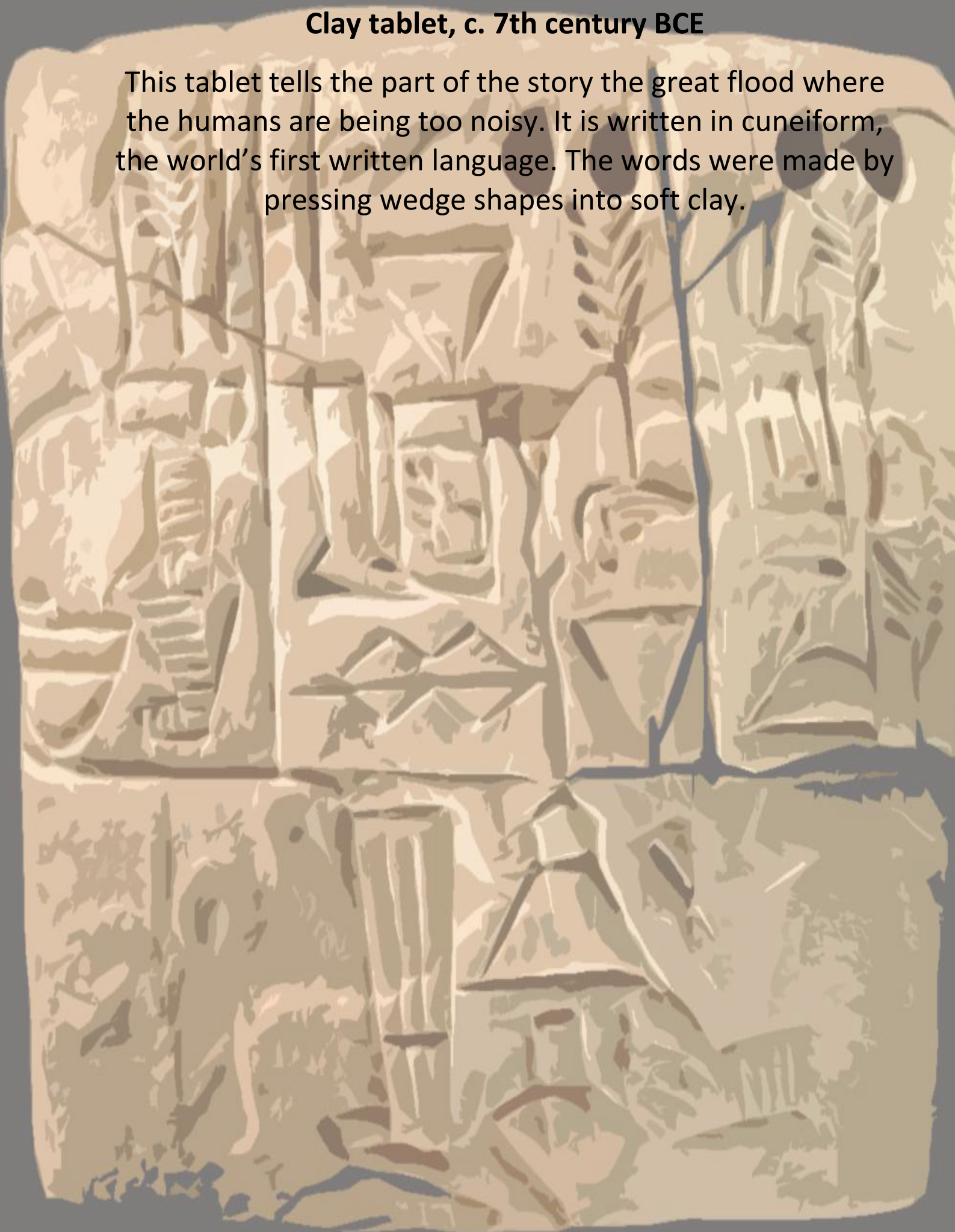


This, they hoped, would ensure that there would never be so many humans, making so much noise, on the Earth again. And Enlil promised that this would be the last time he would ever plot against these fascinating creatures.



Clay tablet, c. 7th century BCE

This tablet tells the part of the story the great flood where the humans are being too noisy. It is written in cuneiform, the world's first written language. The words were made by pressing wedge shapes into soft clay.





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