

Assignment Discovery Online Curriculum

Lesson title:

Mummy Tales

Grade level:

6

Subject area:

Ancient History

Duration:

One to two class periods

Objectives:

Students will understand

1. what mummies are and where they've been found;
2. how and why mummies were made; and
3. what clues mummies give us about the culture of those who created them.

Materials:

- World map
- Pictures of King Tut and other famous mummies (see Related Links)
- Classroom Activity Sheet: Mummy Clues
- Internet access

Procedures:

1. Show the class a picture of Tutankhamen and ask what they know about this ancient ruler. (Often called King Tut, Tutankhamen was an Egyptian pharaoh who reigned between 1333 and 1323 B.C. When archaeologists discovered his tomb in 1922, they found it undisturbed by tomb robbers. All the treasures buried with King Tut were still in his tomb.)
2. Ask students to name other famous mummies. They may know of Ramses the Great or the Ice Man.
3. Now show the class pictures of other mummies. (These may include ice mummies, bog bodies, and South American mummies.)
4. Explain to students that mummies have been found all over the world, including in Canada, China, Denmark, Greenland, Italy, Peru, Thailand, even the United States. Show these countries on a world map.
5. Encourage students to generate a list of questions about mummies. Write the questions on the board.
6. Give students the following background information:

- *What are mummies?* Explain that a mummy is a preserved body of a person or animal. Normally when a person dies, the skin and other soft tissues decay, or break down, leaving only the bones behind. The process of mummification, or mummy-making, includes drying the body very quickly, so decay-causing bacteria can't grow, and soft tissue and hair remain.
 - *How are mummies made?* Explain that over the years, scientists have found mummies that were preserved in different ways. Some mummies are formed naturally—in peat bogs or frozen in ice. Others, like the Egyptian and South American mummies, were carefully preserved. How a mummy is preserved and what it's buried with tells us about the culture or religious beliefs of the people who made it. For example, the Egyptians preserved their dead because they felt a person's body should remain whole in the afterlife.
 - *Why are mummies important today?* Mummies give us important clues about the past. Unfortunately, many ancient mummies have been destroyed and their tombs plundered by grave robbers. But the mummies that do remain offer a fascinating glimpse into the lives of ancient peoples, including what they looked like, how they dressed, what they ate and how, religious beliefs, and even the animals they owned.
7. Distribute copies of the Classroom Activity Sheet: Mummy Clues. Divide the class into groups of four or five. Explain that each group will research a mummy using library or Internet resources and present its findings to the class. Some of the mummies students will study were formed accidentally (bog bodies and ice men), and some were preserved deliberately through mummification. Encourage students to find pictures as they conduct their research; they will show them to the class during their presentations. They might also want to answer questions the class generated.
 8. In a later class period, have each group present its findings on mummies. Encourage students to discuss the similarities and differences among the mummies they studied.

Adaptations

Have students make posters that compare and contrast the mummification processes used by the Egyptians and the Inca of South America. The posters may include drawings, photos, text, and diagrams describing why and how each culture mummifies its dead and what kinds of artifacts scientists have found with Egyptian and South American mummies.

Questions:

1. In addition to mummies, what other sources of information do we have about ancient civilizations?
2. Most Egyptian mummies were kings or queens or wealthy people. Hypothesize reasons for this.

3. Although many bodies were mummified long ago, relatively few mummies survive today. Consider why this is true.
4. People from many branches of science take part in mummy research. In addition to archaeologists, what types of scientists do you think study mummies? What do you think such scientists would hope to learn from mummies?
5. Discuss the different kinds of methods used to study preserved bodies (x-ray, CT scan, DNA testing, carbon dating) and the types of information they reveal.
6. Although mummies provide fascinating information, excavating mummy tombs can present problems. Consider what issues might arise when a mummy is removed from its burial site.
7. Archeologists and other scientists who study mummies are like detectives, deducing things about past people's lives and their cultures. Analyze the types of objects that have been discovered in mummy tombs. Why do you think these objects were buried with the mummies?

Evaluation:

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson:

Three points: actively participated in the group project, researching and analyzing information about a mummy and presenting the findings to the class; effectively located and made imaginative use of print and Internet resources; demonstrated a clear understanding of why mummies are important today.

Two points: participated somewhat in the group project, researching and analyzing information about a mummy and presenting the findings to the class; located and used some print and Internet resources on mummies; demonstrated some understanding of why mummies are important today.

One point: participated minimally in the group project, researching and analyzing information about a mummy and presenting the findings to the class; located and used print and Internet resources on mummies to a small extent; demonstrated little understanding of why mummies are important today.

Extension ideas:

Mummification

Invite your class to make a time line about mummies that shows the year of the first known mummies and when the practice ended. For each point on the time line, include the names of cultures that practiced mummification as well as the year the discovery was made and how the bodies were preserved.

Egyptian Mummies

Make an illustrated class book about Egyptian mummies. Divide students into groups, each to research a different mummy. Have each group report who the mummy was, where and how it was found, and what its discovery says about Egyptian culture. Have each group present its findings to the class.

South American Mummies

Create a newspaper (for example, *The Mummy Times*). Articles can include information about what mummies are; who made them; where, when, how, and why the practice of mummification began; and what clues the mummies reveal about the past. Invite students to write stories about the lives they imagine individual mummies to have lived.

Related links:

Mummies of the World

Learn where mummies have been found and how they are preserved.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/peru/mummies/>

Mummy Locator

Explore mummies around the world and meet a “mummy master.”

<http://www.mummytombs.com/main.locator.htm>

Ask Dr. Dig

A mummy expert tells all!

<http://dig.archaeology.org//drdig/mummy/index.html>

Mummies of Ancient Egypt

Learn how and why the Egyptians made their mummies.

<http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/mummy/>

All about Mummies

Here is everything you ever wanted to know about Egyptian mummies!

<http://www.virtual-egypt.com/newhtml/mummies/>

Mummification

Learn about the mummification process and explore a mummy and its coffin.

<http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/mummies/home.html>

Suggested Reading:

Frozen Girl

David Getz. Henry Holt & Co., 1998.

Written almost as an expedition diary, the reader is invited to experience the excitement of finding a frozen Peruvian mummy on the high slopes of Mount Ampato, in the Andes. The mummy was that of an Inca girl, sacrificed sometime between her twelfth and thirteenth birthday. The adventure of removing the mummy safely from the mountain and preserving her body, as well as using sophisticated tools like a CAT scan machine to examine her body without harming it, make for an exciting story. Even though scientists have gathered much information about this famous mummy, lots of questions still remain unanswered.

Secrets of the Mummies: Uncovering the Bodies of Ancient Egyptians

Shelley Tanaka. Hyperion/Madison Press Book, 1999.

People have always been intrigued with Egyptian mummies, perhaps the best-known mummies in the world. In this well-illustrated book, the process of mummification is explained, and lots of mummy lore is revealed. Several famous mummies like Tutankhamen and Ramses II are highlighted as well as some lesser known, but equally interesting mummies. Interspersed in the text are short imaginative vignettes of what the lives of these mummies might have been like.

Vocabulary:

archaeology

Definition: The science of studying material evidence to find out about human cultures of the past.

Context: Mummies are important **archaeological** finds because they tell us about ancient civilizations.

bog body

Definition: A body preserved naturally in peat or waterlogged land with chemicals that prevent decay.

Context: **Bog bodies** have been found throughout Europe, in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, England, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

culture

Definition: The pattern of learned and shared behavior among the members of a group of people.

Context: Excavating tombs in South America provides clues about the **culture** of a people who mummified their dead.

embalm

Definition: To deliberately preserve a human body after death through physical and chemical methods.

Context: The ancient Egyptians carefully **embalmed** their dead to preserve the bodies.

mummy

Definition: A body that has been preserved by natural or artificial means.

Context: Archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the **mummy** of King Tut in Egypt's Valley of the Kings in 1922.

tomb

Definition: The burial site of a noble or ruler, usually composed of several sealed chambers containing the mummy along with personal possessions and various burial artifacts.

Context: King Tut's **tomb** was discovered with its artifacts intact.

Academic standards**Grade level:**

5-6

Subject area:

Historical Understanding

Standard:

Understands the historical perspective.

Benchmarks:

Knows how to view the past in terms of the norms and values of the time and understands that specific decisions and events had an impact on history.

Grade level:

5-6

Subject area:

World History

Standard:

Understands major trends in Eurasia and Africa from 4000 to 1000 B.C.

Benchmark:

Understands how new ideas, products, techniques, and institutions spread from one region to another and the conditions under which people assimilated or rejected new ideas or adapted them to cultural traditions.

Grade level:

6-8

Subject area:

Nature of Science

Standard:

Understands the nature of scientific knowledge.

Benchmarks:

Understands the nature of scientific explanations (e.g., use of logically consistent arguments; emphasis on evidence; use of scientific principles, models, and theories; acceptance or displacement of explanations based on new scientific evidence), and knows that all scientific ideas are tentative and subject to change and improvement in principle, but for most core ideas in science, there is much experimental and observational confirmation.

Credit:

Nancy Waks, developer of online educational materials for grades K-12.

DiscoverySchool.com

<http://www.discoveryschool.com>

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Mummy Clues

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Be a mummy detective. Choose a type of mummy from the list below and research important facts about that mummy using the suggested Web sites. To guide your research, answer the questions on the following pages. You can focus on one specific mummy (such as the Ice Maiden) or a group of mummies discovered in the same region (such as the embalmed mummies of the Chinchorro people, who lived thousands of years ago along the coast of Peru and Chile).

Types of mummies and suggested Web sites to get you started:

I. Natural Mummies

Ice mummies

Bog bodies

Native American mummies

Mummies of the World

Discover where mummies have been found and meet an ice mummy.

<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/peru/mummies/>>

Mummy Locator

Learn about the different types of mummies discovered all over the world, including bog mummies, ice mummies, and Native American mummies.

<<http://www.mummytombs.com/main.locator.htm>>

II. Embalmed Mummies

Egyptian

South American

Chinese

Mummification

Learn about the mummification process and explore an Egyptian mummy and its coffin.

<<http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/mummies/home.html>>

Mummies Unwrapped

Learn about mysterious mummies discovered in China and embalmed mummies in South America.

<<http://library.thinkquest.org/J003409/index.htm>>

Mummy Clues

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As you research your mummy, answer the questions below.

Who [or what] was the mummy?

Where was the mummy found?

How long ago was it buried?

When was it discovered?

Who found it?

Describe where and how the mummy was discovered.

How was it mummified: was it created accidentally or on purpose (through embalming)?
If the mummy was embalmed, how was it done?

What was found with the mummy? (household objects, textiles, animals, treasures, other mummies, etc.)

What tests did scientists use to study the mummy? (x-ray, CAT scans, carbon dating, etc.)

Mummy Clues

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What did scientists learn about the mummy? (its gender and age, what it looked like, its state of health, how it died, clothing, last meal eaten, etc.)

What does the mummy reveal about the beliefs and culture of the people who created it (or the accidental process through which it was formed)?

What makes this mummy discovery important?

What's the most interesting fact you learned about this mummy?