EGYPTIAN MUMMIES: THE MYTH UNWRAPPED

Passport Distance Learning Program

Background: 5000 years ago, Ancient Egyptians perfected the art of mummification, creating not only lasting preservation of their dead, but also intimate snapshots of their lifestyle and spiritual beliefs. Through a dynamic 50 minute interactive program, students will witness the step-by-step mummification process and find out why, though Egyptians were not the first to mummify, we are fascinated by their mummification process. While learning about the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt, students will know where in the world they can find mummies. By the end of the program, students will understand the significance of mummification to ancient Egyptians as well as understand the role mummies played in cultures of the past and present.

Focus Question:
• What is a mummy?

Student Objectives:
Students will be able to:
• List 3 countries in the world where mummies have been found.
• Learn what makes a mummy unique?
• Discuss why ancient Egyptians mummified their dead.
• Name three ways mummies were used for non-scientific purposes.
• Explain the step-by-step mummification process.
• Identify Egyptian gods and goddesses and explain how ancient Egyptian spiritual beliefs relate to the mummification process.

Materials:
Pens/pencils
Paper for notes

Teacher Preparation:
Gather materials.

Procedure:
Prior to the program, discuss with your students what they already know about mummies and ancient Egyptians. Ask them to think about not only what they know, but what they want to learn about mummies. Have them write down any questions they may want to ask during the program. Connect to Milwaukee Public Museum. Should you have any difficulty connecting, call 414-412-7059.
Vocabulary Words:

- **Mummy**—a corpse that has been preserved through dehydration, whether through natural or human processes.
- **Pharaonic pose**—position in which the arms are crossed over the chest, typically used to indicate royal status.
- **Ushabti**—figurines or statues buried with Egyptian royalty, representing their servants for the afterlife. Tools and size indicate the ushabti’s role.
- **Per nefer**—place of purification. This is a building where the recently deceased were brought to begin the mummification process by washing the body in the water of the Nile.
- **Natron**—“divine salt;” a naturally occurring salt found in certain parts of the Egyptian desert. It is similar to a mixture of table salt and baking soda and was used extensively in the Egyptian mummification process.
- **Resin**—hydrocarbon secretion of many plants, particularly coniferous trees. A sticky substance used in the mummification process to help protect the body and its wrappings from moisture and insects.
- **Canopic jars**—stone or pottery jars used by ancient Egyptians to store specific mummified body parts, particularly the lungs, liver, stomach, and intestines. The lids of the jars are typically formed in the shape of the four sons of Horus.
- **Amulets**—an object that keeps a person from trouble; usually a small charm, stone, or other object used to bring the wearer luck or protect from evil or harm.
- **Scarab**—the dung beetle, a sacred figure in ancient Egyptian mythology. A “heart scarab” would be placed over the heart of the deceased as a symbol of rebirth.
- **Cartonnage**—a paper mâché like final wrapping on a mummy. Made of linen of papyrus soaked in a plaster-like substance. These final wrappings are stylized and used as a diagnostic method by scientist to determine when and where a mummy was mummified.
- **Anthropoid coffin**—human-shaped. This refers to the coffins roughly shaped like a human body.
- **Wedjat Eyes/Eye of Horus**—the eyes of the falcon-headed god Horus, son of Osiris. Represents protection, healing, renewed perfection, and power. They were placed around the edge of coffins so that the mummy could see out into the world.
- **Sarcophagus**—from Greek, “flesh-eater.” These are typically large carved stone receptacles within a tomb in which coffins would be placed.
- **Ba**—the part of an Egyptian’s soul representing their personality. The ba was also the link between life on earth and the afterlife.

Egyptian Gods and Goddesses:

- **Osiris**—god of regeneration and rebirth, judge of the dead in the afterlife. The pharaohs were associated with Osiris in death and through mummification, inherit eternal life through a process of imitative magic. Osiris was the first being to be mummified in Egyptian mythology.
- **Horus**—son of Osiris, the falcon-headed god. He is the god of the sky and closely associated with and protector of the Egyptian pharaohs.
- **Hapy**—son of Horus, the baboon-headed god. Watches over the lungs.
- **Imseti**—son of Horus, a human-headed god. Watches over the liver.
- **Qebehsenuef**—son of Horus, a falcon-headed god. Watches over the intestines.
- **Duamutef**—son of Horus, a jackal-headed god. Watches over the stomach.
- **Anubis**—the jackal headed god. Traditionally associated with death, mummies and mummification. Anubis would lead pharaohs through the underworld to the Weighing of the Heart ceremony, which he helped supervise.
- **Ma’at**—goddess of truth and justice who represents the proper order of the universe and correct action. An ostrich feather from her headdress is weighed against the heart of the deceased in the Weighing of the Heart ceremony and the ceremony takes place in the Hall of Ma’at, where Osiris sits in judgment.
- **Thoth**—ibis-headed god of knowledge, who records the results of the Weighing of the Heart ceremony.
- **Ammut**—“the Devourer,” a demonness who is part crocodile, lion, and hippo. If the deceased’s heart weighed more than the feather, the heart would be given to Ammut to devour, and the deceased would be doomed to wander the underworld without achieving eternal life.

**Extension:**
- Have the students make an apple mummy to further explore the mummification process.
  - See Post Activity: Make an Apple Mummy.
- Have students read and discuss *The Story of Osiris and Isis*.
- Have students create and complete a K.W.L. Fold a plain piece of typing paper into thirds. Label each section K (what they know or knew), W (what they wanted to learn) and L (what they learned). Depending on age, students can draw a picture corresponding to each column. Teachers can also use this activity as an assessment of their students.