



San Diego Museum of Man

LIFE AND DEATH ON THE NILE

SUN GODS AND MUMMIES IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Pre- and Post-Visit Activities



The exhibit, *Life and Death on the Nile*, gives us an opportunity to step back in time and imagine life in Ancient Egypt by displaying some of the ancient art and artifacts found in Egyptian homes, temples, and tombs from the Amarna Period (late 18th dynasty) rule by Pharaoh Akhenaten. The life-giving powers of the sun, the annual flooding of the Nile, and the Pharaoh as a living god and protector were all things that influenced Egyptian culture. The Ancient Egyptians developed a highly distinctive culture that lasted for over 3,000 years.

A mummy, unlike a skeleton, includes soft tissue such as skin, muscles, and internal organs. Our exhibit features an 'international' variety of mummies: two from Ancient Egypt, one from Chihuahua, Mexico, five from the Andes mountains in Peru, and one from the Chinchorro people of coastal Chile. Mummies are precious to us because they are the remains of a human being. It is important that they are treated with respect and given the best possible care and conservation. The techniques and materials used in mummification can tell us a great deal about another culture's technology, medicinal arts, and concept of the afterlife.

Pre-visit Activities:

Students should be able to locate on a map the Nile River and Upper and Lower Egypt. Students should also be familiar with the geography in the surrounding area, the Mediterranean Sea, and deserts to the east and west.

Vocabulary

General Terms:

Anthropology – the scientific study of the origin, the behavior, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans.

Archaeology – the systematic study of material remains from the past to describe and explain human behavior.

Physical Anthropology – the study of the way the human body is formed and how it works.

Physical anthropologists study people through time, including the most ancient remains of human bones.

Egyptian Terms:

Amulet – a charm worn to ward off evil or for good luck.

Canopic Jar – a carved container placed in tombs to hold the internal organs of the mummified individual.

Cartonnage – a papier-mâché-like substance obtained by mixing linen, papyrus fiber, and chalk plaster.

Cartouche – in hieroglyphs, an enclosed oval containing the name or title of a ruler or deity.

Embalm – to keep a dead body from decaying by treating it with various chemicals.

Dynasty – a succession of rulers who are members of the same family.

Hieroglyph – the representation of an object that stands for a word or sound.

Pharaoh – a title meaning "God-King," used for the rulers of Ancient Egypt.

Polytheism – belief in, or worship of, many gods.

Scribe – in Ancient Egypt, someone who could read and write Hieroglyphs, often employed as a copyist or clerk.

Stela – an upright stone slab or pillar that usually has carvings.

Ushabti – funerary statue intended to perform necessary tasks in the afterlife.



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Post-visit Activities

The Pharaoh Akhenaten:

While in the exhibit, students learned about the Pharaoh Akhenaten and his unusual reign in the 18th Dynasty. Have students investigate more about the Pharaoh Akhenaten and his queen, Nefertiti. Why is their reign so interesting to archaeologists? What did the city of Amarna really look like? Why is Akhenaten viewed today as both a heretic and a hero? Why was he viewed with such contempt by Ancient Egyptians? Have students write a mini biography of Akhenaten or Nefertiti.

Cultural Views of Death:

At the museum, students learned about the elaborate funerary practices of the Ancient Egyptians. Cross-culturally, funerals are times for families to come together. Have students research and report burial customs among the varying cultural and religious groups throughout San Diego County. These can include Catholic, Native American, Filipino, Mexican, Buddhist, African-American, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, and Christian Scientist. Hypothesize and speculate what these funerary and burial practices tell about these cultural/religious groups' view of death.

Archaeology:

Much of what is known about Ancient Egypt comes from archaeological finds. The material remains left behind by people tell archaeologists a vibrant story about what people used to eat, what kind of art they made, what they traded for, and what kinds of structures they built. Have students think about their favorite foods, hobbies, and homes. If archaeologists went through their trash 200 years from now, what would they be able to tell about them? Would archaeologists be able to tell what types of clothes they wore, favorite foods, hobbies, interests?

Suggested Background Reading for Teachers:

- Hart, George. *Ancient Egypt*. Eyewitness Books, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1990.
- Vercoutter, Jean. *The Search for Ancient Egypt*. Discoveries Books, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1992.
- Wilkinson, Richard. *Reading Egyptian Art*. Thames and Hudson, London, 1992.
The Egyptian Mummy Secrets and Science. The University Museum, Univ. of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1980.
- Oakes, Lorna. *Ancient Egypt*. Hermes House, New York, 2002.