

# Mummies – Clues to Ancient Cultures

## Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Curriculum Focus:** Ancient History

**Lesson Duration:** 1 to 2 class periods

### *Student Objectives*

- Discover what mummies are, where they've been found and how and why they were made.
- Differentiate between natural and embalmed mummies
- Investigate the clues mummies give us about the culture of those who created them.

### *Materials*

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Mummies*  
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Making Mummies
  - Egyptian Mummies
  - South American Mummies (06:48)
- 
- World map
  - Pictures of King Tut and other famous mummies
  - 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. 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.
6. 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.
7. First, have them choose a type of mummy from the list below. They 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). They'll find Web sites under each type to begin their research.

**Natural Mummies** (Examples: 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>

**Embalmed Mummies** (Examples: 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>
8. Have students research important facts about the mummy they selected using the suggested Web sites. To guide their research, have them 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?
  - 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.)
  - What did scientists learn about the mummy? (For example, could they determine 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?
9. 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.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. 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.
2. In addition to mummies, what other sources of information do we have about ancient civilizations?
3. Most Egyptian mummies were kings or queens or wealthy people. Hypothesize reasons for this.
4. Although many bodies were mummified long ago, relatively few mummies survive today. Consider why this is true.
5. 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?
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?

## Assessment

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

- 3 points: Student 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.
- 2 points: Student 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.
- 1 point: Student 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.

## 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***

### **Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – Historical Understanding: Understands the historical perspective.
- History – World History: Understands major trends in Eurasia and Africa from 4000 to 1000 B.C.
- Science – Nature of Science: Understands the nature of scientific knowledge.

### **The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, continuity, and change

### **National Academy of Sciences**

The National Science Education Standards provide guidelines for teaching science as well as a coherent vision of what it means to be scientifically literate for students in grades K-12. To view the standards, visit <http://books.nap.edu>.

This lesson plan addresses the following science standards:

- Science As Inquiry: Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
-

## **Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

