

# *The How and Why of Mummies*

## Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 6-8

**Curriculum Focus:** Ancient History

**Lesson Duration:** Two class periods

### ***Student Objectives***

- Discover that mummification has been practiced by a number of different societies
- Consider the social and cultural reasons for mummification
- Write a report on mummification in a single ancient civilization

### ***Materials***

- Video on *unitedstreaming: Discover Magazine: 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:

1. Mummies in the Sand

- The Mummification Techniques of Chinchorro Beach
- What the Mummies of Chinchorro Beach Tell Us

- Visual reference materials that students can copy or adapt for their oral presentations
- Reference materials about mummification in various ancient cultures

### ***Procedures***

1. Discuss the process of mummification and possible reasons why societies practiced it.
2. Divide the class into groups. Assign each group one example of mummification in various societies (Egypt, Chile/Peru, Celtic [the Lindow man], Italy [Oetzi the Iceman], others the teacher or students may discover.) Using the links below and other Internet and print resources have each group write an illustrated report including the physical characteristics of the mummies and the conclusions scientists have drawn about them, the process used for mummification, and the possible reasons why the mummies were preserved.
3. Have the groups present their report and illustrations to the class, with each group member taking a different aspect of the report to talk about.

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

<http://www.crystalinks.com/mum.html>

## Discussion Questions

1. In most cultures where the dead were mummified this practice was limited to elite groups. Discuss why you think the Chichurra people made this available to so many ordinary people. Compare this culture with others, such as the Egyptian, and speculate about differences in society and attitudes would account for different burial philosophies.
2. What would happen in the state where you live if there was a long-term drought similar to the one that may have led to the abandonment of Tiahuanaco? What assistance would you expect from the federal government or the rest of the country? How would your town react? What would your family do?
3. Discuss the ways in which different societies (such as Chinese, Native American, American, etc.) treat and think about their dead. Why do they think the way they do? What ideas do they have that are similar or different?
4. Tiahuanaco may have been located where it is because of the view of Lake Titicaca and Illimani Mountain. Why was your town sited where it is? Discuss the different factors that would impel people to start towns in certain locations.
5. The current church in Tiahuanaco is built on top of an ancient sacred structure. Why do you think this was done? What are the factors that would influence people to build religious centers in certain locations?
6. Why is it important to study the cultures of ancient peoples and try to solve the mysteries of their existence? What lessons can modern societies learn? What motivates scientists to spend many years patiently investigating these sorts of questions?

## Assessment

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

- 3 points: Students' reports include substantial factual information including visuals; thoughtful commentary with strong supporting evidence; well paced and clearly articulated oral presentations.
- 2 points: Students' reports include substantial factual information including visuals; some commentary and supporting evidence; oral presentations too slow or fast and not clearly enough articulated.
- 1 point: Students' reports do not include enough factual information or visuals; incomplete comments, with little supporting evidence; poorly paced and unclear articulated oral presentations.

## Vocabulary

### **anatomical**

*Definition:* Concerned with anatomy; related to the structure of an organism.

*Context:* The next step for the mummy maker was to reassemble the bones in the correct anatomical order, tying them together with cords and reinforcing them with wood.

### **altiplano**

*Definition:* A high plateau, as in the Andean regions of Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina.

*Context:* In fact, in his hand he is holding a spear thrower and a scepter in the other representing the lightning bolts that strike down dramatically in this altiplano landscape.

### **excavate**

*Definition:* To expose or uncover by digging.

*Context:* Vivian Standen, a local archaeologist, was called in to excavate the mummies.

### **habitat**

*Definition:* The area or type of environment in which an organism or ecological community normally lives or occurs.

*Context:* The canals provide an excellent habitat for plants and microorganisms that will fix nitrogen from the atmosphere and make it biologically available for plant growth.

### **osteoporosis**

*Definition:* A disease in which the bones become extremely porous, are subject to fracture, and heal slowly, occurring especially in women.

*Context:* Nearly one third of all the adult women suffered from osteoporosis.

### **paleoecological**

*Definition:* Dealing with the interaction between ancient or prehistoric organisms and their environment.

*Context:* The paleoecological record in California shows 200-year-long droughts not that long ago.

## **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/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History – The Beginnings of Human Society: Understands the biological and cultural processes that shaped the earliest human communities.
- Geography – Places and Regions: Understands the physical and human characteristics of place.



- Geography – Environment and Society: Understands how human actions modify the physical environment.
- Geography – Environment and Society: Understands how physical systems affect human systems.

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

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
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### **Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the 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>