

presents

THE MYSTERY OF KING TUT

Study Guide

ABOUT THE PLAY

Theatreworks' original musical is based on the lives of the Ancient Egyptian king, Tutankhamen (who reigned during the 18th Dynasty, circa 1334-1325 BC), and the archeologist who discovered his tomb in 1922, Howard Carter. The accounts of the life of Tutankhamen, who lived over 3,000 years ago, are understandably inconclusive, conflicting, and subject to varying interpretations. For this reason, we caution teachers and audience members that the events depicted in our musical are not meant to be interpreted as absolute fact. Although many of the plot elements are based on historical evidence, our playwright, Mindi Dickstein, had to do a bit of storytelling in order to fill in the gaps (including creating new characters, changing the sequence of events, etc.). As for Howard Carter, since he lived in the 20th Century, better records exist, including an account of the events as told by Carter himself. However, even the actual 1922 discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb is clouded by legend (most notably that of "King Tut's curse").

The play opens at an archeological campsite in Luxor, Egypt, in October 1922. Howard Carter, a British archeologist, has returned from London to the life he has known for nine years, searching for the tomb of King Tut in the Valley of the Kings. He greets his Egyptian foreman, Ahmed¹, with the news that his benefactor, Lord Carnarvon, has agreed to fund their work for one more season. Carter has brought a yellow canary with him to Egypt, and Ahmed pronounces the "golden bird" to be a good omen that will bring them luck in finding the tomb. As Carter and Ahmed examine a bronze arrowhead for the markings of King Tut, a young boy adorned with golden garments appears, hunting with his bow and arrow – the spirit of Tutankhamen.

November 4, 1922: As their work continues, Carter's optimism is tempered by the appearance of an Egyptian official, Abdulla El Halim², who makes it clear that they are allowed to excavate only due to the courtesy of the Egyptian government. Feeling even more pressure to find the tomb that he just knows is there, Carter stamps in frustration, feeling a rock under his foot...it's limestone...cut in a square, which can only mean – he's found something! He calls Ahmed, and the two celebrate what they've found – the first step of a stairway which leads down to the tomb of King Tut. As Carter realizes that Tut is "here," the young Tutankhamen appears again, with his playmate and future wife, Anke, and they run and hunt as they joyfully talk about the day when they will become King and Queen of Egypt. Their joy changes to sorrow when they hear the news from Tut's uncle, Aye³ that Tutankhamen's father has died. Though only a boy, Tut is now the King of Egypt. The funeral procession ends with the wedding of King Tut and his new Queen, Anke.

Meanwhile, after nearly a decade of searching, Carter is finally able to give good news to his benefactor, Lord Carnarvon – he has found the tomb of Tutankhamen. While he attempts to unravel the mysteries of the tomb's hieroglyphs and artifacts, the suspenseful tale of Tut's political struggle emerges. As the young pharaoh challenges the authority of his political advisors, Aye and Horemheb (a military official), the two elders secretly plot to murder the King so that they can succeed him as leaders.⁴ Carter's success turns bittersweet when rumors of "King Tut's curse" spread. When his yellow canary is eaten by a cobra, the event is immediately pronounced a bad omen by Ahmed and the workers, whose superstition seems justified when a number of accidents occur at the site. Lord Carnarvon's supernatural advisor, Madame Minsk⁵, contributes to the misgivings when she senses the presence of "spirits" in the tomb (before leaving with a trunkful of valuables). Lord Carnarvon himself seems victimized by the curse when he suddenly dies from an infection caused by a simple insect bite (this part is true!). Carter is despondent over both Carnarvon's death and the way that the press emphasizes the "curse" rather than the significance of the discovery.

While Carter is faced with more devastating news – the Egyptian authorities have taken over his work and barred him from the tomb – Aye and Horemheb chase down Tut, and he and Anke try to defend themselves. Ultimately, Aye and Horemheb usurp Tutankhamen, although not in the way they had anticipated.⁶ The musical ends as the spirit of Tutankhamen prepares for the next life, and Carter and Tut acknowledge their indebtedness to one another – each of them responsible for the other's legacy, their names forever linked in history.

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1. This character was created by the playwright based on photographs of Howard Carter's Egyptian foreman.
 2. Another fictional character based on Carter's accounts of the obstacles he faced from the Egyptian authorities.
 3. It is not known for certain how Aye and Tut were related, but Aye and Horemheb were among the young boy's advisors.
 4. This is one of many theories about the cause of the death of the young Tutankhamen (at age 17 or 18).
 5. Madame Minsk is a fictional character, based on reports that Lord Carnarvon often consulted with a private spiritualist.
 6. When *The Mystery of King Tut* was originally produced in 2000, the playwright achieved a dramatic conclusion to the play by choosing one of the many then-popular hypotheses regarding Tut's death: was that he killed via a blow to his head. However, a 2005 CAT-scan of King Tut's mummy ruled out this theory. Though scientists now believe that a previously undetected leg injury might have caused a deadly infection, the exact cause of death remains a mystery.

BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

1. **EGYPT** – Using an atlas or encyclopedia, locate Egypt on a map of the continent of Africa. Explain to students that *The Mystery of King Tut* takes place in Egypt during two different time periods: the 18th Dynasty of Ancient Egypt, 14th century B.C., and 1922 A.D. Tell students to observe the differences between Ancient Egypt and the Egypt of 1922 while they are watching the musical and follow up after the performance.
2. **KING TUT** – a/k/a Tutankhamen. Have students ever heard of King Tut? Talk about how this young boy became the ruler of Egypt when he was only nine years old. What would that be like? Could a nine-year old rule a country without help? Explain that it was the Egyptian practice to bury kings with golden treasures that were often stolen by graverobbers, but that the discovery of King Tut's burial chamber was unusual because it was found to contain hundreds of valuable objects which had been untouched by thieves.
3. **ARCHEOLOGY** – Howard Carter was one of the world's most famous archeologists. Review the concept of archeology (See VOCABULARY), and advise students to observe what Carter does in the play. Follow up after the performance.
4. **VOCABULARY / CONCEPTS FOR UNDERSTANDING.** Go over the basic words and concepts listed below (either before or after the performance).

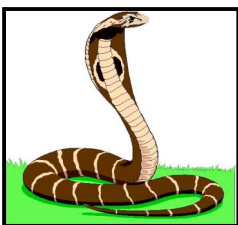
archeology – the study of ancient cultures through examination of their buildings, tools, and other objects

archeologist – one who studies archeology

artifacts – objects made by the people of an ancient culture

canary – a small yellow bird which is well known for its singing and is sometimes kept as a pet in a cage

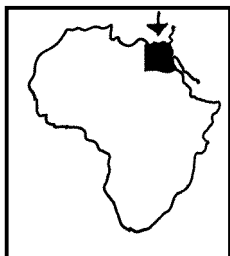
circa – (often abbreviated “c.”) *Latin* term meaning “about,” often used with dates in ancient history (which can't always be determined conclusively)



◀ **cobra** – a poisonous snake (native to Africa or Asia) which can make itself look bigger and more threatening by spreading the skin at the back of its head (see drawing, left).

EGYPT ➤

officially **Arab Republic of Egypt**, country located in the northeastern corner of Africa. (See map right, and detailed map on **FACT SHEET**.) Known for the innovations of its ancient civilization, and the remarkable structures and artifacts that it left behind



Egyptology -- the study of the culture and artifacts of the ancient Egyptian civilization; **Egyptologist** = one who studies Egyptology

foreman – chief workman in a group who supervises the work of others

hieroglyphics- system of writing that uses pictures and symbols (**hieroglyphs**) to represent words and sounds (see **FACT SHEETS**)

limestone – a white or light grey rock which is used as a building material and in the making of cement

mummification – the ancient Egyptian process of embalming in order to preserve a corpse as close to its original state as possible

Nile River – the main body of water in Egypt and the longest river in the world; approximately 4,160 miles long from its remotest headstream, the Luvironza River in Burundi, central Africa, to its delta on the Mediterranean Sea, NE Egypt

omen – a symbol of good or bad luck about a future event *Examples:* Ahmed considered the yellow canary to be a good omen; when the cobra ate the canary, it was interpreted as a bad omen

pharaoh – ancient Egyptian ruler, generally synonymous with “king” (but limited to ancient Egypt); derived from the ancient Egyptian phrase, *per-aa*, meaning “great house,” or “royal palace”

tomb – a large stone structure or underground room where someone, especially an important person, is buried

Valley of the Kings – a valley in Egypt (near the ancient city of Thebes, and the modern city of Luxor) in which chambers were built into the stone in order to house the remains of royal leaders and to protect their valuables from thieves; the tomb of Tutankhamen is located here (see **FACT SHEET**)

AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

1. Following up on your pre-performance discussions (if applicable), ask students what they learned about **Egypt** and **archeology** from watching the play. What was different about the Egypt that Howard Carter worked in and that of King Tutankhamen's time? What is Egypt like today? *For older grades:* What was the relationship between Great Britain and Egypt in 1922? Why do you think that Carter was challenged by the Egyptian authorities? (How did they feel about their national treasures?)
2. When Tutankhamen first appears in the play, he is a very young boy. Do you think that he was ready to take over as King of Egypt? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of being such an important person at such a young age? (Who would he rely on for help? How would he know who to trust?) Research Tutankhamen's short reign as King. Did he accomplish anything significant?
3. Discuss the concept of superstition. Who in the play was superstitious? Do you remember what happened that made some people think that supernatural forces were at work? What are some possible scientific explanations for the things supposedly caused by "King Tut's Curse"?
4. Why do you think that the musical is called *The Mystery of King Tut*? What parts of King Tut's story are still a mystery? Do you agree with the conclusion that the play makes (that Tut was accidentally killed by his wife) or do you have a different theory? Do research to back up your claim.
5. *For older grades:* In *The Mystery of King Tut*, the playwright tells two stories that are separated by 3,000 years. How was the play structured to emphasize the similarities between Carter and Tutankhamen? Discuss the concept of suspense. What parts of each story were suspenseful? Which story did you find the most interesting?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Discovery Journal. When Howard Carter first arrived in Egypt (at age 17!), he worked as a "tracer," recording the art and inscriptions found by archeologists with his detailed drawings and paintings. When he discovered the tomb of Tutankhamen, he recorded each finding with both words and illustrations. Based on your research, create a page (or more) of Carter's "discovery journal" with textual descriptions of the features of an artifact, inscription, etc., and illustrate it with a drawing. (If you prefer, describe an object from your local museum or that you find in a book or on the internet – see REFERENCES.) Try to describe the artifact as accurately as possible.

Scribble, Scribble. Discuss the scene in the musical in which reporters interview Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter about their wonderful archeological find (see *National Geographic's*, website, REFERENCES, for Maynard Owens Williams' actual article). Imagine that you are a reporter in 1922 interviewing either of these men – what questions would you ask? How would you decide what to talk about in your article (the artifacts? the "curse"? Lord Carnarvon's death?)? What do you think is more important, getting the facts or writing the most exciting story? Research the facts about Carter's discovery and write your article based on your answers to these questions.

Mummies Research the Egyptian practice of mummification. According to Egyptian religious beliefs, what was its purpose? Why were royal tombs full of gold statues and other precious objects? What did analysis of Tutankhamen's mummified remains tell scholars about the possible causes of his death? How (and where) were common people buried – were they also mummified, or was this process restricted to royalty?

The Tomb of Tutankhamen Today. Research the Tomb of Tutankhamen in the present day. Is it still open to tourists? How has the tomb held up over the years and what is being done to help preserve the ancient structure? What became of the objects that Howard Carter found, and where does the mummified body of King Tut reside today? *Suggested Activity:* Using a travel book on Egypt or a website with tourism information (see REFERENCES for some ideas), imagine that you are planning to travel to Egypt to visit the Valley of the Kings. What do you most want to see? What else is available for sightseeing in addition to ancient tombs?

More Discoveries in the Valley of the Kings: KV5. In 1995, archeologist Dr. Kent Weeks made the most startling discovery in the Valley of the Kings since Howard Carter's 1922 find. Research the facts about Weeks' discovery of the tomb known as "KV5" that made headlines around the world. Compare the obstacles faced by Weeks (whose work continues today) to those of Carter. How has archeology changed since the 1920s (or are some things still done in the same way)? What tools are available to Weeks that Carter could not have even dreamed of? What is the significance of Weeks' discovery compared to Carter's? (See REFERENCES for sources for information on KV5.)

Ancient Facts Keeps Changing. When *The Mystery of King Tut* premiered in 2000, one of the most popular theories regarding his death was that he was dealt a fatal blow to the back of his head. Due to recent scientific discoveries, this is no longer considered valid. Are there any other examples of scientific invention proving long-accepted "facts" untrue? For example: the earth is round, not flat; the earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around. Any others?

REFERENCES

For Older Students and Teachers:


- Brier, Bob. *The Murder of Tutankhamen: A True Story*. New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 1999.
- Carter, Howard and A.C. Mace. *The Tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amen*. 3 vols. London: Cassell, 1923. Carter's own account of his discovery. (Re-published in many subsequent editions.)
- King, Michael R; Gregory M. Cooper and Don Denevi. *Who Killed King Tut? Using Modern Forensics to Solve a 3,300-Year-Old Mystery*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006. A forensic account of King Tut's death. The most recent edition of this book (2006) includes information from the 2005 CAT-scan.
- Reeves, C.N. *The Complete Tutankhamun: The King, The Tomb, The Royal Treasure*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990.
- Weeks, Kent R. *KV5: The Lost Tomb*. New York: William Morrow and London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1998.

For younger students:

- Bown, Deni and Michele Claiborne. *Action Packs: Tutankhamen & Ancient Egypt*. London: DK Publishing, 1996. (This interactive book and kit includes activities, models, games, poster, etc.)
- Donoughue, Carol. *The Mystery of the Hieroglyphs: The Story of the Rosetta Stone and the Race to Decipher Egyptian Hieroglyphs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press Children's Books, 1999.
- Der Manuelian, Peter. *Hieroglyphs From A to Z*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1995. (For younger children, this book provides Egyptian hieroglyphic symbols to correspond with the sounds of the English alphabet, plus stencils so that children can write their own messages.)
- Hart, George. *Eyewitness: Ancient Egypt*. London: DK Publishing, 2000. (General reference about Ancient Egypt, including descriptions of daily life.)
- Murdoch, David, and illustrators Christopher Forsey and Anne Yvonne Gilbert. *DK Discoveries: Tutankhamun: The Life and Death of a Pharaoh*. London: DK Publishing, 1998. (Factual yet entertaining, with the detailed illustrations and photographs that are the trademark of this publisher.)
- Reeves, Nicholas. *Into the Mummy's Tomb: The Real-life Discovery of Tutankhamun's Treasures*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1992.

WEBSITES

EGYPTIAN MUSEUM – The official website for the museum in Cairo which is the home of the artifacts found in Tut's tomb: http://www.tourism.egnet.net/Attractions_Detail.asp?code=6

 [egyptvoyager.com](http://www.egyptvoyager.com) In addition to the hieroglyphs lessons below, this site contains information provided by Egyptologists from around the world (including a section on King Tut), as well as details about travel to Egypt for tourists (including a "virtual tour" of Cairo). <http://www.egyptvoyager.com>

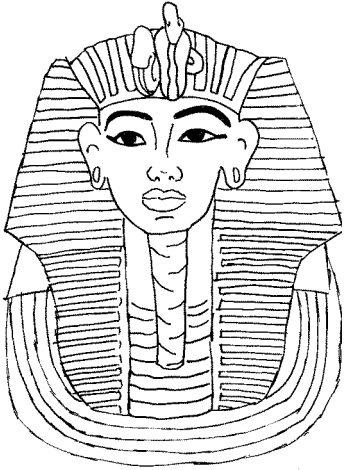
- **TEACH YOURSELF HIEROGLYPHS** is another nice feature of EgyptVoyager, located at http://www.egyptvoyager.com/hieroglyph_archives.htm
The ten lessons (some of them quite advanced) were compiled by Egyptologist Jacques Kinnaer, whose own website on *Ancient Egypt* can be found at www.geocities.com/amenhotep.geo/

KV5 – The official website of archeologist Kent Weeks' **Theban Mapping Project**, the ongoing survey of the Valley of the Kings which led to the discovery of "KV5", Kings Valley Tomb 5, a previously unexplored site which yielded the most significant Egyptian archeological finds since Tutankhamen's tomb. The site ranges from general information on the study of Egyptology and archeologists (including Howard Carter) to minute details on each tomb in the valley, including of course, Tutankhamen's (a/k/a, "KV 62" – see their official diagram on the FACT SHEET). Includes frequent updates on the ongoing excavation, informative maps, and comprehensive bibliographies. www.kv5.com

KINGTUTONE.COM – Features a wealth of information on ancient Egypt, which includes a children's section with activities. Special emphasis is placed on mummies, pyramids, queens, and King Tut himself – you can even take a virtual tour of his tomb. www.KingTutOne.com

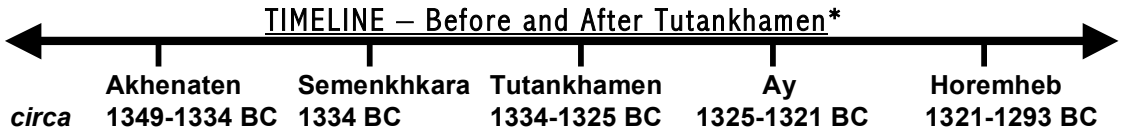
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY -- AT THE TOMB OF TUTANKHAMEN – National Geographic Society's website contains a description of Howard Carter's discovery of King Tut's tomb as told by their correspondent Maynard Owen Williams in the February 1923 issue of *National Geographic* magazine. Also featured are classroom activities designed to accompany their IMAX film, *Mysteries of Egypt* (some of which we have reprinted with their permission – see *WRITING ACTIVITIES – HIEROGLYPHS*). <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/egypt/>

**FACT SHEET:
KING TUTANKHAMEN AND HIS TOMB**



**TUTANKHAMEN (a/k/a Tutankhamun, Tutankhamon, or Tut)
King of Egypt, 18th Dynasty (circa 1334-1325 BC*)**

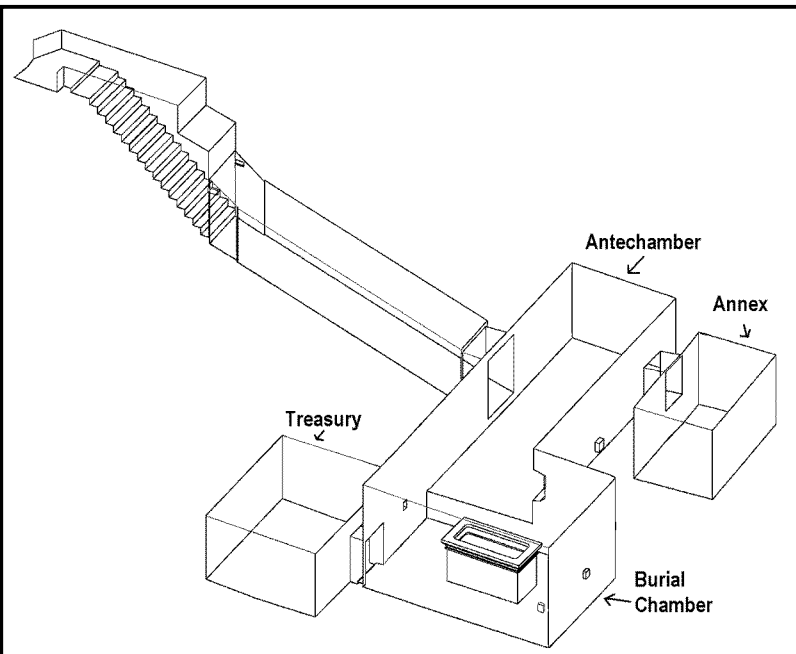
At the age of about nine, Tutankhamen succeeded Akhenaten (who may have been his father) after his death c. 1334 BC (Semenkhkara, possibly Tutankhamen's older brother, may have co-reigned briefly with Akhenaten.) He was married to Ankhesenamen (who may have been his half-sister); they had no surviving children. Since his mother and father were deceased, a senior civil servant, Ay (who may have been related to Tut) served as his advisor, along with Horemheb, commander-in-chief of the army, and other officials.



THE MYSTERY. Tutankhamen died during the ninth year of his reign, at the age of 19. Mystery still surrounds the circumstances of his death. As hypothesized in the play, some believe he was murdered, because 1968 X-rays revealed what was thought to be a bone fragment in his skull, indicating a blow to the head. Since Ay and Horemheb both succeeded him as Pharaohs (see timeline), they had been implicated as suspects, although they left written messages that they did not kill Tutankhamen. Conflicting evidence that Horemheb took some of Tut's treasures and engraved his own name in place of Tutankhamen's would suggest otherwise. Others theorized that outsiders (foreigners) may have had a hand in the death, and still others suggested that his wife may have plotted against him. Other once-popular hypotheses included a fatal disease or a brain tumor. However, recent scientific developments, particularly a 2005 CAT-scan now indicate that Tut probably died from an infection stemming from a leg injury. The exact cause of death remains unknown.

THE TOMB OF TUTANKHAMEN

DISCOVERED: November 4, 1922, by the British archeologist, Howard Carter (1874-1939), in the Valley of the Kings (see map, right). It took Carter about ten years to finally locate the tomb that he believed to exist there. Like the other tombs in this area, the tomb was cut out of the limestone bedrock. The tomb consisted of four rooms which could be reached after descending a flight of sixteen steps (see diagram below). What made this tomb so unique was the fact that graverobbers had not touched the burial chamber, which was found to contain over 600 objects, as well as the King's mummy.



After the discovery, Carter carefully catalogued the items and shipped them to Cairo (a process which took about ten years), where many of them are on display today in the Egyptian Museum. The mummy of King Tutankhamen remains in the original tomb in the Valley of the Kings. Diagram of the Tomb of Tutankhamen (a/k/a "KV 62") used by permission of Dr. Kent Weeks of the Theban Mapping Project. See REFERENCES for more information.

Special thanks to Francis Dzikowski of the Theban Mapping Project, for his assistance.

©Theban Mapping Project, Cairo, Egypt

**Note that ancient dates are subject to interpretation, so various sources on Ancient Egypt will often list conflicting dates.*

FACT SHEET: *HIEROGLYPHS*

The written language used by the Ancient Egyptians is called **hieroglyphics**, which uses pictures, or **hieroglyphs**, to convey ideas. There are several different types of hieroglyphs. **Ideograms** are signs that mean exactly what they represent, for example:



As the written language became more complex, other signs were developed, such as those that represented sounds, called **phonograms**. Still other signs, called **determinants**, might be added at the end of a word in order to indicate a different meaning (for example, an abstract idea instead of a literal thing, as in the lyric from *The Mystery of King Tut*: “An eagle means prosperity – except when it means eagle.”) By using hieroglyphs in these different capacities and combinations, the Ancient Egyptians could convey more and more sophisticated concepts.

This written language was used primarily by religious officials, royalty, and skilled writers, called **scribes**, who made writing hieroglyphs their profession. The signs were written not only for meaning, but to be pleasing to the eye. According to Egyptologist Jacques Kinnaer¹, the comparison of different hieroglyphic texts shows that the signs were not always written in the same direction. Hieroglyphic texts could indeed be written both in rows and columns, from right to left or from left to right. Even within the same block of text, it was possible for one part to be written in columns and the other in rows. (This variability is one reason that it took so long for scholars to decipher Ancient Egyptian writing.)



The example (above, left) uses a piece of fictive text to show the different orientations of hieroglyphic signs. As a general rule, signs representing people or animals all look towards the beginning of the text. Thus, if the signs in a text all “look” to the left, one should start reading from the left to the right, and vice versa (see A and B above). The texts with C and D are written in columns, with a vertical line dividing the different columns. The signs in text C look to the left so again the text is to be read from left to right (and from top to bottom), whereas the signs in text D look to the right. This kind of flexibility allowed a symmetrical construction of texts on the walls of temples and tombs. This example (above, right) demonstrates how symmetry was obtained in a decorative panel (notice the mirrored symbols facing each other).



Egyptian pharaohs had many different names. Some of these names were enclosed in a figure called a **cartouche** or “royal ring” (see left). The **cartouche** depicts a loop formed by a rope, the ends tied together so as to offer to the spectator the appearance of a straight line: Strictly speaking this loop should be round as it conveys the notions of “eternity” and “encompassing the entire creation”. An example of the elaborate hieroglyphs used for royal titles is Tutankhamen’s name below. The names enclosed within the cartouches are indicated by “()”.



The King of Upper and Lower Egypt (Nebkheperure), the son of Re (Tutankhamun)

¹ Excerpted from *TEACH YOURSELF HIEROGLYPHICS*, see REFERENCES section. Used by permission of parent website, egyptvoyager.com, all rights reserved.

WRITING ACTIVITIES:
HIEROGLYPHS
FROM
THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

The civilization of Ancient Egypt disappeared centuries ago, yet left a remarkable written legacy that experts are still working to interpret. The Egyptian language was one of the earliest to be written down in a pictorial form we call **hieroglyphics**. The word “hieroglyph” literally means “sacred carving.” At first, the Egyptians carved or painted hieroglyphs only on temple walls. Later they were used on tombs, papyrus, or boards washed with plaster. Jottings in hieroglyphs have even been found on fragments of limestone that were the “Post-it” notes of the ancients!

Grades K-4

Funny Pharaohs

Draw a symbol or “hieroglyph” that stands for your name. Use cardboard, glue, aluminum foil, and other craft materials to make a crown with your name pasted on. Put on the crowns and have a parade.

Grades 4-8

The Golden Bird

Howard Carter, discoverer of Tutankhamen’s tomb, brought a beautiful yellow canary with him to the Valley of the Kings. As the legend goes, just as Carter discovered the amazing treasure house in the tomb, a cobra ate the canary. (The cobra is traditionally associated with the pharaohs.) Do you think the canary’s death was an omen of bad luck, as the Egyptian workers did? Or was the snake simply looking for a meal? Using an Egyptian style, draw pictographs telling your version of the story of the golden bird.

Grades 9-12

A Sacred Language

Invent a hieroglyphic language of your own to represent important words and letters. Use your hieroglyphs to write a message and your name. Ask a friend to translate your writing without using a key, as the first Egyptologists had to do.

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Mysteries of Egypt is a large-format film from National Geographic Television.

For more information, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/egypt.

Special thanks to John Rutter for his assistance and consideration.

We’d love to hear from you! Please let us know what you thought of *THE MYSTERY OF KING TUT*.
Did the performance fit into your curriculum? Did any of the classroom activities fit into your lesson plans?

Send comments to:

TheatreworksUSA, 151 West 26th Street, New York NY 10001

e-mail: info@theatreworksusa.org

THE MYSTERY OF KING TUT – ART PAGE

In Ancient Egypt, masks were attached to mummies so that the person's spirit would "recognize" them when they returned to the tomb. This is a black and white sketch of one of the most famous objects found in the tomb of Tutankhamen, the mask of the young pharaoh. Fill in the colors of the mask that Howard Carter found with the mummy of King Tutankhamen (according to your research), or make up your own

