



# The Ancient Egypt Sleepover

As we celebrate 100 years since the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, dig into this class read-aloud guaranteed to inspire young Egyptologists

STEPHEN DAVIES

Whenever I do a talk or assembly about my new book, *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover*, I describe the real sleepovers organised for children in the British Museum, and then ask, "What could possibly go wrong?"

Ten hands shoot up.

"Yes, you," I point.

"THE MUMMIES COME ALIVE AND START ATTACKING CHILDREN IN THEIR SLEEPING BAGS!"

"Exciting!" I grin inanely. "Who else has an idea?"

Nine hands go down, because everyone else was thinking the same thing. One hundred years of schlock

horror and 50 years of *Scooby Doo* have convinced us all that Egyptian mummies love nothing more than to attack Egyptologists. *You disturbed my rest and now you must pay!*

For children's authors, too, the lure of the mummy is strong. Our fingers itch to write about Egyptian mummies that sit bolt upright in their coffins, walk stiff-legged into the rain and order roast hippo and chips from the nearest kebab van. But let's face it, that kind of book is not much help to the children in your classrooms trying to get their heads around their Ancient Egypt topic.

I wrote *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover* as a whole-class read for Key Stage 2. I wanted to write

something exciting and funny but entirely devoid of ancient curses or marauding mummies. Instead, the book has a *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* vibe, with a group of unsuspecting children (clutching golden tickets, no less) rocking up at the British Museum for a night of Ancient Egypt-themed activities. Things go wrong, of course. There is a mystery to solve and a dastardly heist to foil.

*The Ancient Egypt Sleepover* consists of 21 short chapters intended for reading aloud over the course of one month. I produced some free downloadable teaching notes to accompany the book, including the following ideas and suggestions.

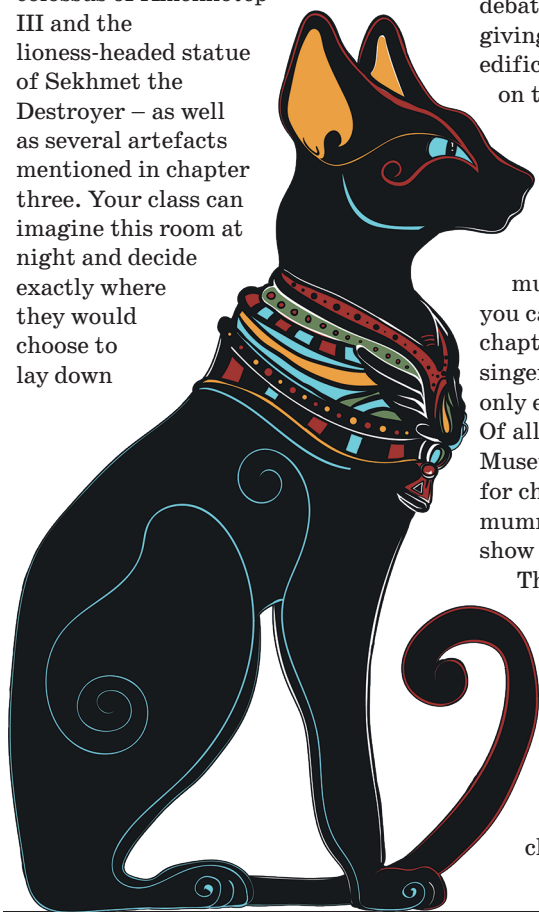


## Sharing and talking about the book

### Explore the British Museum

The book's action takes place in the Great Court, the Ancient Egypt sculpture gallery and the mummy galleries of the British Museum. If a class outing to the British Museum is unrealistic, fear not – Google Streetview Interiors enables you to explore a crowd-free museum from the comfort of your classroom. Begin in the Ancient Egypt sculpture gallery, where eagle-eyed children will notice two of the statues featured on the cover of the book – the one-eared colossus of Amenhotep III and the

lioness-headed statue of Sekhmet the Destroyer – as well as several artefacts mentioned in chapter three. Your class can imagine this room at night and decide exactly where they would choose to lay down



their sleeping bags.

Zoom in on the Rosetta Stone in the middle of the gallery, the most visited artefact in the whole museum. The story of Champollion's great breakthrough on 14 September 1822 is one of the best 'eureka' moments in history, featuring an ecstatic dash across Paris, a hoarse cry ("Je tiens l'affaire!") and a dramatic fainting episode.

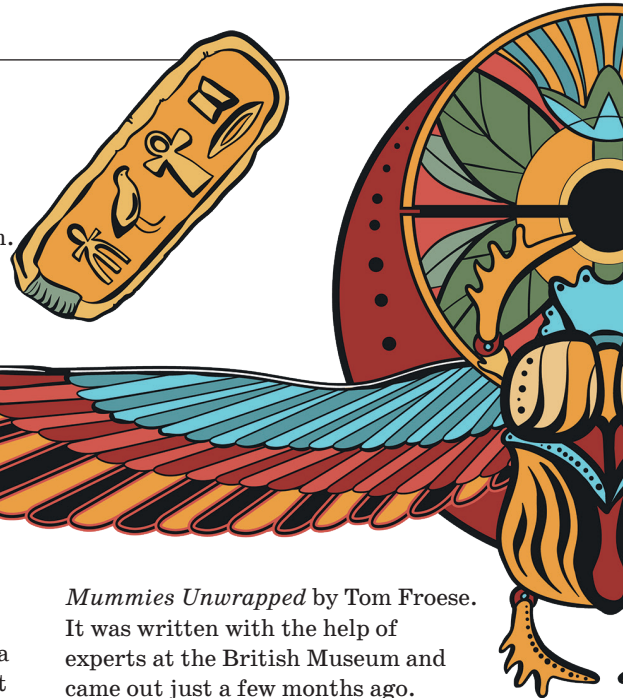
Discuss with your class the fact that some Egyptian archaeologists have asked for the Rosetta Stone to be returned. Children could prepare a debate, with speakers for and against giving back the stone. (For your own edification, James Acaster's routine on this subject is a YouTube gem.)

### Marvellous Mummies

In chapter eight of the book, Mo and his friends visit the mummy galleries, which again you can explore via Streetview. The chapter focuses on Tjayasetimu, a singer in the royal choir, who was only eight years old when she died. Of all the mummies in the British Museum, this one is the most relatable for children. Show pictures of the mummy case, and then, if appropriate, show CT scans of Tjayasetimu's face.

This is a good route into a frank discussion of mummies and our reactions to them. Why do we so often respond to mummies with fear and loathing, or with corny jokes? Acknowledge such responses but try to help children move beyond them.

My favourite non-fiction children's book about mummies is



*Mummies Unwrapped* by Tom Froese. It was written with the help of experts at the British Museum and came out just a few months ago.

### Activities Hieroglyphs

In chapter five, Mo and his friends get their first lesson in Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. Put the puzzle on page 29 of the book under a visualiser and challenge your class to decipher the inscription. Then hand out a simple hieroglyphic alphabet and get each child writing their own name inside a cartouche. Collect their hieroglyphic names, split the class into two or three teams and display the cartouches one by one – contestants 'buzz' to answer and get points for correct guesses. This activity familiarises children with the whole hieroglyphic alphabet, not just the glyphs in their own name.

Chapter five ends with a boisterous game of Basket Lion Viper. Mo's friend Kelvin notices that the first three hieroglyphs of his name can be used as an Ancient Egyptian version of Rock Paper Scissors. Basket traps Viper, Viper bites Lion and Lion mauls Basket. As a two-minute filler, let

## Take it further →→→

### Recreate the thrill

The discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb was in fact a whole series of electrifying moments: finding the first step... digging frantically... noticing the royal seal on the first door... clearing the rubble... piercing the top left corner of the second door... lifting the candle to peer into the antechamber of the tomb...

"Can you see anything?"

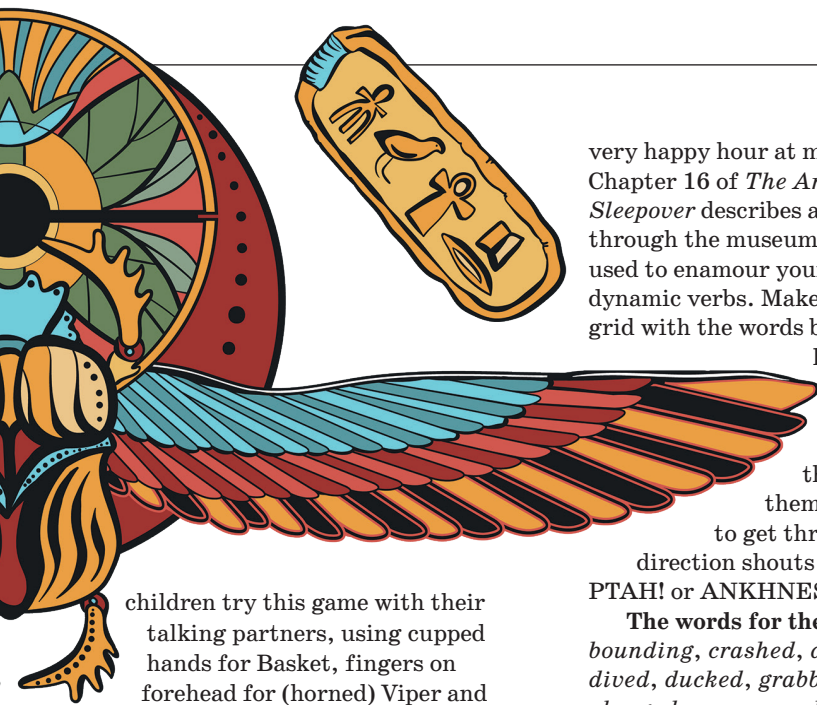
"Yes. Wonderful things!"

It is one thing for pupils to learn this sequence of events but quite another for them to feel the sheer spine-tingling delight of it all. What can we do to recreate that thrill in a classroom setting? Drama, of course, and a little bit of set design.

Recently, I visited a Year 4 classroom which had been transformed into the Valley of the Kings, with an improvised tomb at the back. Both the valley and the tomb were made of desks and display paper, all very

low-budget. One girl read the narrator's lines from *The Tutankhamun Experience* (the italicised paragraphs in chapters nine and 10 of *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover*) and the other members of the class were workmen, basket boys and girls, officials, journalists, villagers and photographers, plus Carter, Carnarvon and the all-important water boy.

When it came time for Howard Carter (aka Rory) to enter the tomb, he made a small tear in the display paper, flicked on his



children try this game with their talking partners, using cupped hands for Basket, fingers on forehead for (horned) Viper and outstretched claws for Lion. Basket Lion Viper could become a running joke in your classroom, as well, as a non-violent way to resolve disputes.

### Detective notebook

At the sleepover, Mo meets a distinguished professor of Egyptology called Maria van Tam, but he begins to distrust her after she gives a wildly incorrect date for a coffin. Give everyone a page from a 'detective's notebook' with the heading *Maria van Tam: Prime Suspect*. As you read the book together, encourage children to make a note of anything suspicious which Maria says or does. By the end of chapter seven, they should have at least six pieces of incriminating evidence against the fake professor.

### Writing a chase scene

I love chase scenes. Give me a hero, a villain, a memorable location and a MacGuffin, and I will spend a

very happy hour at my keyboard. Chapter 16 of *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover* describes a foot chase through the museum and can be used to enamour your pupils with dynamic verbs. Make a 4x4 bingo grid with the words below and

let students tick off the words as you read the chapter to them. First child to get three lines in any direction shouts BINGO! or PTAH! or ANKHNESNEFERIBRA!

**The words for the grid are:**

*bounding, crashed, dashed, dived, ducked, grabbed, jumping, plunged, ran, scrambled, seized, skidded, slipped, snatching, sprinted, staggered.*

After reading the chapter, challenge children to write a chase scene of their own, using plenty of strong verbs. Because they are only creating one scene,



## Loved this? Try these...

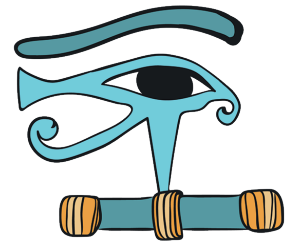
- ❖ *The Curse of the Tomb Robbers* by Andy Seed
- ❖ *The Story of Tutankhamun* by Patricia Cleveland-Peck
- ❖ *Casting the Gods Adrift* by Geraldine McCaughrean
- ❖ *The Nile Adventures* (series) by Saviour Pirotta

and coming soon...

- ❖ *Myths, Mummies and Mayhem in Ancient Egypt* by Stephen Davies and Núria Tamarit (March 2023)

there is no need for extensive planning or characterisation.

For another writing activity, children could do a newspaper report about the extraordinary holographic exhibition in chapters nine and 10: imagine that you were one of the 99 children to enter The Tutankhamun Experience that night. Convey the sights, sounds and smells of the exhibition to readers of the newspaper. **TP**



*Stephen Davies lives in London and enjoys visiting primary schools to conduct Ancient Egypt-themed writing workshops.*

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battery-powered candle, peered inside and gasped. The children all took their turn, approaching the tomb in an oddly silent queue, their cheeks slack with anticipation. Each one of them gasped – they couldn't help themselves.

When my turn came, I gasped as well. Even though the mummy looked like a row of cushions with a sheet on top, and even though the canopic jars looked like painted yoghurt pots, and even though the necklaces and bracelets were from Claire's Accessories, I still gasped. I will never forget that moment, and nor will the children.

### Wonderful things

Ancient Egyptians were consummate artists, and this topic lends itself perfectly to art of all sorts. Instead of everyone making the same thing, why not split the children into groups, with the purpose of blinging your makeshift tomb?

For Tutankhamun's death mask, cut out a cardboard headdress, beard and collarpiece, then tape them back and front to a rigid paper mask. Cover the whole with two layers of papier maché, leave to dry, then paint the whole thing with yellow or metallic

gold paint. When the golden base is dry, add features and decorations with black, light blue, dark blue and dark red paint. Attempting a 3D cobra (*wadjet*) and vulture (*nekhbet*) is a recipe for tears, so paint these along with the other details!

The canopic jar team can use modelling clay to mould a jackal head (*Duamutef*), a baboon head (*Hapy*), a falcon head (*Qebehseuef*) and a human head (*Imsety*). Leave five days for the clay to dry, then glue the heads to yoghurt pot lids and cover the pots and lids with three layers of papier mache. Leave to dry again, then paint. Voila!