

Egyptian funerary practices

Lesson Map: <http://esriaustralia.com.au/education/SpatialActivity98>

Engage

Historical context: religious beliefs, funerary practices and historical evidence

- Click on the map URL above to open the StoryMap. The title page will be displayed. Scroll down to the section titled *Historical Context* to begin.
- This Story Map also has a navigation panel at the top of the page, which allows users to quickly jump to specific aspects of the Story Map.
- Read the information. Take notes if required and stop to discuss if necessary.
- Scroll down to the section titled *Available sources*. Read the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary.

Explore

Why was the afterlife?

- Scroll down to the major heading titled *The Afterlife*. The section below this contains five slides. You can navigate between each slide by pressing the left or right arrows.
- As you read through the information on each slide, take notes if required and stop to discuss as necessary. As you progress through the slides, write definitions for the following terms:

Historical term	Definition
Ra	<i>The Egyptian sun-god.</i>
Funerary text	<i>A variety of directions, guidelines, spells and recitations that were buried with the dead, the purpose of which was to help them reach the afterlife.</i>
Afterlife	<i>The place that Egyptians went to after death. The Afterlife presented them with an opportunity to live a second life and escape oblivion.</i>

- ? When you reach the fifth slide ('What did the afterlife look like?') examine the image. The Afterlife was considered a perfect version of everyday life. After observing the image, what activities appear to be central to the everyday life of Egyptians?
[Farming, looking after livestock, trading and business, gathering water, and scribing]

Download student worksheet [here](#).

Time
60 minutes

Activity

Investigate Egyptian funerary practices.

Learning Outcome

Students will be able to:

- Understand and comprehend various aspects of Egyptian funerary practices
- Analyse and evaluate primary and secondary sources
- Synthesise evidence from sources to justify responses

ACARA Curriculum Link

Year 7 History: The Mediterranean World

[ACDSEH032](#) | [ACDSEH033](#) | [ACHHS206](#) | [ACHHS209](#) | [ACHHS210](#) | [ACHHS211](#) | [ACHHS213](#)

Senior Ancient History

Teacher Feedback:

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all appear to be activities that were regularly carried out by Egyptians daily.]

Explain

What was the purpose of funeral preparations?

- Scroll down to the major heading titled *Funeral preparations*.
- Scroll down to the sub-heading titled *Mummification*. Read through the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary. As you progress through the slides, write definitions for the following terms:

Historical term	Definition
Canopic jars	<i>Ceramic jars that the deceased's organs were placed in for preservation.</i>
Ma'at	<i>The Egyptian goddess of truth.</i>
Weighing of the heart ceremony	<i>The deceased's heart was weighed on a scale against a feather of Ma'at. If the heart weighed the same or lighter than the feather, the deceased passed judgement and was granted admittance to the afterlife.</i>

- **Read and interrogate Herodotus' written account of the embalming process (mummification). Then, respond to the questions below.**
- ? According to Herodotus, how many methods of embalming are there? What does Herodotus refer to when distinguishing between each method? *[According to Herodotus, there are three methods of embalming. He distinguishes between each method by referring to the costs and expenses involved in each process. It appears that there was a process for the upper classes, middle classes and lower classes.]*
- ? Read the first process of embalming. Make a numbered list of the steps involved in this process from beginning to finish.
 1. *The brain is removed from the nostrils, first with a crooked piece of iron, and then with a rinsing of drugs.*
 2. *An incision is made along the side of the abdomen with a knife and all bodily organs are removed. These organs are cleansed with palm wine and aromatics.*
 3. *The bodily cavity is filled with spices (myrrh, cassia etc.) and then the incision is sewed up.*
 4. *The body is completely covered up with salt for 70 days, which acts to dehydrate the body of liquids.*
 5. *After this time, the body is washed, wrapped up in bandages of linen, and handed back to the deceased's family members.*
- Scroll down to the next sub-heading titled *Funerary rituals – the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony*. Read through the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary.
- Scroll down to the next sub-heading titled *Funerary rituals – funerary texts*. Read

through the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary.

- ? Explain the difference between Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts. [*Pyramid Texts were for exclusive use in pharaonic burials in the Old Kingdom. These texts accompanied the pharaoh in his burial chamber to protect and guide the body to the afterlife. In the Middle Kingdom period, funerary texts were no longer reserved for just the pharaohs; spells were recorded on the inside walls of the coffins and tombs of wealthy families and high-ranking officials to aid their journey to the afterlife. These became known as Coffin Texts.*]
- ? What was the Book of the Dead? [*The Book of the Dead was a collection of nearly 200 spells designed to guide the dead to the afterlife and provide instruction for living in the afterlife. The spells were available to any individual or family but were costly. The wealthier a family, the more spells they could afford to have copied to the walls of their tombs or coffins.*]
- Scroll down to the next sub-heading titled *Funerary rituals – funerary goods*. Read through the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary.

Extend

The reality of funerary preparations for everyday Egyptians | Source interrogation

- Scroll down to the major heading titled *The rich and the poor*. Read through the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary.
- ? Read the source. How did the less wealthy classes and the poor compromise on funerary preparations made for dead family members? [*Only the powerful and wealthy could afford more costly, complex, and extensive funerary practices. For the lower classes, providing a burial and preserving the dead was important but shortcuts were often taken. Baines and Lacovara (2002), provide evidence of this by stating that the less wealthy often provided 'empty food containers' as funerary goods and that 'only a semblance of the embalming necessary to preserve a body might [actually] be carried out.'*]
- Scroll down to the next heading titled *Death and life*. Read the information and take notes if required. Stop to discuss as necessary.
- **The instructions outlined below are for an extension activity (source interrogation). Only complete this if your teacher has instructed you to.**
- Scroll down to the next heading titled *Extension activity*. Read the task, the source

context, and sources before planning and creating a response.

- ? In a paragraph response, evaluate the usefulness of Herodotus' and Diodorus Siculus' accounts of embalming (mummification) in Ancient Egypt. Refer to the checklist on the Story Map to ensure you cover everything. *[Student responses will vary but modelled paragraph provided below. Scale to a Year 7 response as required.]*

*Herodotus' and Diodorus' accounts of the Egyptian mummification process are quite useful to historians. Both accounts are **relevant** as they provide an insight into three different levels of the embalming process, which is **representative** of how wealth and social status in Egypt influenced the method of one's embalming after death, the thought being that the better preserved one's body was, the more likely they would be successful in living in the afterlife. Furthermore, both sources are useful in that they are relatively **reliable** as Herodotus and Diodorus visited Egypt themselves and witnessed the embalming processes **first-hand**, recording what they saw. Some concerns may exist around the **accuracy** of the sources as both Herodotus and Diodorus were foreigners and may have misinterpreted some of the practices or beliefs, or read into them from their own belief systems however, this does not appear to impact on either extract as both sources provide mostly **factual**, step-by-step explanations of the embalming processes whilst avoiding resorting to their opinions. Most notably however, is that despite the sources being written almost 400 years apart – Herodotus in 440 BCE and Diodorus in 36 – 30 BCE – they **corroborate** on many of the points. For example, both mention that there were three levels of embalming and that these were based on wealth. They also describe the most expensive method of embalming, and their descriptions are almost identical. This reinforces the accuracy of the details communicated in each source and allows historians to gain a rather reliable insight into the Egyptian embalming process and how it has, or hasn't, changed over 400 years.*

Next Steps:

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