

Lesson Plan: Mummy Case

Summary

The presenter pulls an Egyptian mummy case and explains the difference between a body shaped inner case and a larger outer sarcophagus. They discuss why curses and inscriptions were meant for protection, not horror, and how other cultures honored preserved ancestors without fear. They explore oldest examples, large burial sites with many coffins, and a rabbit hole on self mummifying monks. Personal reflections on dignity, funeral practice, and memory underline that remembrance is what lasts.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/XteDxNX9YYk?si=Knm94dwWeydKGlQc>

Objective

Students will distinguish between a mummy case and a sarcophagus, describe cultural purposes of mummification, and reflect on how remembrance practices shape meaning in communities.

Standards

- CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.RI.8.1, Cite the textual evidence that supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly.
- NGSS MS-LS4-2, Apply scientific ideas to construct an explanation for similarities and differences in patterns.
- C3 D2.His.2.6-8, Classify series of historical events and developments as examples of change and continuity.

Materials

- 9 Fun Facts list
- Worksheet
- Optional, projector or printed images of mummy cases and sarcophagi
- Optional, whiteboard or chart paper and markers

Introduction

Activate prior knowledge by asking students what comes to mind when they hear the word mummy. Prompt them to separate movie imagery from cultural practice. Introduce the terms mummy case and sarcophagus and explain that the lesson uses a short set of facts and a reflection activity to compare practices and purposes.

Activity

- 1) Vocabulary and distinctions, students define mummy case and sarcophagus in their own words after hearing the summary.
- 2) Jigsaw reading, divide the 9 Fun Facts among small groups, each group paraphrases one fact and identifies the key takeaway.
- 3) Compare and contrast, whole class creates a two column list of protective purposes versus entertainment myths.
- 4) Reflection quickwrite, students write three to five sentences on how remembrance practices shape meaning in their own families or communities.

Assessment

Formative, teacher circulates during jigsaw and compare and contrast to check accuracy.

Exit ticket, one sentence that distinguishes a mummy case from a sarcophagus plus one cultural insight about preservation.

Worksheet, completed and turned in.

Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Content Understanding	Accurately explains terms, purposes, and cultural differences with clear examples	Mostly accurate with minor gaps	Partial understanding with notable gaps	Inaccurate or missing explanations
Discussion Participation	Contributes multiple relevant points and builds on others	Contributes at least once with relevance	Limited participation, needs prompting	No participation or off task
Worksheet Completion	All items answered clearly with evidence from the facts	Most items complete and mostly clear	Some items incomplete or unclear	Few items complete or off topic
Technology Connections	Uses optional media or visuals to support points clearly	Uses media with minor relevance issues	Minimal or unclear use of media	No use of media when appropriate

9 Fun Facts

1. A mummy case is an inner body-hugging shell, while a sarcophagus is an outer coffin, often stone. Museums describe mummy cases as cartonnage shells that fit closely around the wrapped body, sometimes molded to human form and painted with symbolic imagery. These cases were placed inside larger wooden or stone coffins for protection. A sarcophagus, usually carved from stone, served as the outermost layer, often decorated to honor the deceased's status or beliefs about the afterlife. The mummy case was personal, while the sarcophagus was public and monumental.

<https://www.spurlock.illinois.edu/exhibits/online/mummification/artifacts6.html>

2. Cartonnage mummy cases appear by about 2000 BCE in Egypt. The British Museum notes that body-shaped cases made of linen or papyrus mixed with plaster began appearing in the Middle Kingdom. These materials allowed artists to paint vivid faces, jewelry, and protective spells directly onto the case. Over time, artisans layered them like papier-mâché, creating durable shells that could survive thousands of years in dry tombs. Their craftsmanship shows how Egyptian funerary art evolved from simple boxes to lifelike portraits of the dead.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/galleries/egyptian-death-and-afterlife-mummies/aswan-cartonnage>

3. There is no master count of mummy cases, but single sites yield hundreds of coffins. At Saqqara, one of Egypt's most active excavation sites, archaeologists recently uncovered more than 450 sealed sarcophagi. Each one contains a mummy from Egypt's Late Period, with bright colors and inscriptions still visible after 2,500 years. The find reveals how mass production of coffins supported the burial industry for priests and middle-class citizens, not just royalty. Excavations continue, suggesting thousands more may still lie buried in the same region.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/archaeologists-unveil-hundreds-of-sarcophagi-at-saqqara-and-theyre-not-done-yet-180980168/>

4. The oldest intentional mummification might predate Egypt by several thousand years. Recent evidence from northern Chile shows that hunter-gatherers were smoke-drying their dead as early as 10,000 years ago. The remains show deliberate cuts, ash residues, and reshaped skeletons, indicating that the bodies were prepared with purpose, not just preserved by climate. These people lived long before the Chinchorro culture, which was already famous for elaborate clay-covered mummies. This discovery may push back the timeline for deliberate mummification to 10,000 BCE.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/the-worlds-oldest-mummies-might-be-these-smoke-dried-12000-year-old-skeletons-from-south-america-180987348/>

5. Mummification is a full religious preservation process, while embalming is one technique within it. In ancient Egypt, mummification meant more than drying a body, it was a sacred ritual tied to rebirth and protection in the afterlife. Priests removed moisture using natron, applied resins and oils, wrapped the body in linen, and performed spells during the process. Modern embalming, by contrast, focuses mainly on delaying decay for a short period, such as for funerals or transport. Ancient mummification aimed for eternity, while modern embalming is practical and temporary.

<https://www.si.edu/spotlight/ancient-egypt/mummies>

6. Egypt holds the greatest concentration of documented mummies in the world.

Archaeologists estimate that over the course of three thousand years, Egyptians may have mummified as many as seventy million people. Mummification became so common that even pets, cats, ibises, and crocodiles, were preserved to serve spiritual roles. The dry climate of Egypt and the meticulous sealing of tombs made it the ideal environment for long-term preservation. This tradition of careful burial left behind one of the largest archaeological records in human history.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/afterlife-ancient-egypt/>

7. Outside Egypt, preserved ancestors were usually honored, not feared. In the Andes, mummies were viewed as living members of the community rather than corpses to be feared. Families brought them to festivals, dressed them in fine clothes, and offered food as if they were still alive. These preserved ancestors were thought to bring wisdom and protection to the living. It's a sharp contrast to the Western "mummy's curse" stories that dominate popular culture.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/fascinating-afterlife-perus-mummies-180956319/>

8. Some Buddhist monks once practiced self-mummification to achieve

enlightenment. In Japan, a few monks followed the sokushinbutsu path, which involved years of meditation, fasting, and consuming tree resin to dry the body from within. When they finally died, their preserved bodies were enshrined as living Buddhas, symbols of discipline and spiritual perfection. The practice is now banned and extremely rare, but several of these monks remain on display in temples today. Their preservation stands as both devotion and endurance in physical form.

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/sokushinbutsu>

9. Reports of "still meditating" monks reflect belief and unusual preservation, not verified life. Modern examples, like the Mongolian monk found in 2015 and the Russian lama Dashi-Dorzho Itigilov, show remarkably intact bodies seated in meditation. Followers see them as continuing their practice in an enlightened state called thukdam, where consciousness lingers after death. Scientific studies have found no brain activity but acknowledge the preservation is extraordinary. These figures sit at the crossroads of faith, science, and the mystery of decay.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/mummy-deador-trance-180954170/>

Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Review

- 1) Define mummy case and sarcophagus in your own words.
- 2) According to the facts, what materials were used to make Egyptian mummy cases durable and decorative?

Discussion

- 3) How do the Andean practices with preserved ancestors differ from fear based stories about Egyptian tombs?
- 4) What purposes did mummification serve beyond simple preservation?

Data Analysis

- 5) Choose one fact with numbers or time periods and explain what that scale tells you about the culture that produced it.
- 6) Based on the facts, list two conditions that help long term preservation and explain why.

Reflection

- 7) Which remembrance practice from the facts best matches values in your community and why?
- 8) Write two or three sentences about how memory can act as a kind of afterlife for a person.