



Contexts for Conservation

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“The Wrap on Mummies” Using the story of Tutankhamen to Introduce Conservation and Science to Children

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Abstract

Artlab Australia has developed an innovative program for school groups linked to the Australian Curriculum for History and Science with the objective of introducing children aged 10-14 to conservation and science concepts in a fun and engaging manner. The story of ancient Egyptian mummies, and in particular Tutankhamen, has always excited and engaged children. Using role play, conservators at Artlab introduce the children to the story of Tutankhamen and then lead them to the Ancient Egypt gallery in the Museum to investigate the two Egyptian mummies on display. The mummies were examined using a CT scanner and a detailed forensic analysis undertaken to learn more about their lives and deaths.

The face of one of the mummies has been re-created from the scans by an artist. Hieroglyphics on the sarcophagus of one of the mummies provides clues the children which they use in an activity to piece together broken tablets with messages and translate the hieroglyphics. The message relates to Bastet the cat god and a reproduction of a mummified cat is shown to the students who are asked the question: “Is it real or fake?” Using inspection, analysis and logic, the students must determine the authenticity of the mummy.

A modification of this program was also used to engage students at Aboriginal schools in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in northern South Australia. The difference in language skills and educational levels were taken into account so that the program was more accessible. Using costume and props, the children made a classmate into the mummy of Tutankhamen providing them with an engaging ‘hands on’ educational experience.

Keywords

Egypt, Tutankhamen, Hieroglyphics, South Australian Museum, Australian Curriculum

Introduction

Artlab has been actively involved in promoting conservation to school children for over 10 years. The aim of the program is to raise awareness of conservation in a focussed and targeted way reaching as many students as possible with the limited resources available. Artlab undertakes these activities both independently including presenting during National Science Week and as part of the South Australian Museum (SAM) Out of the Glass Case Roadshow program. Joining with SAM has allowed Artlab to leverage resources optimising opportunities. The Roadshow program involves staff travelling to schools and communities within South Australia from as far as Mt Gambier in the south east to the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in the far north and Artlab staff have joined the Museum on many of these trips. The Roadshows aim to provide innovative outreach programs to engage children, students and adults of all ages with a high level of engagement with up to date scientific research, including interactive experience with the Museum's collections. These experiences provide a chance for face to face access with experts in their field and opportunities for discussions on career pathways in science, natural history and cultures. Art lab's objectives for the school program align very closely with those of the Museum and we have developed the program "The wRap on Mummies" in close conjunction with them using examples from the Museums Egyptian collection. The children are provided with hands-on experiences using costume and objects related to the topic. Obviously it is not possible to use real Egyptian objects so replicas were constructed with every attempt made to make them as interesting and engaging as possible.

"The Wrap on Mummies"

The story of ancient Egyptian mummies, and in particular Tutankhamen, has always excited and engaged children. The Australian Curriculum for Science and History in Australian schools frequently introduces the history of Egypt over 4000 years ago. The program is presented using three sections. Breaking up the program increases student engagement and allows the timing of the presentation to be flexible. Using role play, conservators dress as Lord Carnarvon and his daughter Lady Evelyn. Lord Carnarvon was the benefactor of Howard Carter the Egyptologist who located Tutankhamen's tomb in the Valley of the Kings in 1922. They initially ask the students what kind of work these people did and what they discovered in 1922 that made them the most famous people on earth. The student that provides the best answer is then asked to assist the presenters. The student is provided with a costume to dress as Howard Carter. The presenters talk about the story of Tutankhamen as if they were actually there and with the assistance of Power Point illustrations, lead the class to the Ancient Egypt gallery in the Museum to investigate the two Egyptian mummies on display. The mummies were examined using a CT scanner and a detailed forensic analysis undertaken to learn more about their lives and deaths. This part of the program concludes when "Howard Carter" reveals the plaster cast face of one of the mummies that has been re-created from the mummy scans by an artist.

The next part of the program engages the students in hands-on activities and is less reliant on the children just listening. Hieroglyphics on the sarcophagus of one of the mummies from the Museum was discussed in the previous part of the program. The students are divided into 4 small groups and invited to piece together broken tablets buried in tubs of sand and translate the hieroglyphic messages on them. Each group pieces together a tablet and then report back on the messages they find. Each message is

slightly different but all relate to Bastet the cat god. The students are asked to guess what Bastet might be?

In the final part of the program, the students are presented with a reproduction sarcophagus. The students are asked to look at the hieroglyphics on the outside of the sarcophagus which are also on the tablets and asked what might be inside. They are invited to open the sarcophagus to reveal a reproduction mummy. The students pass it around and try to guess what it is. "Is it real or fake?" Using inspection, analysis and logic the students must determine the authenticity of the mummy. The reproduction contains an actual dead cat and the x-rays and CT scan of the reproduction are shown and compared with photographs, x-rays and scans made from those of the Egyptian mummified cats from the Museum's collection. The reproduction contains an "amulet" of a man on a horse back and the children think about whether the ancient Egyptians rode horses. The students look at Google images of horses in Egypt and discover that all of the images show horses with chariots.

The students decide /debate whether it is a fake or real mummy and they generally decide that it is in fact a mummified cat but it is not an Egyptian mummified cat. The presenters then confirm the findings of the class and confess to having made the mummified cat as a prop and explain to the students that they made it to show them how a scientist or a conservator interprets the evidence and draw conclusions about old artefacts or artworks.

The session is wrapped up by asking if the students know what happened to Lord Carnarvon. Within weeks of the tomb's official opening, Lord Carnarvon died suddenly from blood poisoning resulting from a mosquito bite and this led to speculations of the tomb being cursed. The acting Lord Carnarvon humorously points out the dangers of shaving and the fact that Howard Carter, Lady Evelyn and numerous Egyptians also entered the tomb and they did not die. The students enjoy the speculation about what happened and it is a good light hearted way to end the session. Questions are encouraged throughout the sessions and the interaction with students ensures the success of the program.

APY Lands Program

The program as described relies on some general knowledge of Egyptian mummies and Tutankhamen. It also relies on the children sitting and listening particularly during the first section. When the program was first introduced to the APY lands schools in 2010 it became clear that the assumption of prior knowledge of Egyptian mummies could not be made. Also many of the students do not speak English as a first language and sitting and listening was less engaging and a different approach was required. The program was altered for the trip made to the APY lands in 2012. The presenters introduce themselves as Lord Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn and tell the students about Egypt including a map showing it in relation to Australia and talk about what they found in 1922. One student is asked to join the presenters and dresses as Howard Carter.

The notion of the importance of afterlife to Egyptians is introduced and when Tutankhamen died as a boy how important it was to prepare him for his next life. The preparation of a mummy is acted out using costume. One student is dressed as Anubis the Jackal priest, the maker of mummies. Another wears a mummy costume. "Anubis" with the assistance of the presenters and "Howard Carter" prepare the third student to

become the mummy of Tutankhamen. Fake body organs and the brain of the mummy are removed. The prop heart is weighed on scales by “Anubis” with a prop feather which is rigged to be heavier than the heart and to see if the student can pass to the afterlife. Finally the “mummy” puts on a replica of the famous gold mask and the mummy is prepared.

Power Point is used to show photos of the tomb of Tutankhamen and they see that the mummy they just made looks very much like the real one reinforcing the learning and providing an understanding of Egyptian belief on the after life.

The rest of the program is similar to that previously described. However the tablets were modified so they only included three or four words and much stronger painted patterns, graphic lines and colours. The students were also provided with “Rosetta Stones”. These were sheets of paper with the translations of the tablets written in Hieroglyphics, Pitjantjatjara and English. After completing piecing the tablet together students had to find the “Rosetta Stone” with the hieroglyphics that matched their tablet and then translate the text using whichever language they were most familiar.

Summary

The story of the discovery of Tutankhamen tomb remains universally fascinating for young and old. The adaptation of this story using props, role play and hands on activities has proven to be an extremely engaging vehicle to communicate conservation and science concepts to children. The story engages children of widely different age groups and levels of learning. The program remains flexible and where possible the props and tools can be easily modified to suit different groups. Using the South Australian Museums collection has enabled links between both Artlab and the Museum introducing students to our shared but varied roles in the cultural sector.

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Biography of Authors

Kristin Phillips

Kristin holds a Bachelor of Applied Science from the University of Canberra and is presently the Principal Conservator of Textiles at Artlab Australia where she has been employed for 23 years. She is responsible for the conservation of textile collections belonging to the Art Gallery of South Australia, the South Australian Museum, the History South Australia, the State Library of South Australia and Carrick Hill. Conservation for private individuals is also part of her brief.

Justin Gare

Originally a Carpenter and Joiner, Justin retrained as an Objects Conservator at the University of Canberra. He has worked as a conservator at Artlab since 2001. He retains an enduring interest in Furniture and Built Heritage.

List of Illustrations

1. Showing Students the mummified cat
2. Piecing together the broken tablet
3. Making the mummy of Tutankhamen with students in the APY Lands



Fig 1: Showing Students the mummified cat



Fig 2: Piecing together the broken tablet



Fig 3: Making the mummy of Tutankhamen with students in the APY Lands