

Materials of ancient Egypt



Key Stage 2 Education Workshop

Support Notes for Teachers

Workshop structure

The session consists of a sequence of interactive activities which will enable pupils to learn about a range of different types of materials used in ancient Egypt, handle examples of these materials and discover how ancient Egyptian materials have survived over the millennia by a visit to the galleries.

- **Introduction:** The session opens with a general introduction to ancient Egypt, the environment, climate and conditions. During this introduction the pupils will have the opportunity to explore in methods of mummification and preservation of materials.
- **Object handling:** Pupils will explore examples of materials used for making coffins, tombs, pyramids, pottery and jewellery and using enquiry skills discover what the materials are, what the sources of the material are and why these materials were used in ancient Egypt.
- **Gallery activity:** The next part of the session provides an opportunity for the pupils to engage in looking at the materials used for the objects in the ancient Egyptian galleries. Using a key, students will identify objects in the gallery in terms of the source of material used (animal, mineral or plant) and record the types of materials and their properties and decide why these materials were used for specific objects.

Plenary: The session closes with a chance for the pupils to talk about their findings and discuss why some materials used in ancient Egypt are no longer commonly used today as many 'natural' materials have been replaced with synthetic or manufactured materials.

Important Note: Object Conservation

During the course of the workshop the pupils will be handling a range of replica and real objects. Some of these objects are drawn from the collection of the Department of Ancient Egypt and the Sudan at the British Museum. The Museum would, therefore, very much appreciate it if pupils attending the workshop could wash and dry their hands before the start of the session to help conserve the objects being handled.

As some of the handling objects are composed of metal we recommend that pupils also wash their hands after the session, particularly if they are due to go straight into their lunch break.

Before the visit

Key themes covered by this workshop are materials and their properties and the preservation methods used by the ancient Egyptians.

Before the day of your visit you may like to talk to the pupils about the historical background to the session covering information such as location of Egypt, the environment of ancient Egypt and the customs of the ancient Egyptians.

No prior knowledge of ancient Egyptian materials will be expected of the pupils as this is one of the areas explored during the workshop. You may, however, like to talk to the pupils about modern day materials in terms of properties and their uses and if the materials are natural or manufactured/ synthetic.

You may like to group objects found in the classroom with your pupils into categories such as glass, metal, fibre, plastics etc and look at their properties (such as waterproof, transparent, flexible) . Classroom investigations can be carried out recording the effects of heat, humidity and burial of different types of materials (such as natural and synthetic objects) over a day and through to a week.

Ancient Egyptian objects in The British Museum

There are many objects from ancient Egypt on display in The British Museum.

A good starting point is the COMPASS website at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass

Where you can search for objects from ancient Egypt in the Museum collections.

There is a children's COMPASS website at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/childrenscompass

Below are a few key galleries which you may like to include as part of your visit.

Gallery 61: Understanding ancient Egyptian culture

A range of objects relating to past and present cultural life in Egypt.

Gallery 62: Roxie Walker Galleries of Egyptian Funerary Archaeology

Objects relating to ancient Egyptian burial practices and mummies.

Gallery 64: Early Egypt

Objects from the predynastic period including an early sand-dried mummy.

Gallery 65: Egypt and Africa

Objects from ancient Nubia

Follow-up activities

All work produced by pupils during the workshop is available back at school.

A survey of materials could be followed up in several ways:

- Pupils could report their findings in pie charts, bar charts etc to show what sorts of materials survive most commonly. They could then consider that the reasons for this have to do with the nature of the material, as well as the role of preservation on graves.
- Pupils could consider the technologies required to produce the range of objects and materials found. This could lead to further research in woodworking, metalworking, stone carving, pottery making and basket and textile weaving

Curriculum Links

Workshop activities cover a range of scientific concepts and link in particular to the aspects of the National Curriculum listed below.

National Curriculum for Science at Key Stage 2

Programme of Study: Characteristics of Materials

Pupils should be taught: that every material has characteristics or properties which can be identified. Use appropriate vocabulary to describe some of these properties.

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