

# The Mystery of King Tut

*A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book*  
*Word Count: 3,018*

## Connections

### Writing

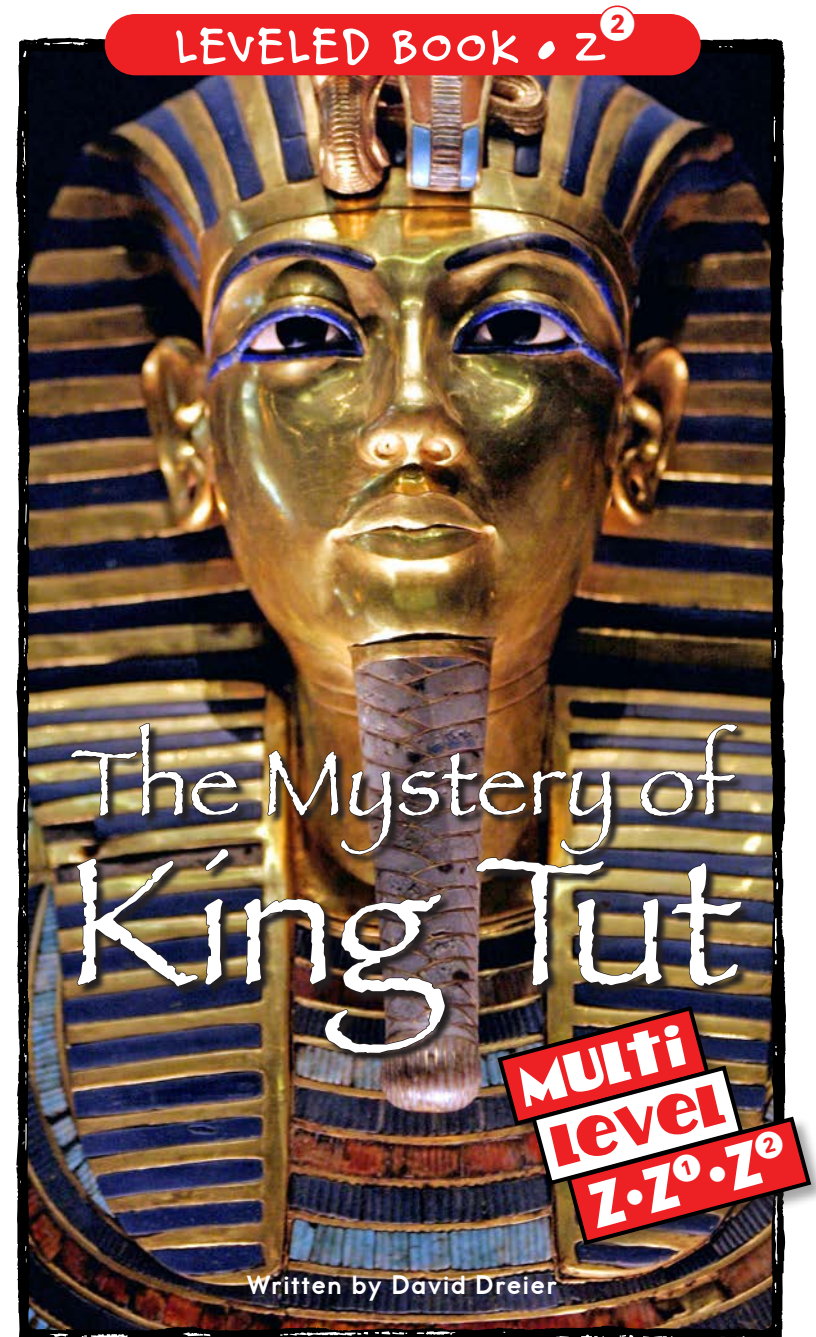
Write a report about King Tut that includes answers to the following questions. What did you already know about King Tut? What new information did you learn from this book? As a scientist, how would you find the answers to questions you still have?

### Social Studies

Use information from the book and outside research to create King Tut's family tree.

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# The Mystery of King Tut



King Tut's sarcophagus

Written by David Dreier

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## Focus Question

Who was King Tut, and why was he important?

## Words to Know

archaeologist	papyrus
deities	pharaoh
deterioration	postmortem
dynasties	protruding
embalmed	remnants
headdress	sarcophagus
hieroglyphics	terminated
inscription	unrestricted
monotheist	vast

Front cover: The front of King Tutankhamun's funeral mask, one of the treasures found in his tomb

Page 3: British archaeologist Howard Carter, who discovered the tomb of King Tut, examines the golden sarcophagus during the excavation.

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## Correlation

### LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



## Finding Tut

On November 4, 1922, a British **archaeologist** (AR-kee-OLL-oh-jist) made a fantastic discovery in the Valley of the Kings in the country of Egypt. He found the tomb of Tutankhamun (toot-an-KAH-muhn), better known as King Tut. Tut ruled ancient Egypt more than 3,300 years ago, becoming **pharaoh** (FAIR-oh) at the age of nine. He ruled for less than a decade before dying suddenly at about age nineteen. In the years since the discovery of Tut's burial, many have wondered how and why the young king died.

Just like detectives, archaeologists try to solve mysteries by looking at the evidence and by asking questions. Finding the answers is often difficult. It's a little bit like putting together a jigsaw puzzle that has many pieces missing. Archaeologists use more than just the things left behind: the tomb, the body, and the belongings of the person. They also use texts and documents written on **papyrus** and carved in stone, which might have survived the centuries, in order to answer these questions: Where did Tut live? What was his health like? Who were his family and friends? Did he have enemies? Answering questions like these may help solve the ultimate question: Why did King Tut die at such a young age?

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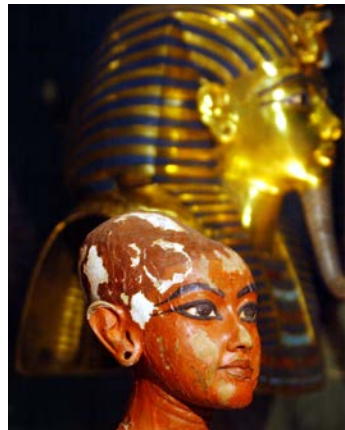


## King Tut's Homeland

Ancient Egypt was ruled for about three thousand years by a series of thirty **dynasties** (ruling families). Historians group them into historical periods called the Early Dynastic Period, the Old Kingdom, the First Intermediate Period, the Middle Kingdom, the Second Intermediate Period, the New Kingdom, the Third Intermediate Period, and the Late Period. The kingdoms are periods of strong central government, and the intermediate periods are periods of weaker central government.

King Tutankhamun was a member of the 18th Dynasty, the first ruling family of the New Kingdom, which began in about the year 1550 BC, almost two hundred years before Tut was even born.

In ancient Egypt, religious belief was an important part of daily life. Egyptians at that time worshipped hundreds of different **deities**. To understand King Tut's life and perhaps his death more completely, one must learn the history behind this religious belief.



What Tut might have looked like, with his funeral mask in background

At the beginning of the New Kingdom era, two of Egypt's most important gods were Ra (RAH) and Amun (AH-muhn). Ra was believed to live within the Sun. In images, he was often depicted as a falcon or a man with a falcon's head wearing a solar disc on his **headdress**. His main worship center was at Heliopolis, near modern-day Cairo. Amun was usually depicted as a man with a tall double-plumed headdress. His main worship center was at Thebes, near the modern city of Luxor.

During the 18th Dynasty, some Egyptians began to worship the Sun in a different way. They

began to worship an ancient symbol for the Sun, the Aten (AH-tuhn), as a new creator god and depicted him as a large golden disk with rays of light reaching out toward Earth. Those rays often **terminated** near the faces of the





Amenhotep IV

royal family in a hand holding the ankh, the symbol for life.

As Aten's power as a god grew, other gods, including Ra and Amun, were worshipped less and less by the nobility.

To most people, Aten was just another god among many and was included in some household shrines. He did not pose a threat to their religious

beliefs until a young man named Amenhotep (ah-muhn-HO-tep) IV became pharaoh.

### King Tut's Family

Amenhotep IV began his rule in 1352 BC. He has been shown in Egyptian artwork as an odd-looking man with a long face, large lips, and a **protruding** belly. There have been many theories about why depictions of him are different from the standard Egyptian style, including various diseases. Experts have not come up with an idea that everyone agrees on. Amenhotep had been raised in the new Aten religion and was a true believer in it. He saw Aten as a universal god—a god of all the people in the world, not just Egyptians.



### Queen Nefertiti

Except for Cleopatra, no other queen of Egypt is as well known as Nefertiti (neh-fer-TEE-tee). She was the favorite wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten. Nefertiti was likely stepmother to young Prince Tutankhaten (later Tutankhamun) after his mother died. Nefertiti died in her early thirties.

The pharaoh believed Aten created the world at the beginning of time, ruled over it alone, and continued to give it life through his bright rays of light. Some experts call Amenhotep IV the world's first **monotheist**. Others say that he could not be a monotheist because he acknowledged the existence of other gods but chose to worship only Aten. Amenhotep IV expected the Egyptian people to worship him, as he believed he was equal to the god. This was not accepted by the people. In their homes, they continued to worship the traditional gods, but in public they worshipped Amenhotep IV.

Early in the fifth year of his reign, the new pharaoh took a drastic step. He began a religious revolution—a sudden and complete change in the official religion of Egypt. He declared that Egyptians could worship only the Aten in public, and he changed his name to Akhenaten (ahk-eh-NAH-tuhn), which means “He Who Serves Aten.”

Akhenaten closed and tried to destroy temples where people worshipped the other gods of Egypt. In addition, all public holidays and religious festivals that were associated with gods other than Aten were forbidden. Akhenaten's severe actions upset the **vast** population that was used to worshipping many gods and angered the priesthoods of those gods. In various parts of Egypt, people tried to stop the destruction of their local temples, but the pharaoh's military was able to control them.

In addition to destroying some temples, Akhenaten ordered a new capital city built. He moved the capital to a place where nothing had ever been built. It was north of Thebes and called Akhetaten (ahk-eh-TAH-tuhn), which means "Horizon of Aten." The priests and followers of Amun called it a heresy because it went against the accepted mainstream Egyptian religion.



Today this area is called Amarna, and Akhenaten's revolution is called the Amarna Revolution.

Akhenaten and Nefertiti, possibly Tut's stepmother, with three of their children in a carving from a temple at Amarna

It was in this new capital of Egypt that King Tut was born in about 1345 BC. He was named Tutankhaten, meaning "the Living Image of Aten." In 2010, researchers used genetic tests to positively identify mummies that were Tut's parents and grandparents. Using DNA samples taken from bones, the tests established the mummy that might be Akhenaten as Tut's father and provided a five-generation family tree for the boy king. Tut's mother is shown in the testing to be a full-blood sibling to Tut's father, but further identification was not possible with the samples taken. Marriages between close relatives were common in Egyptian royal families so the family could keep their lands and the power that came with them.

Akhenaten died in 1336 BC after seventeen years of rule. What happened next is as puzzling as the other mysteries surrounding Tut's life and death. Because the ancient evidence is limited at best, many scholars have discussed several theories for the succession of the Egyptian throne. In the last century, scholars discovered evidence for the existence of two rulers who had very brief reigns after Akhenaten's death.

One of them was Smenkhkara (smen-kah-RAH), who may have been a brother of Akhenaten or



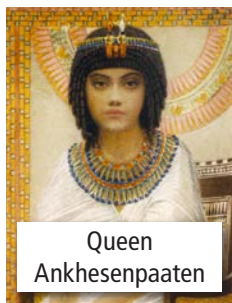
Tutankhaten. The other may have been Akhenaten's favorite wife, Nefertiti. There is not yet enough evidence to know for sure. In any case, three or four years after Akhenaten's death, the throne of Egypt was again empty, so nine-year-old Tutankhaten became pharaoh.

## The Boy Pharaoh

Before and during his reign, Tut lived the life of the wealthy. He wore gold and silver jewelry, linen clothes, perfumed oils, and makeup. Archaeologists have found all these types of items in his tomb. As pharaoh, he would have been expected to hunt with members of his royal court, often with a bow and from a moving chariot.



King Tutankhaten



Queen Ankhesenpaaten

Two chariots, nearly fifty bows, and board games, including *senet* and hounds and jackals, were placed in his tomb for his use in the afterlife.

During his reign, Tutankhaten married his half-sister Ankhesenpaaten (AHNK-eh-suhn-PAH-ah-tuhn), the third daughter of Nefertiti and Akhenaten. Ankhesenpaaten's name means "She Lives Through Aten." Tut fathered at least two daughters, but both died.

King Tut had several servants in the court. Like many servants in the household, Tut's personal attendant, Tutu, had served the family for years, since Tut's grandfather, Amenhotep III, had been king. Other servants, some even younger than King Tut, would help him with even the smallest tasks. For example, he had a cupbearer, whose job was to make sure everyone's drinking cups stayed full, especially the young king's.

Because the pharaoh was so young, the military and political work of the royal court was mostly carried out by others—two men in particular. One of them was an old man named Ay, who held the title Commander of Chariotry, one of the chief administrative advisers to the king since Akhenaten's reign. The other was an army general named Horemheb (HOR-ehm-heb), who held the title Great General of the Army, among others. Although they had both served Akhenaten, it is thought that they strongly disliked his religious reforms. The two men



hoped King Tut would bring back the old gods and their ways of worship.

Wall painting of Horemheb, an army general and adviser to King Tut



Remains of  
Akhenaten's  
city of  
Akhetaten  
built around  
1348 BC

Horemheb and Ay used their influence to persuade Tut to end the worship of Aten. They especially wanted Tut to return Amun to his former glory as chief god. Under their influence, the young king did so and changed his name from Tutankhaten to Tutankhamun, “the Living Image of Amun.” The queen also took a new name, Ankhesenamun (AHNK-eh-suhn-AH-muhn). By replacing “Aten” with “Amun” in their names, the king and his queen were showing the priests of the old ways that the royal family was abandoning the Aten religion. Historians are certain that Ay and Horemheb were the main forces behind the changes that took place during King Tut’s reign. Because he was so young, historians believe the pharaoh did as he was told.

As part of a return to the old ways, the royal court moved back to the city of Thebes. The once-thriving city of Akhetaten was left to decay in the Egyptian sun.

## End of a Dynasty

In 1327 BC, when he was about nineteen years old, King Tutankhamun died. How he died was not officially recorded in the ancient texts, so a mystery was created. The young pharaoh was mummified and buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings, a large royal cemetery near Thebes, just like all the other kings of the New Kingdom.

Because Tut had no surviving children, the throne of Egypt was open to another member of the royal court. Ay, because of his long experience in the court, became the new pharaoh and married Tut’s widow. It is the last time Ankhesenamun appears in the historical record. After ruling for just four years, Ay died in 1323 BC. Horemheb then became pharaoh.



### Do You Know?

Just like a person today might have a first, middle, and last name, pharaohs had more than one name. They had one name at birth, and when they became pharaohs they were given other names. Often these names appeared inside an oval known as a cartouche (car-TOOSH). Ancient Egyptians believed names were very powerful. They thought that by writing a person’s name on something and then breaking it, they could hurt or even kill that person.



After his sixteenth year on the throne, Horemheb ordered the destruction of everything connected with the Aten religion and Akhenaten in order to show his devotion to Amun. In Amarna and elsewhere in Egypt, his men demolished the abandoned temples of Aten. They also smashed statues of Akhenaten and his family—including those of King Tut and Ay—and gouged their names and faces from wall art. Later, workers removed the blocks of stone with the wall art from the buildings in the city and used them for construction projects in Hermopolis, a city on the other side of the Nile River near Amarna.



Archaeologists digging in Egypt's Valley of the Kings always hope to find a ruler's untouched tomb.

Horemheb ruled for twenty-seven years, dying in 1295 BC. With his death, the 18th Dynasty ended. Later, Ramses II, a great pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty whose grandfather had served with Horemheb in the Egyptian army, continued to plunder the site for building materials, completing the destruction of Amarna. The shattered **remnants** of Akhenaten's once-splendid capital were covered by drifting sand and forgotten.

### King Tut's Tomb

In the 1800s, many archaeologists went to Egypt to decipher Egyptian picture writing, called **hieroglyphics** (hy-ur-uh-GLIF-iks), that is found on many walls and monuments. From the writing, archaeologists learned much about the customs of Egypt and about its pharaohs. They learned that the tombs of pharaohs would be filled with all

### The Rosetta Stone

Scholars had long puzzled over the ancient Egyptian picture language, hieroglyphics. When Napoleon brought his army to conquer Egypt in 1798, one of his soldiers found something more enduring: a flat black rock about the size of a coffee table, with writing in three languages carved into its surface. Two of the languages were forms of ancient Egyptian, but the third was Greek. Over the next twenty-five years, using the Greek text as a key, scholars translated the other languages. Finding the Rosetta Stone remains one of the most critical archaeological discoveries of all time.

the things a person might need in the afterlife. Expecting to find riches, they excavated many pharaohs' tombs but were always disappointed. Thieves had robbed the tombs of their valuable treasures long ago.

By the early 1900s, scholars believed they had discovered the tomb of every known pharaoh in the Valley of the Kings except one: Tutankhamun. A determined British archaeologist named Howard Carter searched for Tut for more than five years without success. In 1922, he persuaded his patron, the fifth Earl of Carnarvon, to pay for one more season.

Luckily for the world, his persistence paid off. Later that year, Carter found Tut's tomb in almost undisturbed condition. It contained a wealth of artifacts, including thrones, jewelry, weapons, statues, and even food the king would need in the afterlife. The mummy of Tutankhamun, covered with a large gold mask, lay within three nested coffins inside a quartzite **sarcophagus** and four wood-gilt shrines that were nested inside each other, surrounding the sarcophagus and filling the room. The innermost coffin was made of about 242 pounds (110 kg) of pure gold. Carter's discovery created a sensation, and Tut became the most famous pharaoh in history.

## The Mummy's Curse

In November 1922, Lord Carnarvon attended the opening of Tut's tomb. A few months later, he died from an infected mosquito bite. Soon after that, two other people who had entered the tomb died prematurely. Newspaper stories of these deaths gave rise to the legend of "The Mummy's Curse." The legend said that anyone who dared to disturb Tut's resting place was doomed. However, Howard Carter, the man who should have been the most cursed of all, lived until the age of sixty-six.

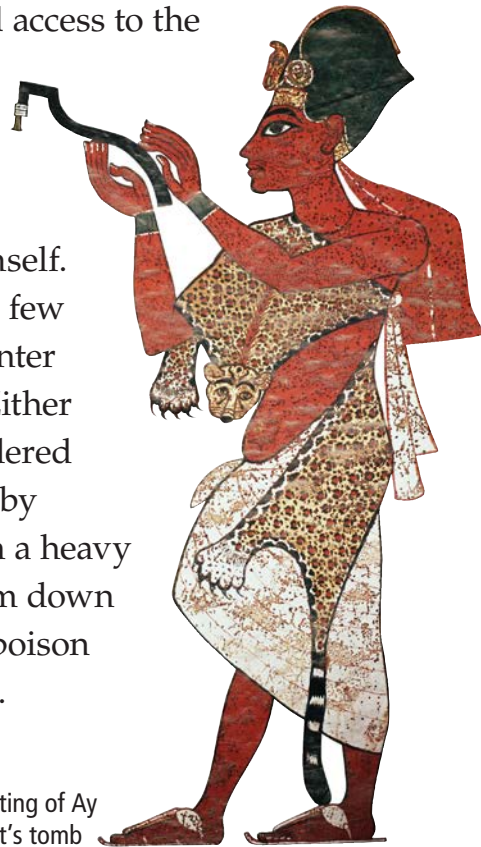
## The Suspects

Early death was not unusual in ancient times. The average life span in ancient Egypt was about thirty years, and many people didn't live that long. Still, there were many reasons for some historians to believe that the physically weak teenage King Tut may have been the victim of foul play. Several people associated with the court and the royal family had reasons to kill him.

Ay and Horemheb, who controlled many of King Tut's decisions, both became pharaohs after Tut's death. There was no natural heir to Tut's throne. Thus, if they wanted to seize power, the time to do it was before Tut had children who lived or before he reached adulthood and pushed the two men aside. Ay had a desire for power, as shown by his marrying Tut's widow, and some

ancient Egyptians may have suspected that Horemheb was involved in Tut's death because an **inscription** on a statue in his tomb claims he is innocent of foul play. The inscription could instead refer to Ay's death since he ruled for a brief time before Horemheb took the throne.

If Tut was murdered, Ay and Horemheb were the most likely suspects, but they were not the only ones. Some researchers identified two of Tut's servants as possible murderers: the cupbearer, who had **unrestricted** access to the king's drink, and Tut's personal attendant, Tutu, who had unrestricted access to the king himself. They were among the few people permitted to enter the king's bedroom. Either man could have murdered the pharaoh, perhaps by striking his head with a heavy object, by pushing him down stairs, or by slipping poison into his food or drink.



A wall painting of Ay found in Tut's tomb

## The Body

For years, people had theorized that Tut was killed by a blow to the head. They based that theory on X-ray studies of the pharaoh's mummy made in 1968 and in 1978 by the University of Michigan's School of Dentistry. The X-rays showed damage to the back of Tut's skull. Experts said the damage was strong evidence that Tut had been hit on the back of the head with a heavy object.

In 2005, researchers in Cairo, Egypt, decided to find out if that was true. The group was led by an Egyptian archaeologist, Zahi Hawass. The researchers studied King Tut's mummy with an advanced X-ray technique called CT (CAT) scanning. A CT scanner takes numerous X-rays of an object from different angles. The X-ray information is processed by a computer that produces images that are much more detailed than ones made with regular X-ray machines.

Hawass announced that King Tutankhamun definitely did not die from a blow to the head.



Hawass said the skull damage was **postmortem**, meaning it happened after

Dr. Zahi Hawass with Tut before the mummy enters the CT scanner



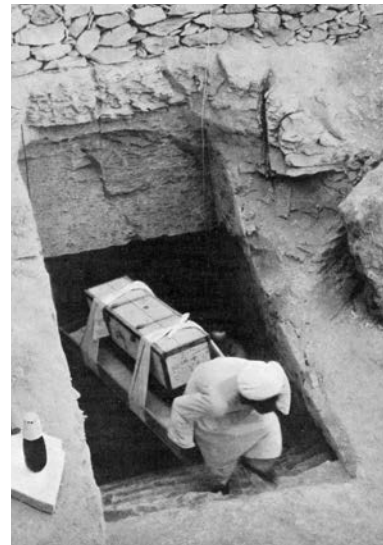
Tut was already dead, and that it probably occurred during the mummification process.

The CT scans also revealed several physical problems that young King Tut endured. He had a cleft palate as well as a club foot, which made walking extremely painful and required him to walk with a cane. More than 130 decorated canes and walking sticks were discovered in his tomb. The researchers also found other evidence of what might have killed Tut. The scans showed that shortly before his death, he had suffered a broken leg that had not healed properly. Hawass said the king may have developed an infection from the injury and died a few days later. Other experts say there is no evidence of infection. From 2007 to 2010, Hawass and other researchers studied Tut's remains further using genetic tests.

The new genetic tests showed the researchers two important conditions they hadn't seen before. They found evidence that King Tut had multiple attacks of severe malaria, which was common in Egypt. The disease alone probably wouldn't have killed Tut, but it may have left him very weak. They also found evidence of a **deterioration** of the bones in Tut's left foot, called *bone necrosis*, which may have left the young king susceptible to other infections not yet discovered.

## Mystery Solved?

So, is that the end of the mystery? Did young King Tut die from a combination of physical problems, an accident, a disease, and/or an infection from a broken leg? Or could it have simply been natural causes? After reading the CT scans, some members of Hawass's group said the broken leg might have happened when Tut was being **embalmed**. Other scholars still feel certain that members of Howard Carter's team caused the break when they removed Tut's body from its coffin years ago. It's still possible that Tut was poisoned or that the broken leg happened during a failed attempt on his life. But if any of those theories is true, we may never find definite proof of it. As more evidence becomes available and



more pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are discovered, theories of how the young king lived and died become more provable. But different experts might still interpret them differently. What's your interpretation?

Carter's team removes artifacts from Tut's tomb.



## Glossary

<b>archaeologist</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a scientist who studies the remains of ancient cultures (p. 4)
<b>deities</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	in monotheistic religions, the supreme beings and creators; in polytheistic religions, gods or goddesses (p. 5)
<b>deterioration</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the process of becoming worse over time (p. 21)
<b>dynasties</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	series of rulers from the same family in a country (p. 5)
<b>embalmed</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	preserved the body of a person who had died so it would not decay (p. 22)
<b>headdress</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a piece of decorative clothing worn on the head, often for a ceremony or other special occasion (p. 6)
<b>hieroglyphics</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a system of writing that uses pictures or symbols to represent words, syllables, or sounds, used by the ancient Egyptians and others instead of alphabetical letters (p. 16)

<b>inscription</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	words carved into stone or metal (p. 19)
<b>monotheist</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who believes in one god (p. 8)
<b>papyrus</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a type of paper made from the stalks of a grasslike plant that was used by ancient cultures (p. 4)
<b>pharaoh</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a ruler in ancient Egypt (p. 4)
<b>postmortem</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	occurring after death (p. 20)
<b>protruding</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	sticking out (p. 7)
<b>remnants</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	small parts of something that are left over after the rest is gone (p. 16)
<b>sarcophagus</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a stone coffin or tomb from ancient times, often inscribed and elaborately ornamented (p. 17)
<b>terminated</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	reached an end or caused to end (p. 6)
<b>unrestricted</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having no limits, restraints, or definition (p. 19)
<b>vast</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	great in size, number, or amount (p. 9)