

# The Mystery of King Tut

*A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book*  
*Word Count: 2,056*

## Connections

### Writing

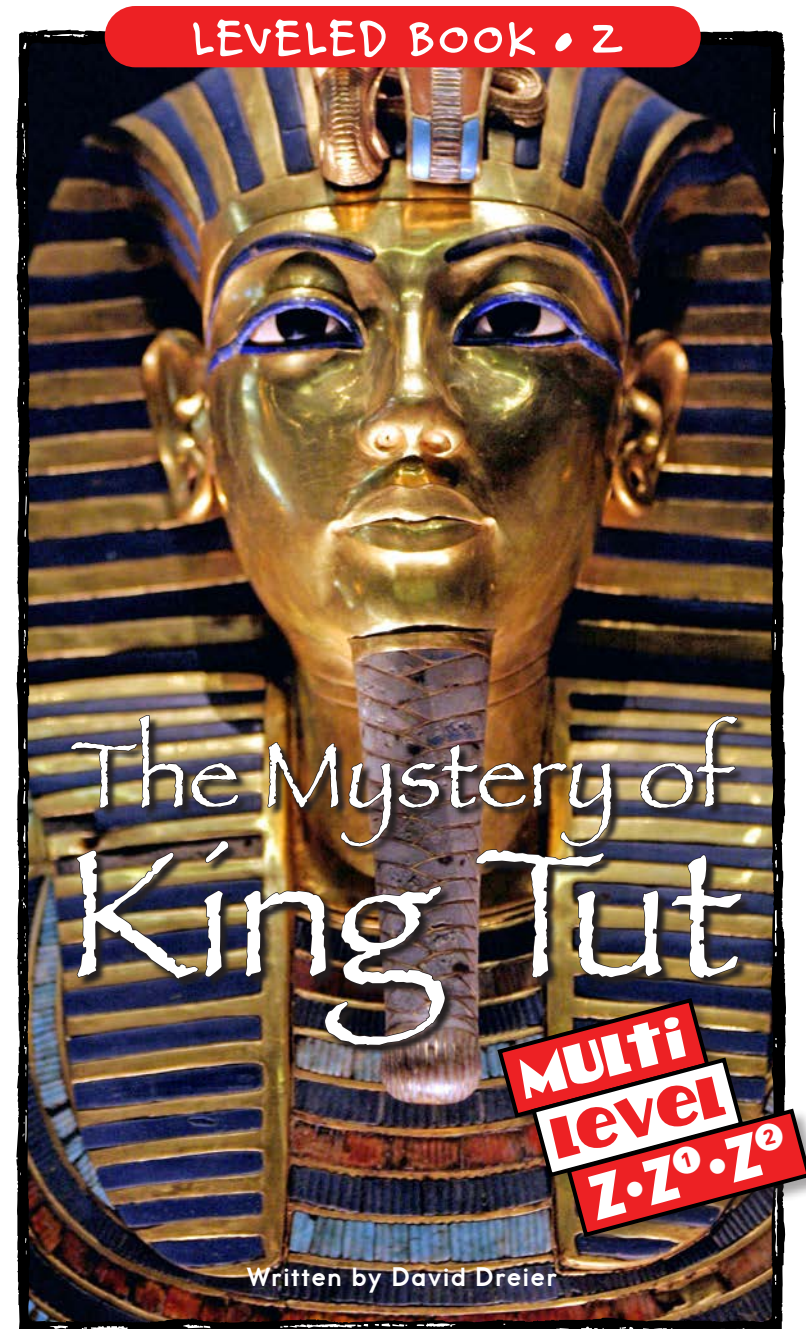
Write a report about King Tut that includes answers to the following questions. What did you already know about King Tut? What new information did you learn from this book? As a scientist, how would you find the answers to questions you still have?

### 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

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## Focus Question

Who was King Tut, and why was he important?

## Words to Know

archaeologist	genetic
artifacts	hieroglyphics
depicted	monotheist
deterioration	mummified
dynasties	pharaoh
embalmed	protruding

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 Z

Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50



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## Finding Tut

In 1922, a British **archaeologist** (AR-kee-OLL-oh-jist) made a fantastic discovery 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 almost ten years and died suddenly at about age nineteen. In the years since the opening of Tut's coffin, many have wondered how the young king died.



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

Just like detectives, archaeologists solve mysteries by looking at the evidence and asking questions. Where did Tut live? Who were his family and friends? Did he have enemies? Answers to these questions may help solve the ultimate question: Why did King Tut die at such a young age?



## King Tut's Homeland

Ancient Egypt was ruled for about three thousand years by a series of **dynasties**, or ruling families. Historians group them into historical periods called the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom.

King Tutankhamun was a member of the 18th Dynasty, the first dynasty of the New Kingdom, which began around 1550 BC, about two hundred years before Tut was even born.

In ancient Egypt, religious belief was an important part of life. Egyptians at that time

worshipped many different gods and goddesses. To understand King Tut's life and perhaps his death, one must learn the history behind this religious belief.



At the beginning of the New Kingdom, two of Egypt's most important gods were Ra (RAH) and Amun (AH-muhn). Ra was the Sun god. In images, he was often **depicted** as a falcon. Amun was a creator god. He was usually depicted as a man with a tall crown.

During the late New Kingdom period, however, some Egyptians gradually began worshipping the Sun in a different way. They called this god Aten (AH-tuhn) and depicted him as a golden Sun disk.



Amenhotep IV

As Aten's power grew, other gods, such as Ra and Amun, were worshipped less. Religion was an established part of life in Egypt, but there was some flexibility. To most people, Aten was just another god among many. He did not pose a threat to their religious beliefs until a young man named Amenhotep (ah-muhn-HO-tep) IV—Tut's father—became pharaoh.

## Gods on the Job

Out of hundreds of deities, people usually chose to devote themselves to a small group of major and minor gods and goddesses. One reason Egyptians worshipped particular deities was to get help with their careers.

Thoth, god of writing and knowledge, was worshipped by many scribes in ancient Egypt.

Seshat, goddess of writing and measurement, would have been a better choice than Thoth for ancient astronomers, architects, and mathematicians.

Ptah, god of craftspeople, was worshipped by artisans of all kinds, such as those who painted tomb walls or those who made statues.

## 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. Amenhotep IV had been raised in the new Aten religion and was a true believer. He saw Aten as a universal god for all the people in the world.

The pharaoh believed Aten created the world at the beginning of time, ruled over it alone, and continued to give life to the world through his bright rays of light. Thus, Amenhotep IV has been called the world's first **monotheist**, someone who believes in a single, all-powerful god.

After about five years, the new pharaoh took a drastic step. He began a sudden and complete change in the official religion of Egypt. He declared that Egyptians could only worship Aten. He changed his name to Akhenaten (ahk-eh-NAH-tuhn), which means "He Who Serves Aten."

Akhenaten closed and tried to destroy temples of many of the other gods in Egypt. Akhenaten's severe actions upset people who were used to worshipping many gods and angered the priests of the old gods. In various parts of Egypt, people tried to stop the destruction of their temples, but the pharaoh's military was able to control them.

In addition to closing temples, Akhenaten also built a new capital city. He moved the capital away from Thebes and called the new city Akhetaten (ahk-eh-TAH-tuhn), which means "Horizon of Aten." Today this area is called Amarna.

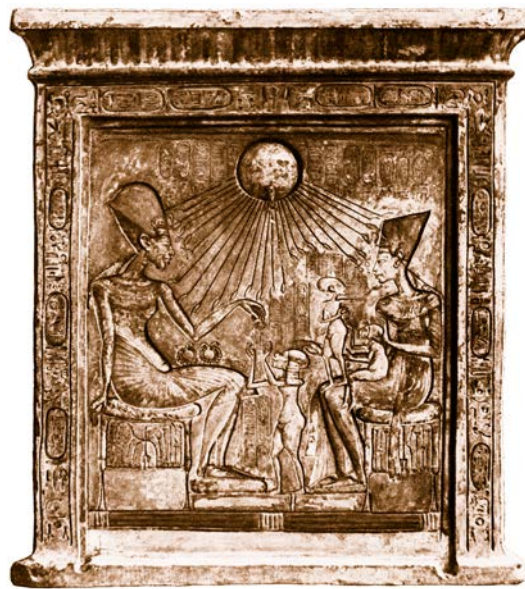


## Queen Nefertiti

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.

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.” Researchers recently used **genetic** tests to identify mummies that were Tut’s parents and grandparents. Using DNA samples taken from bones, the tests identified a mummy that might be Akhenaten as Tut’s father and provided a family tree for the boy king. Tut’s mother is known to be one of Akhenaten’s sisters, but which one is uncertain.

Akhenaten ruled for seventeen years. What happened next is as puzzling as the other mysteries surrounding Tut’s life and death. There were two rulers during the next three or four



years whose identities are unclear. After them, the throne of Egypt was again empty, so nine-year-old Tutankhaten became pharaoh.

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

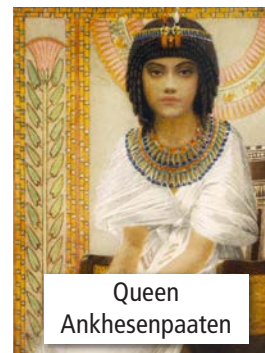
## The Boy Pharaoh

Tut lived the life of the wealthy. He wore jewelry, linen clothing, perfumed oils, and makeup. Archaeologists found all these items in his tomb. As pharaoh, he would have been expected to hunt with members of his royal court, usually with a bow and from a chariot. Chariots, nearly fifty bows, and board games were put into his tomb for his use in the afterlife.

Tutankhaten married his half-sister Ankhesenpaaten (AHNK-eh-suhn-PAH-ah-tuhn). Her name means “She Lives Through Aten.” Tut fathered at least two daughters, but neither lived.



King Tutankhaten



Queen Ankhesenpaaten

King Tut had several servants in the court. One personal attendant, Tutu, had served Tut’s family for years, since his grandfather 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 the chief advisor, named Ay. The other was the general in charge of the army, named Horemheb (HOR-ehm-heb). Although they had both served Akhenaten, they strongly disliked his religious reforms. The two men wanted King Tut to bring back the old ways of worshipping.

Horemheb and Ay used their influence to persuade Tut to end the worship of Aten. They wanted Tut to return Amun to his position as chief god. 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). 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, the king 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 city of Amarna, devoted to the god Aten, 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. The young pharaoh was **mummified** and buried in a tomb in the Valley of the Kings, a large royal cemetery near Thebes.

Tut had no living children, but the throne of Egypt needed a new king. Ay, because of his long experience in the court, became the new pharaoh and married Tut’s widow. 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.



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

To show his devotion to Amun, Horemheb ordered the destruction of everything connected with the Aten religion and Akhenaten. In Amarna, his men demolished the temples of Aten. They also smashed statues of Akhenaten and his family—including those of King Tut. 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. The shattered remains of Akhenaten's once-splendid capital were covered by drifting sand and forgotten.

Horemheb ruled for twenty-seven years, dying in 1295 BC. With his death, the 18th Dynasty ended.

## King Tut's Tomb

In the 1800s, many archaeologists went to Egypt to study Egyptian picture writing, called **hieroglyphics** (hy-ur-uh-GLIF-iks), which is found on many walls and monuments. From the writing, archaeologists learned much about Egypt and its pharaohs. They learned that the tombs of pharaohs would be filled with all the things a person might need in the afterlife. Expecting to find riches, they excavated many tombs but were always disappointed. Thieves had robbed every tomb of its valuable treasures long ago.

### The Rosetta Stone

Scholars and scientists had long puzzled over the ancient Egyptian picture language, hieroglyphics. No one could decipher the meaning of its symbols and drawings. When Napoleon brought his army to conquer Egypt in 1798, he was there for military glory. But one of his French 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 on the stone were unreadable 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 two languages—one of which was hieroglyphics. Finding the Rosetta Stone remains one of the most critical archaeological discoveries of all time.





By the early 1900s, archaeologists believed they had discovered all the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. A determined British archaeologist named Howard Carter searched for Tut for more than five years without success. In 1922, he persuaded the man paying for the search, Lord Carnarvon, to pay for one more season.

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, and statues. The mummy of Tutankhamun, covered with a large gold mask, lay within three nested coffins. The innermost coffin was made of about 242 pounds (110 kg) of gold. Carter's discovery created a sensation, and Tut became the most famous pharaoh in history.

### The Mummy's Curse

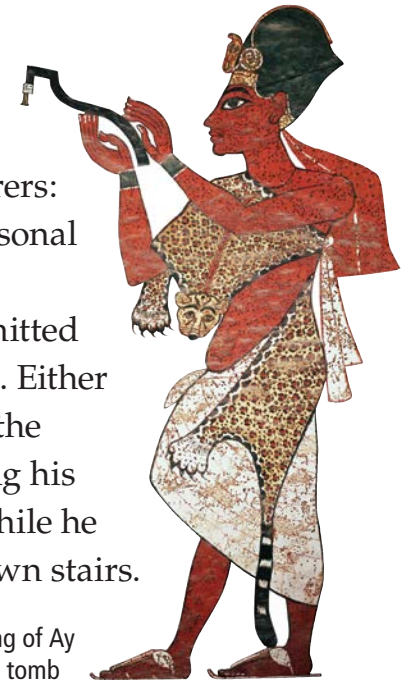
In November 1922, Lord Carnarvon attended the opening of Tut's tomb. A few months later, he died from an infected mosquito bite. Soon after that, two other people who had entered the tomb died prematurely. Newspaper stories of these deaths gave rise to the legend of "The Mummy's Curse." The legend said 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 nothing 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 think that the physically weak teenage King Tut may have been the victim of murder.

Ay and Horemheb controlled many of King Tut's decisions, and both became pharaohs after his death. There was no natural heir to Tut's throne. 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.

Some researchers identified two of Tut's servants as possible murderers: the cupbearer and Tut's personal attendant, Tutu. 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 while he slept or by pushing him down stairs.



A wall painting of Ay found in Tut's tomb

## The Body

For years, many people thought 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, which showed damage to the skull. Experts said the damage was strong evidence that Tut had been struck on the back of the head with a heavy object.



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

In 2005, researchers in Cairo, Egypt, decided to find out if that was true. The group was led by a top 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. A computer uses the information to produce images that are much more detailed than ones made with regular X-ray machines.

Hawass announced that the skull damage happened after Tut was dead. He determined that it probably occurred during the mummification process.

The CT scans also revealed that the young king had several physical problems, including a cleft palate and a club foot. 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 hadn't healed properly. Hawass said the king may have developed an infection from the injury and died a few days later. From 2007 to 2010, Hawass and other researchers studied Tut's remains using genetic tests.

The new genetic tests showed the researchers two important conditions they hadn't seen before. There was evidence that King Tut had multiple attacks of severe malaria. The disease alone probably wouldn't have killed Tut, but it may have left him very weak. They also found evidence



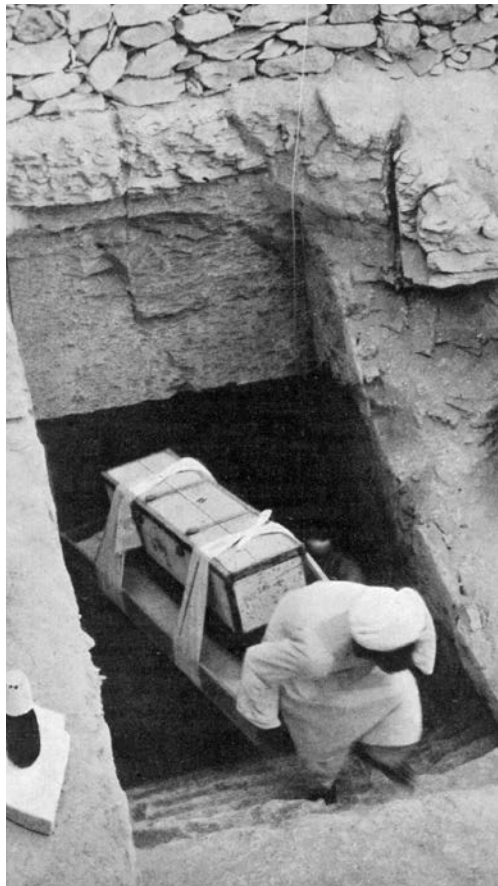
of a **deterioration** of the bones in his left foot. Tut may have inherited the condition from both of his parents; since they were siblings, it may have made the damaging effects of the condition worse.

Scientists reveal the face of King Tut's mummy.



## Mystery Solved?

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 been something else? Some members of Hawass's group said the broken leg might have happened when Tut was being **embalmed**. Other experts say that Carter's team caused the break when they removed Tut's mummy from its inner coffin years



ago. With new scientific research and DNA evidence, theories of how the young king lived and died become more provable. But different experts might interpret them differently. What's your interpretation?

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

## Glossary

- archaeologist** (*n.*) a scientist who studies the remains of ancient cultures (p. 4)
- artifacts** (*n.*) any objects made or used by humans long ago (p. 15)
- depicted** (*v.*) represented or portrayed something (p. 6)
- deterioration** (*n.*) the process of becoming worse over time (p. 18)
- dynasties** (*n.*) series of rulers from the same family in a country (p. 5)
- embalmed** (*v.*) preserved the body of a person who had died so it would not decay (p. 19)
- genetic** (*adj.*) having to do with heredity and variation in living things (p. 9)
- hieroglyphics** (*n.*) 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. 14)
- monotheist** (*n.*) a person who believes in one god (p. 7)
- mummified** (*v.*) made into a mummy (p. 12)
- pharaoh** (*n.*) a ruler in ancient Egypt (p. 4)
- protruding** (*adj.*) sticking out (p. 7)