

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Core: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# MUMMIFICATION!

Ancient Egyptians are known for their famous mummies. The process of mummification was used to preserve the dead and prevent them from rotting. It was important for Ancient Egyptians to be preserved through mummification. For this reason, most people tried to pay for some sort of embalming of their loved ones. However, only the very wealthy could afford the best mummifications.

By preserving the dead, Ancient Egyptians believed that the person's "ka" could return to their body, even after death. Ancient Egyptians believed that each person had two bodies: a spiritual one known as ka, and a physical body. In the afterlife, the physical body was believed to be important, so they tried to preserve it as best they could.

The mummification process was long and involved. It could take up to 70 days to complete all of the steps. Essentially, mummification involved drying the body out as much as possible. Without moisture, body tissues can be preserved for thousands of years.

When the noble died he was brought to the Beautiful House, where an embalmer (often a priest with knowledge of rituals, wrapping and anatomy) prepared the body to cross to the afterlife.

Egyptians believed that the afterlife would be much like life on Earth and that the soul would want use of its body in eternity. That's why Egyptians made an art out of mummification, or the preservation of the dead.

The process of embalming took great skill and required many steps. What follows is a crash course on the Egyptian embalming technique.

**Removal of the Brain:** With long hooks, the brain is extracted through the nasal passage. The Egyptians didn't think that the brain had any special use.

**Organ Removal (Evisceration):** A cut is made on the left side of the body, and the liver, lungs and other organs are removed, dried out and stored in sacred vessels called canopic jars. The heart is left in the body, because it will be needed to be weighed in judgment by Osiris.

**Dehydration with Natron Crystals:** Now the body must be dehydrated (have the liquids removed) to stop decay. A type of salt called natron is used. Natron crystals are packed around the body. The



crystals absorb body fat and fluids and keep the body from decaying. After being treated for about 40 days, the corpse is washed and dried.

**Stuffing:** Because the body has lost much of its mass, resin-stained clothes or bits of sawdust are used to pack the corpse, which by now has also lost its eyeballs. Pieces of cloth are stuffed in the eye sockets and painted black. At this point, the corpse's lips and cheeks are painted.

**Oiling the Body:** This elaborate process includes, massaging, perfuming and anointing (blessing with oil) the corpse.

**Coloring:** After the nose and mouth are filled with cloth scraps to restore the shape of the face, the body is colored. Men are colored red; women are colored yellow. After the coloring, resin is poured into body cavities.

**Arrangement of the Body:** Depending on which period of Egyptian history the deceased lived in, the arms are either placed to the side of the corpse, folded on its chest or placed with hands on shoulders.

**Wrapping:** The body is wrapped in several layers of fine linen, and various body parts receive particular attention. This process takes two weeks, after which a resin is added to the bandages.

**Funerary Mask:** A mask, sometimes made entirely of gold, is fitted to the mummy's body. Symbols of gods often adorned masks.

**Burial of Waste:** All materials used to prepare the corpse (such as natron and bloody linen) are placed in a jar and buried away from the mummy's tomb.

Finally, the time has come to entomb the mummy. Jewelry, games, furniture, food, clothing, and cosmetics might be entombed with the corpse. These things would be used in the afterlife. The Book of the Dead, a collection of hymns and prayers, might also be included in the tomb to protect the body on its journey to the realm of the dead.



### Sources:

- Newsela website, "Ancient Egypt: The Art of Mummification"
- "The Mummification Process" by Student Savvy