

Ancient Egypt: Nebamun



Nebamun hunting in the marshes
From Thebes, Egypt
Late 18th Dynasty, around 1350 BC

Visit resource for teachers
Key Stage 2

Contents

Before your visit

Background information

Resources

Gallery information

Preliminary activities

During your visit

Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

Gallery activity: Nebamun goes hunting

Gallery activity: Animals

Gallery activity: Find the evidence

Gallery activity: What to wear in ancient Egypt

After your visit

Follow-up activities

Before your visit

Background information

The wall paintings on display in Room 61 come from an ancient tomb. The tomb was built for an ancient Egyptian called Nebamun, who lived in the city of Thebes around 1325 BC. Nebamun was a scribe in charge of grain collection for the city. The tomb would have been built before Nebamun died as a safe place for his mummified body and some of his belongings, all of which he believed he would need in the afterlife.

The tomb was created by cutting rooms, passages and a grave shaft into a rocky hillside on the west bank of the River Nile. The tomb walls were then plastered; firstly with a thick layer of plaster made from mud and straw and then with a thin layer of fine plaster to make a smooth top surface on which to paint. A team of artists would have worked in the tomb, first sketching the outline of the different scenes (which covered all the walls of the tomb) and then painting on the colour and details. Paint colours were made from a range of natural materials such as soot, ground stone and ground minerals. Brushes were made from various materials, such as twine, reed and twigs, bound together (sometimes with a wooden handle). The grave shaft containing Nebamun's body and belongings would have been sealed but the upper tomb rooms, containing the paintings, were left open so that they could be entered by his family and friends.

Tomb paintings were created both as a way to commemorate the life of the dead person and as an indication of the type of lifestyle they aspired to in the afterlife. The surviving paintings from Nebamun's tomb show him engaged in a variety of activities such as hunting in the marshes with his wife and daughter, attending a banquet and overseeing a count of geese and cattle. Other pictures show the food and drink which Nebamun believed he would need for the afterlife.

The exact position of Nebamun's tomb is no longer known. It could be covered by sand or buried beneath a modern Egyptian village. The paintings on display in Room 61 are all from Nebamun's tomb. The eleven belonging to the British Museum were acquired by the collector Henry Salt in about 1821. They have recently undergone a ten year conservation and research programme before being re-displayed in a dedicated gallery.

Resources

British Museum websites

Explore

Explore is an online database of over 5000 objects from the Museum's collection. To investigate objects from ancient Egypt use the Explore option on the homepage www.britishmuseum.org

Online tomb reconstruction

There is an online tomb reconstruction available to view at www.britishmuseum.org/nebamun

Ancient Egypt website www.ancientegypt.co.uk

This is an interactive learning and information website with text, images and maps relating to a range of key themes. It includes a wide variety of online activities for students and an area for teachers providing guidance and ideas for the classroom. There is a section of the website dedicated to mummification.

Books

For adults

Parkinson, Richard, *The painted tomb chapel of Nebamun*, British Museum Press, 2008

Spencer, A. J. (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, 2007.

For children

Hooper, Meredith, *The Tomb of Nebamun*, British Museum Press, 2008

Gallery information

Room 61 contains a number of ancient Egyptian wall paintings from the tomb of an ancient Egyptian government official named Nebamun. The tomb and its painting were created during what is known as the New Kingdom period of ancient Egyptian history. The gallery also contains objects from the same time period - principally the artistic equipment used to paint such images and objects from everyday life (some of which are featured in the paintings).

What is it like to visit these galleries?

Room 61 forms part of the ancient Egyptian suite of galleries on the Upper Floor of the Museum. Whilst Rooms 62 and 63 tend to get very crowded, Room 61 is often quieter. The gallery has two doorways at right angles to each other; one leading to Room 62, the other leading out onto the landing at the top of the west stairs. The gallery has both wall and free-standing cases. While the paintings are in large, open view cases, visual access to the objects tends to be more restricted. There is a screen at the west end of the gallery which shows a 3D 'walk-through' reconstruction of Nebamun's tomb on a loop (which also indicates the original position of the fragments within the overall layout of the tomb space). An online, interactive version of this display can be found on the Museum website at www.britishmuseum.org/nebamun

Case Numbers

Please note that case numbers are usually small, white and high up on the glass.

Preliminary activities

General introductory activities

- Explore specific vocabulary and meaning around words associated with the process of burial such as coffin, grave, tomb, funeral, mourners, commemoration.
- Revise knowledge around ancient Egyptian belief in the afterlife. Discuss the role of the tomb space in the process of burial and the journey to the afterlife.
- Compare and contrast modern and ancient burial practices. Offer students an opportunity to discuss personal experience of this process in a supportive school environment before the visit to the Museum.
- Look at the paintings on the Explore section of the British Museum website. Look at the Nebamun PowerPoints available in the classroom resources section of the Ancient Egypt Learning Pages. Use the online tour of Nebamun's reconstructed tomb at www.britishmuseum.org/nebamun

Activities to support gallery activities

- Discuss how paintings can show you something happening. Look at examples of illustrations in story books and ask the students to talk about what they can see happening and list the different people and things they can see in the picture. (Ask them to include details such as buttons and they may be surprised how long the list gets!)
- Revise the difference between wild and kept (domesticated) animals. Why do humans keep animals? What sort of wild animals do the students think lived in the ancient Egyptian environment?
- Talk about the different types of evidence available to historians. What is the difference between primary and secondary evidence?
- Discuss what humans wear – different types of clothes on our bodies, footwear to protect our feet, jewellery to adorn different parts of our body.

During your visit

Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

The gallery activities are a set of activity sheets which can be used by students working in Room 61. The sheets can be used as stand-alone activities or you may wish to develop work around particular sheets as suggested in the before and after sections of this resource.

- Where case numbers are indicated on a sheet, these are usually to be found marked in white numbers high up on the glass of that particular case.
- You are welcome to select the activities which are most appropriate for the focus of your visit and adapt sheets to meet the needs of your students.
- Each activity is designed to support the students in looking at, and thinking about, objects on display in the gallery.
- Individual activity sheets may be undertaken by single students, in pairs or as a small group.
- Where space is provided for recording this may be undertaken by the student or an adult helper as is most appropriate for the students involved.
- Familiarise the students and accompanying adults with the chosen activity sheets at school before the day of the visit. Make sure students and adults know what they are to do and are familiar with the vocabulary used on the sheets or which they may encounter in the gallery.

Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

Gallery activity: Nebamun goes hunting

- This wall painting shows Nebamun hunting wild birds in the marshes which grew along the edge of the ancient River Nile.
- This activity encourages the students to look for detail in the painting and use the sheet to record what they have seen.

Gallery activity: Animals

- The ancient Egyptian environment was full of wild animals. Humans living in ancient Egypt also kept a number of animals as companions and as farming animals.
- This activity asks the students to look for different animals shown in the paintings and decide if they would have been wild or kept animals.

Gallery activity: Find the evidence

- Archaeologists are able to use ancient objects, such as these paintings, as a source of evidence about life in the past.
- This activity asks the students to look for evidence in the paintings to support a number of statements about ancient Egypt.

Gallery activity: What to wear in ancient Egypt

- The paintings and objects in this gallery provide a lot of information about what people wore in ancient Egyptian both in terms of jewellery and clothing.
- This activity asks the students to record information about what the ancient Egyptians wore on different parts of their body.

Nebamun goes hunting

The most famous painting shows Nebamun hunting in the marshes.

- Look carefully at the painting and circle each detail listed below as you spot it and then draw a line to show where it is on the copy of the picture below.

Nebamun

his wife Hatshepsut

their young daughter

birds flying

hieroglyphs

papyrus reeds

a small boat

fish








Write down four more things you have spotted in the painting.

- Nebamun is standing in a very energetic pose. Have a go at copying his pose yourself – do you feel full of energy and ready to go hunting? What do you think his wife and daughter are thinking?

Animals

- Find each of the animals below on the paintings and then draw how it is shown in the painting next to the photograph of that animal.

Animal	How is this animal shown in the paintings?
 butterfly	
 COW	
 cat	
 goose	
 fish	

- Do you think each animal was a wild animal, a kept animal or an animal which could be wild or kept? Circle your answer for each animal.

butterfly	wild	kept	can be wild or kept
cow	wild	kept	can be wild or kept
cat	wild	kept	can be wild or kept
goose	wild	kept	can be wild or kept
fish	wild	kept	can be wild or kept

- Continue looking at the paintings and see if you can spot any other animals. Can you find the horses? What else?

Find the evidence

Objects can provide information about life in the past.

- Look at the paintings and record (by writing and drawing) the evidence you find to support these statements. You may find supporting evidence for a statement on more than one painting.

Statement	What evidence did you find?
Men, men and children wore jewellery in ancient Egypt.	
Ancient Egyptians listened to music.	
Farming was used in ancient Egypt to help produce food.	
Clothes for both women and men were made from white linen cloth.	
Tables and chairs were used in ancient Egypt.	

- Have a look at the objects on display in Room 61. See if you can spot any objects which provide evidence for one of the statements above?

What to wear in ancient Egypt

- Look at the paintings and objects in Room 61 to find out what people wore (clothes and jewellery) in ancient Egypt. Record what you find in the boxes.

something to wear on your feet

something to wear on your head

some clothes to wear on your body

some jewellery (for you neck, wrists and ears)

- Do you think that everybody in ancient Egypt wore the same things? Look for examples of people dressed in different ways in the paintings. Why do you think they are dressed differently?

After your visit

Follow-up activities: introduction

Follow-up activities encourage students to reflect on the work undertaken in the Ancient Egyptian galleries during their Museum visit.

- Some of the activities draw directly on the information gathered at the Museum while others encourage the students to draw on personal experience or undertake additional research in the classroom.
- Each activity includes a suggestion for classroom work and also an outcome which may be in the form of a written piece, drama presentation or artwork.
- You may also wish to look at some of the activities available on the ancient Egypt learning website (www.ancientegypt.co.uk) which relate to your visit.

Follow-up activity: Nebamun hunting in the marshes

Curriculum links: History, art and design

- Display a copy of Nebamun hunting in the Marshes on the whiteboard. Ask the students to tell you what they can see. Either make a list or annotate the picture on the board. Discuss the level of detail in the painting. Talk about how the artist includes lots of detail to help the viewer understand exactly what is happening.
- Remind the students that a key aspect of the wall paintings was their aspirational nature – this is what Nebamun is hoping will occur in the afterlife. Ask the students to draw a picture of themselves doing something at school (e.g. writing a story, eating lunch, playing in the playground) the best they would ever hope to do it (e.g. writing with a beautiful pen, enjoying the best lunch box ever with no crumbs on the table, scoring a perfect goal). Remind them to include plenty of detail to help the viewer understand exactly what is happening. Ask them to show their picture to a partner who has to describe what they can see in the picture and explain what they think is happening.
- Look at paintings from other times and cultures and study how the artist includes detail to create an accurate picture of what is happening. This could be a single action picture such as *Man writing a letter* by Gabriel Metsu or a painting with lots of different activities such as *Children's Games* by Pieter Brugel or *The Railway Station* by William Frith. Do the students think they are idealistic or realistic images?

Follow-up activity: Animals

Curriculum links: History, Science

- Review the animals shown on the wall paintings. What do these animals tell us about the environment of Ancient Egypt? Group the animals in different ways, for example water and land animals, wild and domestic animals, mammals and non-mammals.
- Repeat the exercise with animals in your local environment. What animals would be found in a pond environment, a domestic environment, a wooded area?
- Ask the students to create an *Animals of ancient Egypt* chart. The chart may be arranged as an identification chart with individual animals drawn and labelled in rows/boxes or it may be divided into different environments or different types of animal.

Follow-up activity: Find the evidence

Curriculum links: History

- Review the evidence collected by the students to support each of the statements. Did everybody find similar evidence for each statement? Compare and contrast the evidence collected for one particular statement.
- Ask the students (in pairs or small groups) to look for further evidence to support one of the statements using books or information on the internet. Ask the students to decide if the evidence they find is primary evidence (an object, like the paintings used in the Museum) or secondary evidence (information written by another historian after they have seen an object or read an ancient document). Ask the students to present their findings on a chart which indicates the statement they were researching alongside the primary and secondary evidence they found.

Follow-up activity: What to wear in ancient Egypt

Curriculum links: History, art and design

- Ask the students to review what they found to wear in ancient Egypt. Ask them to compare their findings in small groups – did everybody find the same things. Look at some images of people from ancient Egypt (from wall paintings or papyri) – ask the students to compare what they found with what the person in the picture is wearing – is it the same or different?
- Ask each group to collect their findings together and present them as a catalogue of ancient Egypt clothes and personal adornment. They could look at examples of modern catalogues to give them some ideas about layout and how to combine pictures and text.
- Ask the students to use what they have found out to draw a picture of themselves as an ancient Egyptian.

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