Soulful Creatures: Animal Mummies in Ancient Egypt

on view October 18, 2014 - January 18, 2015

CURRICULUM GUIDE

Organized by the Brooklyn Museum
Site Curated by Stanton Thomas, Curator of European Painting and Decorative Art
CONTENTS

Exhibition Overview ................................................................................2

Goals of the Tour Experience .................................................................2

Suggested Books......................................................................................2

Objectives Established with Bloom’s Taxonomy.................................3

Vocabulary..................................................................................................3

Classroom Activities ...............................................................................4-7
Exhibition Overview

*Soulful Creatures* focuses on one of the most fascinating aspects of ancient Egyptian culture and religion—the mummification of animals. Even today, archaeologists continue to discover countless numbers of these carefully prepared and preserved remains, attesting to the importance of animals in Egyptian life. The exhibition features masterworks of ancient Egyptian art on display with related examples of mummified birds, cats, dogs, crocodiles, and snakes. Carefully wrapped in linen and often enclosed in beautifully crafted coffins, these extraordinary but often-overlooked and mysterious artifacts are the focus of this fresh, exciting look at Egyptian art and culture.

Goals of the Tour Experience

Visitors will use the objects to investigate the following:

1. Beliefs about animals in ancient Egypt.
2. Theories on the function of animal mummies.
3. How animal mummies were made and what is inside.

Suggested Books

- *The Winged Cat* by Deborah Nourse Lattimore, ISBN: 0064434249
Objectives Established with Bloom’s Taxonomy

The learner will ...

**Remember**
*Draw on prior knowledge to discuss contemporary cultural beliefs about animals.*

**Understand**
*Examine objects and discuss them through any or each of the three guiding themes.*

**Apply**
*Use new knowledge to investigate and interpret select objects.*

**Analyze**
*Compare and contrast two objects.*

**Evaluate**
*Make interpretations about select objects. Justify interpretations with new and prior knowledge.*

**Create**
*Carve and paint to create a scarab seal that communicates a message.*

Vocabulary

**Stela** \(\text{ˈstē-lə}\)
a small, low pillar with an inscription that communicates a message. Typical uses include burial inscriptions or to designate a landmark. A stela is sometimes called a cippus.

**Frieze**
a broad horizontal band of sculpted decoration that is typically displayed on a wall near the ceiling.

**Votive**
an object that is offered to a god as a religious vow, wish, or expression of thanks.

**Natron** \(\text{nā-trän}\)
a naturally occurring soda carbonate used in ancient Egypt as a drying agent and preservative during the mummification process.

**Linen**
a lightweight, absorbent fiber made from the flax plant and laborious to produce. Linen was used to wrap bodies during the mummification process.

**Resin**
a naturally occurring sticky substance released by trees. Resin was used in the mummification process to seal the linen together and repel moisture.

**Divinity**
the state of being a god or goddess or to be closely connected to the gods.
The following activities will enrich your students' engagement with *Soulful Creatures*. They are deliberately open in design so you can adjust the directions and scope to fit the needs of your students and the strategies of your curriculum.

**Activity 1: Discover beliefs about animals in ancient Egypt**

Explore the information on the website. Choose one of the following response options and create a response.

Website: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/animal_gallery.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/egyptians/animal_gallery.shtml)

**Record New Learning**

As you read, make notes of information that is new to you. Then, go back through the facts you listed and code them IN (interesting), IM (important) or B (both interesting and important).
Make Inferences
Using the text and images as your evidence, what can you infer about animals and culture in Ancient Egypt?

Explore Visual Information
Choose a photo of one of the objects, and study it carefully. Draw it as carefully as you can, paying attention to the details of how the object was made. Use shading, a variety of lines, or different drawing tools to help you distinguish details.

For more information on this topic watch:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-KR-OkScp0

Activity 2: Investigate a theory on the function of animal mummies

Read the following article and think about connections you can make between present day culture, and beliefs and practices from ancient Egypt. Compare and contrast information from the paragraph with present day customs using a Venn diagram or paragraph.

In ancient Egypt, animals had many important roles. They were eaten as food and kept as pets. But most importantly, animals had religious meaning to the ancient Egyptians.

There are many different ideas about how and why animals held special meaning in Egyptian culture. The ancient Egyptians viewed animals as creatures that were made by the gods, just like humans were made by the gods. While they had names for specific kinds of animals (crocodile or cat, for example), all animals belonged to the same general category as humans, that of “living creatures.” The ancient Egyptians did not even have a separate category word to mean “animals“!

Ancient Egyptians believed that some animals were divine, or closely connected to the gods. These special animals included certain cats, the ibis (a type of wading bird), and the Apis bull. These animals were honored for the characteristics that connected them to the divine: strength, power, speed, and fertility.
One reason that the ancient Egyptians mummified animals was in order to communicate with the gods. They believed that once mummified, the soul of the animal mummy could travel between humans on earth and the gods. Humans made written requests of the gods and sent those requests with an animal mummy, knowing that the gods would get the message. While people are still studying archaeological evidence to try to understand all of the reasons that the ancient Egyptians mummified animals, it is clear that animal mummies had an extremely important place in the culture of ancient Egypt.

Source: Soulful Creatures: Animal Mummies in Ancient Egypt published by the Brooklyn Museum
Activity 3: Explore how animal mummies were made and what is inside.

1. Watch the following videos about how animal mummies are made:
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwRgctx9SyA
   While you watch, make note of any questions you have about the information presented: what do you wonder?

2. If you have already seen Soulful Creatures, write about your inferred answers to your questions, based on the information you learned at the museum. If you have not seen Soulful Creatures yet, identify which questions you hope will be answered by the exhibition.

X-ray of Ibis Mummy (Brooklyn Museum, 14.651)