The adventures of Mary and Mery at the Griffith Institute

1. Objects used in daily life in king Tutankhamun's tomb

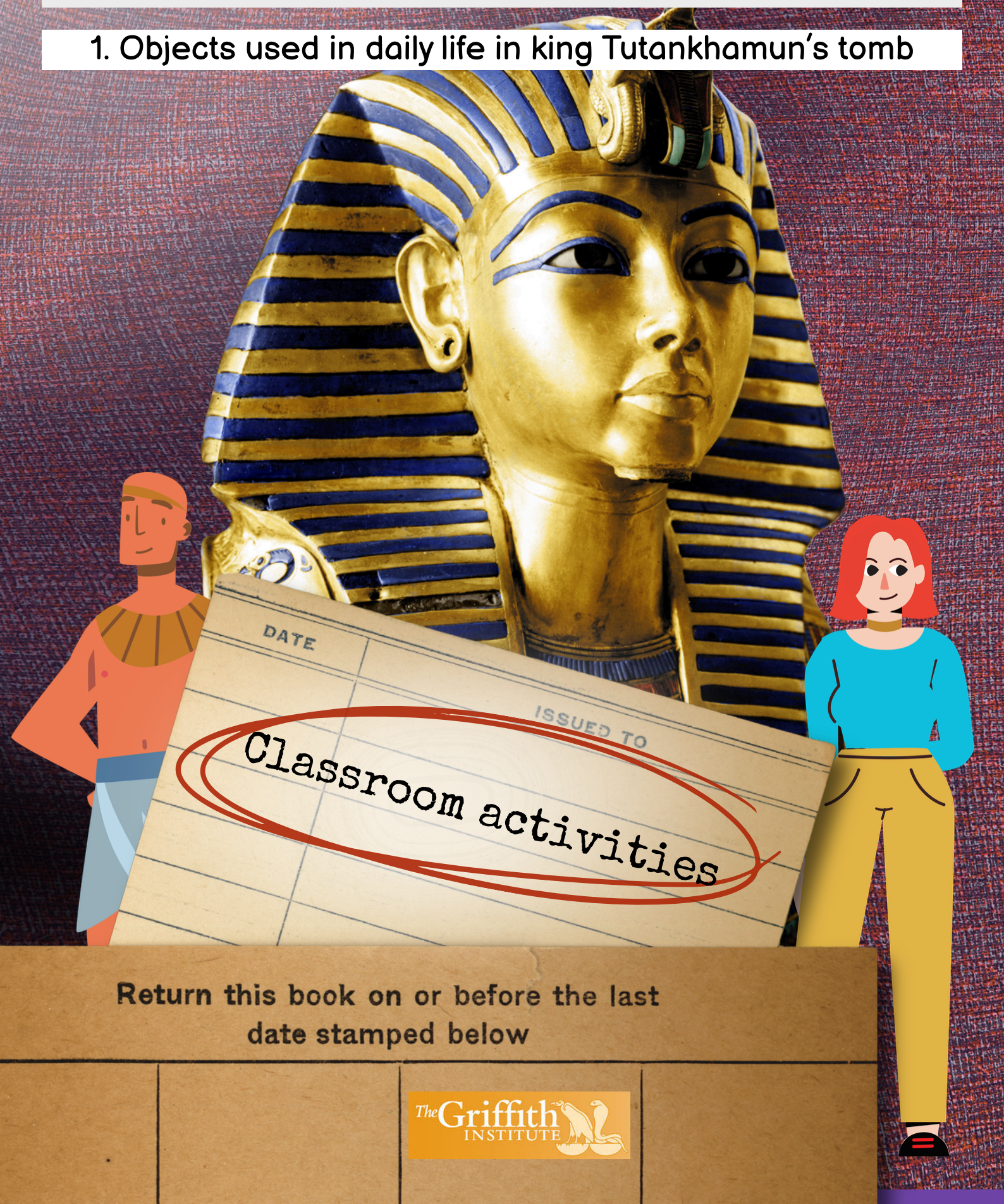


Table of contents

01 INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE 02

03 WORKING WITH OBJECTS

ASSIGNMENT SUGGESTIONS 04

05 HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

FINAL REFLECTION 06

07 WHO ARE WE?



Introduction

Daily objects in Tutankhamun's tomb

Welcome to the first gamified learning module of the Griffith Institute, titled **"Objects used in daily life in king Tutankhamun's tomb."**

This first adventure of our characters, Mary the archivist and Mery the scribe, is intended to introduce children (and adults) to certain items found in Tutankhamun's burial site, which can be surprising because they are so similar to objects we still use today in our everyday lives.

You do not need to be an Egyptologist to recognise these objects and, in doing so, to reflect on their meaning for people who lived more than 3,000 years ago, as well as the meaning similar objects can have for us today.

These reflections can serve as an introduction to more complex ideas, such as:

- how civilisations are formed and organised;
- what the needs and desires of people were in the past;
- how those needs compare with our own.

How to use this guide

This guide has been written as a classroom companion to the **minigame** available on our website and can also complement a broader lesson or scheme of work on Egyptian civilisation.

Here, you will find ideas for classroom activities and discussions based on the themes of the game. These activities are both theoretical and practical and can be adapted for children and young people of different ages.







Working with objects

An object is more than a simple utilitarian item made of wood, bone, metal, or plastic.
Every object tells a story, including the story of the civilisation that created it.

When working with objects, it is important to encourage students to look beyond surface appearance and to think more carefully about what they are seeing.





Starter Activity: A Familiar Object

Take, for example, a common classroom object, such as a pen.

Ask your students:
"What can you tell me about this pen?"

Responses may vary, and ideally, they will. You can support students in exploring different aspects of the object, for example:

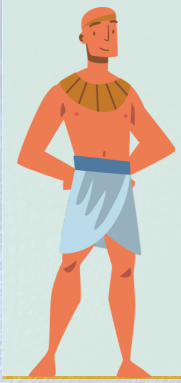
- What materials are present in this pen?
- How are those materials obtained? Are they natural or manufactured?
- Who makes this pen? How is it made, by hand or in a factory?
- Is it a unique object or something mass-produced?
- How many people are involved in making it?
- Where is it made? Is it local or imported?
- How do you obtain a pen? Do you buy it? Is it given as a gift?
- Is it an expensive object?
- How long does it last? Can it be repaired?
- What is it used for? Is there a "correct" use?
- Do you need particular knowledge or training to use it?
- Who can use a pen? Who might not be able to use one, and why?



Record responses and discuss them as a group.

Now choose one of Tutankhamun's objects and ask the same questions.

- How do the answers differ?
- What do these differences suggest about Egyptian society in the 18th Dynasty?
- What social relationships or structures might this object reveal?



Understanding what an object meant to a society, and how we can relate to that meaning, helps students (and ourselves) to understand and respect the "other", whether that is a person from another culture or someone who lived millennia ago.

Assignment suggestions

In addition to classroom discussion, this module can be used as a starting point for deeper reflection and creative work.
These tasks can be adapted depending on age and level.

1. An Object from Your Daily Life

“Choose an object from your everyday life and write about it.”

This activity encourages students to think more carefully about the objects they use regularly, and to consider what those objects might reveal about their own lives and surroundings.

Students can write about their chosen object in a way that suits them (anything will do: watch, backpack, water bottle, teacup, lip balm...). For example, they might:

- describe the object in detail;
- explain how it is made and used;
- imagine a story about it (e.g. “The adventures of my pillow while I am at school”);
- explore where it comes from and how it is produced.

Allowing this flexibility gives students the opportunity to work in a style they enjoy, while also helping to develop their observational and descriptive skills.

It may be useful to set a minimum word count to encourage more developed responses.



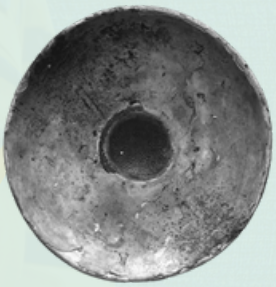
Assignment suggestions

2. The Same Exercise, but in Tutankhamun's Time

Repeat the same task, but with an object from ancient Egypt.

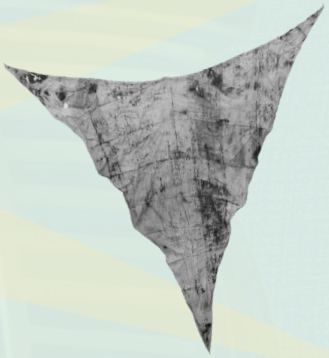
Students may:

- imagine its use;
- compare it with modern objects;
- carry out additional research.

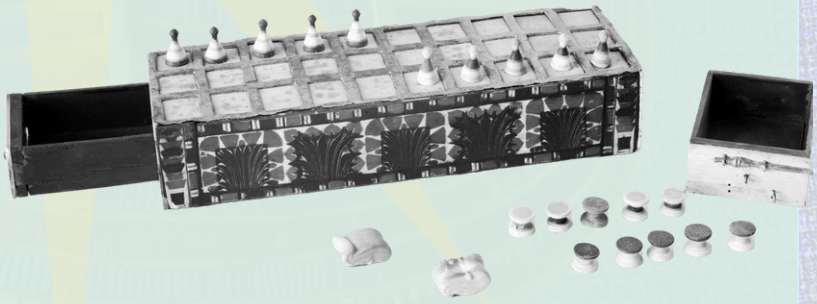














Assignment suggestions

3. Write a letter to Mary!

Most people, children and adults alike, are not aware of the existence and importance of archivists. This module is a great opportunity to help them discover this fascinating profession.

The idea of this assignment is to have them write a letter to Mary to ask about aspects of her job that may not be clear to everyone.

For example:

- What does a typical working day look like?
- How is information recorded? Has this process changed since Carter's time?
- What does it mean to preserve knowledge, and why is it important?



Additional prompts

1. Have you ever imagined using a wooden pillow? What might it feel like?
2. What would you show Mery if he were to visit your home, and why?
3. What might Mery's life be like as a scribe working for the royal family?

These prompts can also be adapted into drawing or discussion activities.



Hands On Activities

The following activities allow students to “create like an Egyptian”, helping them to understand the technical challenges involved in making even relatively simple objects.

1. Jewellery

Discussion themes:

- How did people adorn themselves in ancient Egypt?
- How do we adorn ourselves today (jewellery, watches, tattoos, and other forms of decoration)?
- Who used jewellery, and why?
- What did jewellery represent in Egyptian society?
- What does jewellery represent for us today?



Materials

- String, elastic, or fishing line
- Beads (commercial or handmade)
- Optional: natural materials (shells, stones, wood, etc.)

Procedure

1. Choose the length of the necklace or bracelet.
2. Cut the thread, leaving extra for tying.
3. (Optional) tie a knot at one end to secure the beads.
4. Thread beads one at a time.
5. Experiment with patterns and arrangements.
6. Tie securely when finished.



Reflection

Have students wear their creations and discuss:

- What was most difficult?
- What was most enjoyable?
- How did they choose their design?
- How do modern materials differ from those used in ancient Egypt?



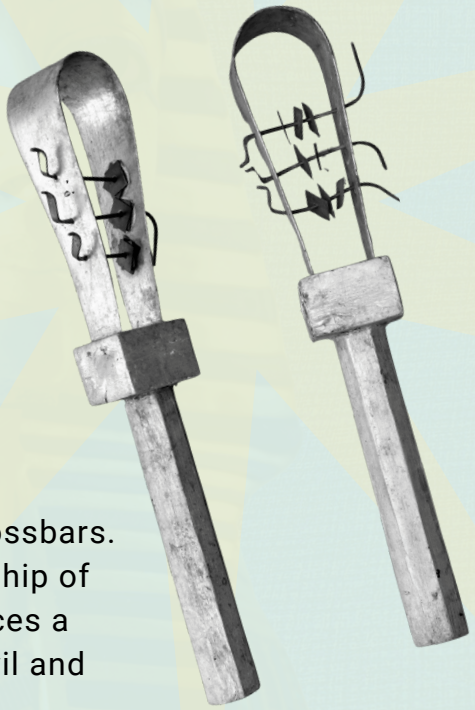
Hands On Activities

2. Musical instruments

Tutankhamun's tomb included instruments such as clappers, trumpets, and sistra. Music was an important form of expression in ancient Egyptian life.

Discussion themes:

- Music as a form of expression across cultures
- The human body as the first instrument (voice, clapping, rhythm)
- Why similar types of instruments appear across different cultures



Creating a Sistrum

The sistrum is an ancient Egyptian percussion instrument, essentially a type of rattle with a metal frame and loose crossbars. It was used in religious ceremonies, particularly in the worship of goddesses such as Hathor and Isis. When shaken, it produces a distinctive jingling sound, which was thought to ward off evil and help appease the gods.

Materials

- Y-shaped sticks
- Wire
- Buttons, bells, or metal objects
- Tape, glue, and decorative materials

Procedure

1. Prepare sound elements (buttons, bells, or metal objects).
2. Thread them onto wire.
3. Attach the wire to the frame.
4. Secure any sharp edges safely.
5. Decorate.

Extension

Create a class performance or group composition.



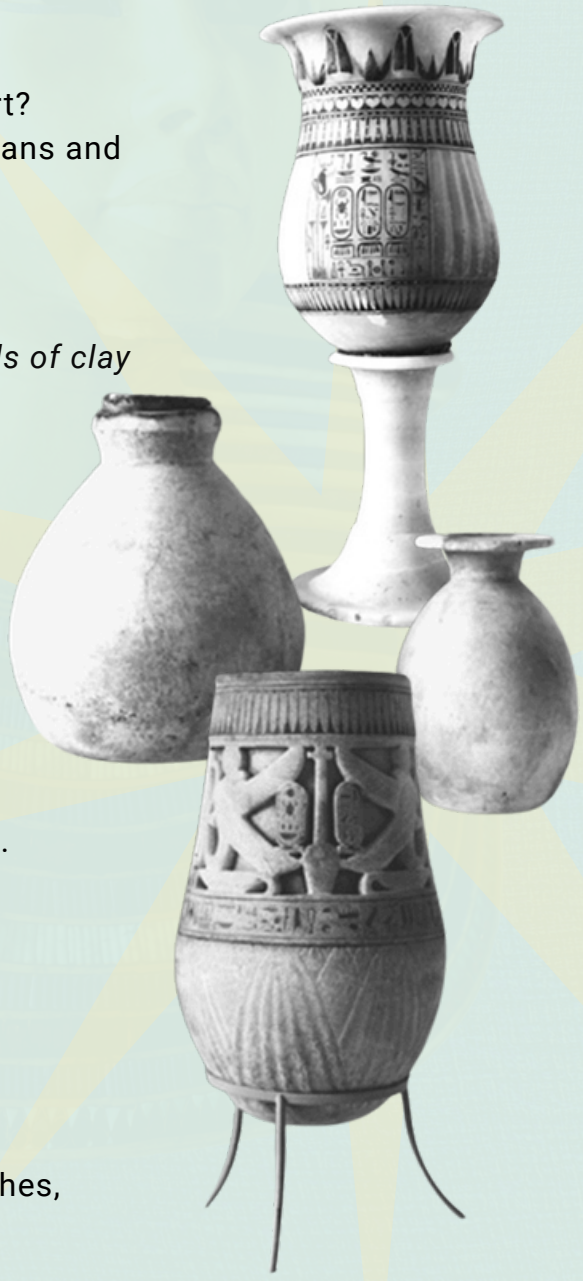
Hands On Activities

3. Pottery

Egyptian pottery was crafted from Nile and Marl clay and served utilitarian, ceremonial, and artistic purposes.
It was integral to daily life, religious practice, and trade.

Discussion themes:

- When is an object utilitarian, and when is it art?
- Why are everyday objects important to historians and archaeologists?
- What do symbols and decoration represent?



Creating Pottery (Coiling Technique)

Students build vessels by rolling and stacking coils of clay

Materials

- Clay (natural or airdry)
- Basic tools (spoons, sticks, etc.)
- Water and sponges

Procedure

1. Knead the clay to soften it.
2. Create a base.
3. Roll coils.
4. Build the structure using scoring and slipping.
5. Shape and smooth.
6. Allow to dry completely.



Decoration

Students can:

- paint designs;
- create patterns;
- add symbols (for example cartouches, animals, or scenes).

Final Reflection

After completing any or all of the activities, encourage students to reflect:

- What have they learned about ancient Egypt?
- What surprised them most?
- What similarities and differences can they identify between past and present?

Objects provide a powerful way to understand the past, not as something distant, but as something lived and experienced.







Who are we?

The Griffith Institute

The Griffith Institute is the heart of Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford for over eighty years. The Institute provides vital resources for the study of the history and culture of ancient Egypt and the Near East.

BLOG

The TAA Archive

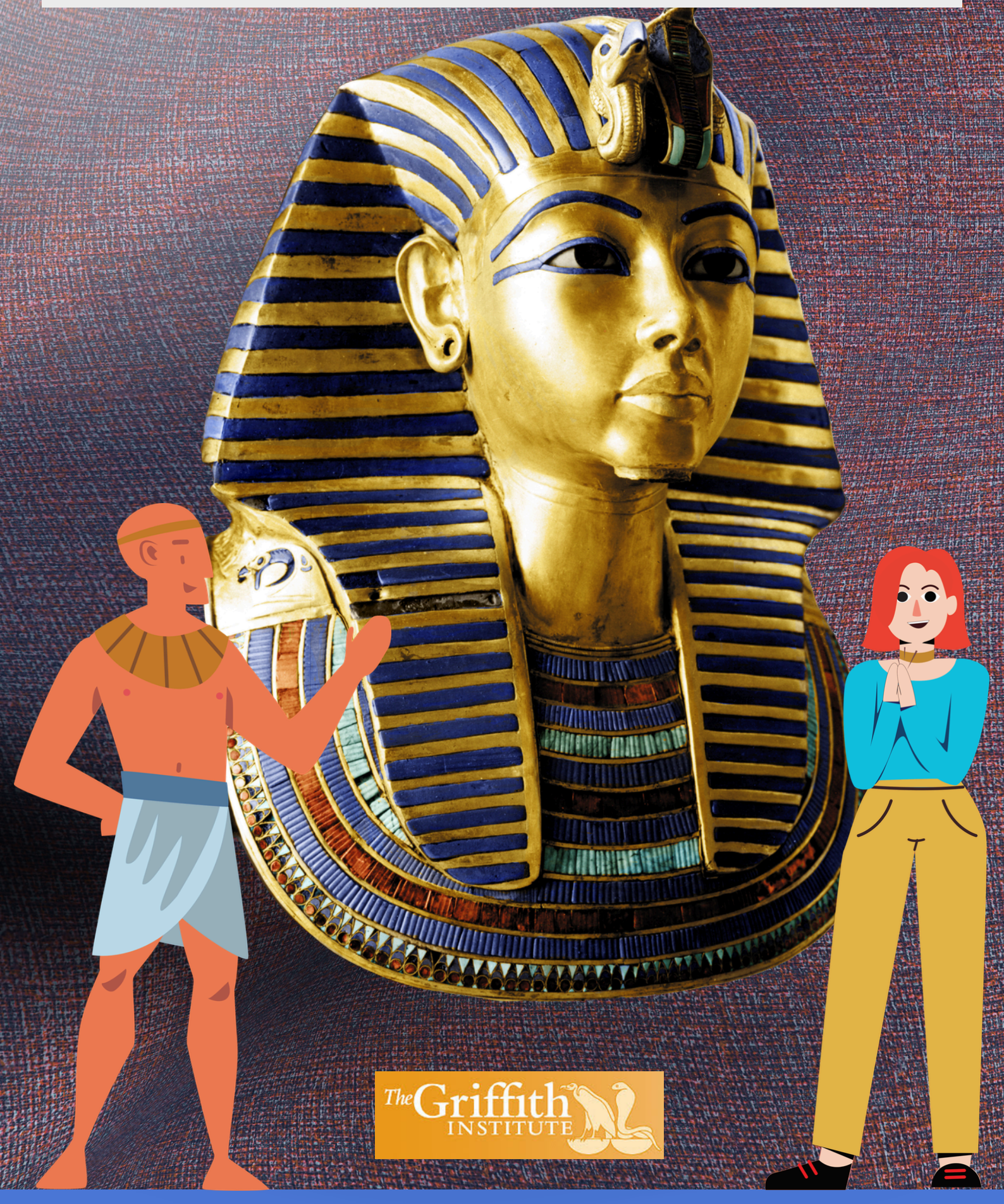
The Tutankhamun (TAA) Archive is the most significant collection held by the Griffith Institute at the University of Oxford.
It preserves the complete archaeological records of Howard Carter and his team's ten-year excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun, including maps, plans, object cards, drawings, journals, diaries, notes, correspondence, and Harry Burton's iconic photographs.

The adventures of Mary and Mery at the Griffith Institute

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Text: Julia Vidile, assisted by the Griffith Institute
Images: The Griffith Institute; Canva; Freepik; Wikimedia Commons; drawings by Julia Vidile
Music: Youtube Music
Sound effects: Zapsplat
Genially add-ons: S'Cape collective



Thanks for playing with us!
Come back soon!



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