

Teaching Notes by Stephen Davies, February 2024

Introduction



I wrote *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover* to accompany your **Ancient Egypt** topic in Key Stage 2 history. I do hope that your class enjoys the book, and that the following ideas prove useful as you plan your lessons.

This is an updated version of the original teaching notes. Please continue to send comments and suggestions, so that I can refine again next year.

sahelsteve@gmail.com

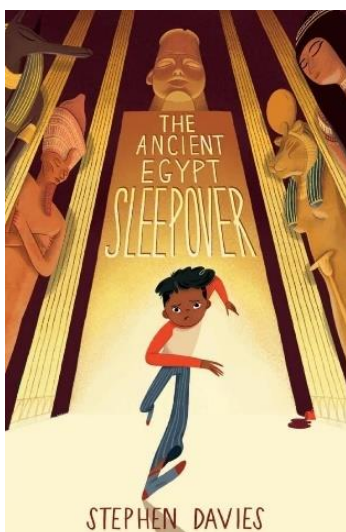
Before Reading

Read the title of the book.

Do you like sleepovers?

What would be the setting of your ideal sleepover?

What do you think might be involved in an 'Ancient Egypt Sleepover'?



Look at the cover of the book.

What do you think is the setting for this story?

A temple? A museum?

Do you recognise anything pictured?

Statue of a pharaoh. Statue of Anubis. Statue of Sekhmet. Painted mummy case.

Does the cover contain any clues to what this story might be about, or spark any questions?

Why might the boy look nervous/unhappy/determined?

Why do you think he is running?

Why is there a mug of spilled hot chocolate in the background?

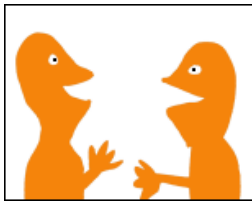
Stephen Says

“The idea for The Ancient Egypt Sleepover came to me during a visit to the British Museum, when I saw a poster for an Ancient Egypt themed sleepover. I started to imagine what this event might be like, then asked myself the all-important question: What could possibly go wrong? Always ask yourself this question when you are planning a story!”



Occasionally the British Museum runs Ancient Egypt Sleepovers, described like this:

Travel back in time to ancient Egypt and discover a world of mummies, magic and myths. Experience the Museum after dark and discover more about this awesome ancient civilisation through workshops, activities and storytelling. At the end of the evening, you'll spend the night sleeping in the Egyptian and Assyrian galleries, surrounded by kings and gods from the ancient world.



Imagine an Ancient Egypt Sleepover at the British Museum, then ask yourselves that all-important question: **What could possibly go wrong?**

Discuss with your talking partner, then write down five things that might go wrong.



For example:

You somehow get locked inside the museum...

You accidentally break something valuable...

The mummies/statues come alive and start chasing you...

You climb an obelisk and get stuck...

Thieves try to break into the museum...

Contents page

Read the chapter headings and look at the hieroglyphs on the obelisk.

Do you see any connections between the chapter headings and the hieroglyphs?

Some of the hieroglyphs look like pictures of the items named. For example, the cat, the lion, hiding place, sunrise...



Chapter 1

Read the first chapter together.

At the end of the chapter, reflect on the main character, Mo.

What have we learned about Mo so far?



Begin to write a character profile of Mo.

First name	Muhammed
Diminutive form	Mo
Family name	Bashir
Family members	Father, sister
Interests	Ancient Egypt

Page 3 lines 5-8

A magnificent black and gold banner beside the main entrance announced the attraction that the whole country was talking about: THE TUTANKHAMUN EXPERIENCE.

The exhibition cost twelve million pounds and is top-secret. What do you think the Tutankhamun Experience might involve? Discuss with your talking partner.



Page 3 lines 19-20

The sleepover ticket in Mo's hand glinted gold in the light of the setting sun.

Does this remind you of another book you have read?

It might remind children of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, with golden tickets and a group of children about to explore a wondrous (and perilous) building.

Chapter 2

This chapter is simply titled KELVIN.

Once you've read the chapter, share your first impressions of Kelvin. Do you like him?

Add to Mo's fact file anything else you have learned about him.

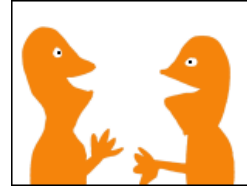
For example:

Skills	Writing, cricket
---------------	------------------

Chapter 3

In this chapter we meet three new characters: Jennifer, Debbie and Dexter.

Discuss each of these characters in turn. What are your first impressions of them? Hazard some wild guesses about what those three characters might do in the museum or what might happen to them!



It might not be possible to visit the British Museum together as a class, but Google Streetview has an incredible new tool which enables you to [explore inside the British Museum](#) with no crowds blocking your path!

Explore the Ancient Egypt Sculpture Gallery ([Room 4](#)) from one end to the other. Can you imagine this room at night?

On Streetview, can you spot anything mentioned in chapter 3 – or anything from the cover of the book?

- Statues of Sekhmet
- Colossus (huge head) of Amenhotep III (top centre on the front cover of the book)
- Obelisks

The block statue of Sennefer is not currently on display in Room 4, but you can see it virtually in the British Museum's online collection [here](#), and the children can read more about Sennefer on my [blog](#).

Chapter 4



Read the chapter, then try and find the coffin of Ankhnesneferibra on Streetview (it's the dark, lidded sarcophagus right next to the brass railings). Zoom in on the hieroglyphs. Can you spot any cartouches (a cartouche is an oval shape containing the name of an important person)?

Page 22 lines 8-14

“Let me guess.” The woman scratched her head. “You thought it was a mummy coming to life. I devote my life to teaching children the wonders of Ancient Egypt, but all they are interested in is killer mummies and curses and nonsense like that. Put all of that stuff out of your head, and you might actually learn something tonight.”

What do you think about that little speech by Professor Maria Van Tam? Do you agree with her?

Page 23 lines 14-16

He was thinking about something the professor had said, something that made him feel extremely uneasy.

What do you think has unsettled Mo?

Hint 1: You would expect a professor of Egyptology to get her facts right.

Hint 2: How old did she say the coffin of Ankhnesneferibra was?

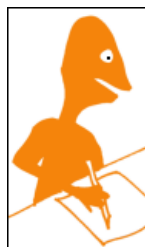


Chapter 5

On the British Museum Streetview app, walk out through the middle door of Room 4, into the Great Court. Drag the cursor to tilt your gaze upwards at the magnificent glass roof of the Great Court. Then read the chapter together.



In this chapter, the characters gather in the Great Court and dress up in Ancient Egyptian costumes. Perhaps today's whole class read could coincide with an Ancient Egyptian dress-up day.



The characters also learn to write their names using hieroglyphs. Names are the easiest entry-point for children into the mysterious world of hieroglyphs – beyond which point, they have to start learning Ancient Egyptian.

Put a [hieroglyphic alphabet](#) on the board and tell children to have a go at writing their names in hieroglyphs on slips of paper. (The link is a Scholastic resource – it is pretty good but it does suggest the reed hieroglyph for 'e' which is usually omitted) Collect the slips of paper, shuffle, then put them under a visualiser one at a time for a game of 'Guess Who'.

Another fun game for this lesson would be the Egyptian **Basket, Lion, Viper** game that Kelvin devised, based on the first three hieroglyphs of his name. Children can play this game with their talking partners, using the actions that Kelvin suggested or making up their own gesture for each of the three nouns. The game could become an in-joke for your class – a way of resolving disputes or for choosing between two volunteers.



To consolidate the learning from this chapter, have another look at the coffin of Ankhnesneferibra on Streetview. Zoom in on the hieroglyphs, which are beautifully clear on the dark surface. Encourage children to point out any glyphs they recognise and to spot oval cartouches. The cartouches on the side of the coffin facing the main concourse contain (near the top left) the Ankhnesneferibra cartouches. Point out the ankh, the n, the s and the nefer symbol. The heart on the right of the 'nefer' glyph is pronounced 'ib' and the circle is the symbol for the sun god, pronounced 'Ra' or 'Re'.

Chapter 6

The children eat Ancient Egyptian snacks in this chapter, so today might be a good day to bring figs and dates into the classroom. Read the chapter together and examine Debbie's claim about figs containing dead wasps. Is this true or false? Or perhaps a half-truth?



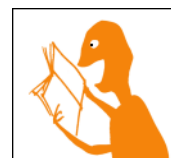
The characters stop to look at the Rosetta Stone. Pay a visit to the Rosetta Stone in the middle of Room 4 ([Streetview link](#)). Talk about how hieroglyphs were first deciphered. I [blogged](#) about it here and made a video about Jean-Francois Champollion [here](#).

Egypt has asked for the Rosetta Stone back. The repatriation of artefacts might be an interesting topic for class discussion, either now or at a later stage.

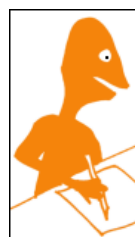
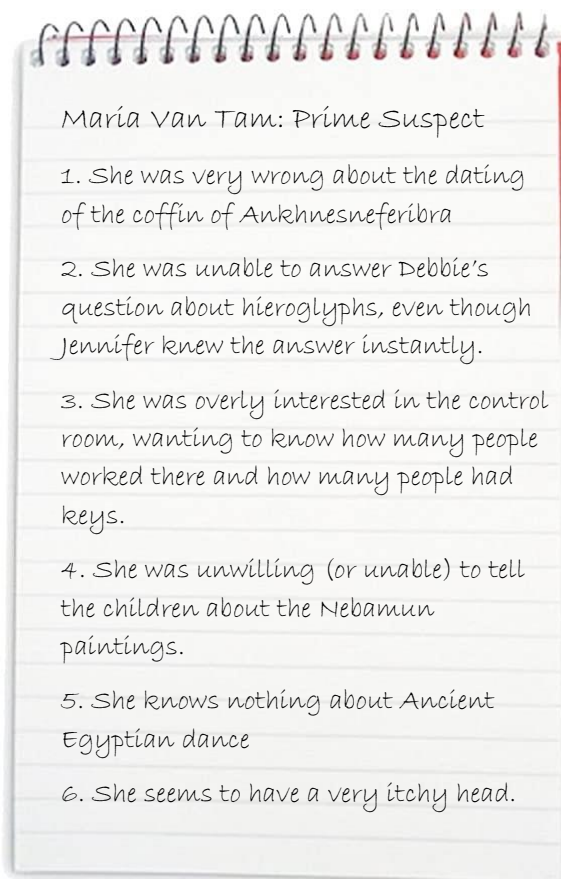
At the end of this chapter, Mo and Kelvin find out about the control room. Children love secret doors (don't we all?) and they should enjoy [this tweet](#) from the British Museum, revealing a *real* secret door in Room 1.

Chapter 7

Read the chapter, then pay a visit to the gorgeous Nebamun paintings ([Streetview link](#)), which show an idealised view of life in Ancient Egypt. I have written blog posts on the [Counting of the Cows](#), [Nebamun's Banquet](#) and [Hunting in the Marshes](#).



'Professor' Maria Van Tam is acting suspiciously again, so it might be time for your young detectives to open a file on her! Ask children to write down anything suspicious she has said or done so far in the story.



Chapter 8

Dr Jasmine Day is a mummy expert who helped me with this book. She owns a huge collection of mummy-related objects and books, and has come to the opinion that mummies in children's fiction are always either **baddies** or **clowns**. She says people fear and loathe mummies, so they defeat or ridicule them in fiction. This chapter aims at something different. Our characters come face to face with mummies and even see inside the cases, thanks to CT technology. The fear and loathing are still there in Dexter's responses, but some characters, like Jennifer, find their way through to a more sympathetic, respectful attitude.

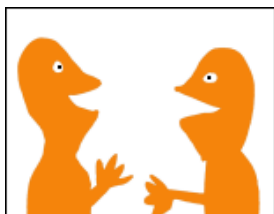
Read Chapter 8, then explore the mummy galleries in the British Museum ([Streetview link](#)). To look inside the cases, see my blog posts on [Tjayasetimu](#), [Tamut](#) and [Padiamenet](#).

In my opinion, the best non-fiction book about mummies is [Mummies Unwrapped](#) by Tom Froese. It was written with the help of experts at the British Museum.



Chapters 9 – 11

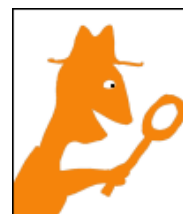
These chapters will fit well with any work you do on the boy king Tutankhamun. The sky is the limit here. I have seen teachers go to great lengths to create an elaborate tomb somewhere on the school grounds, which children then explore with torches. Even a little den in a corner of the classroom would be enjoyable for children to crawl through – a low-cost, low-tech, blankets-over-a-clothes-horse sort of tomb.



The tomb experience in chapters 9 to 11 is far from low-tech, of course. Read these chapters and talk together about the advance of cinema technology. Have you ever seen a 3D film? What about 4D (with water, wind, scent and strobe lights)? What about 5D (all of the above, plus moving chairs)? These days, cinemas are luring audiences with wild claims of 6D, 7D and more. How many D would you ascribe to THE TUTANKHAMUN EXPERIENCE?

Hologram technology is developing quickly (see, for example, [the Buddy Holly Hologram Tour 2022](#)) but has not yet reached the level portrayed in *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover*. While writing the book, I watched [this footage](#) of a 7D zoo in Dubai, but have since been persuaded that the video is fake.

The theory that a water boy discovered the first step of the tomb is still controversial among Egyptologists. This [animated BBC version of the water boy story](#) is a good watch and lasts exactly four minutes.



The photo of a boy wearing one of Tutankhamun's necklaces is even more controversial. Is this a photo of the same boy who discovered the tomb? Probably not. There were dozens of children working on the dig site, and this photo was taken in 1926, four years after the discovery.

Writing



Write a newspaper report for the *Week Junior* about the Tutankhamun Experience. Try to convey the sights, sounds and smells of the exhibition for people who have not experienced it themselves.

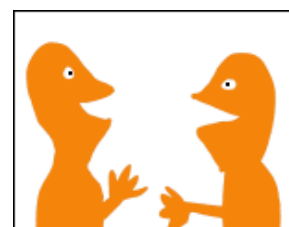
Or

Write a script for *Newsround*, reporting on the exhibition.

Game

Play 'My Granny Went to Market' around the classroom with an ever-growing list of treasures found in Tutankhamun's tomb. There are five thousand to choose from!

e.g., Howard Carter went to Egypt, and he found a death mask, some throw sticks, an ostrich feather fan, a golden necklace, two silver trumpets, an ivory board game, a makeup case, three funeral beds, some chariot wheels, a statue of Anubis, and so on...



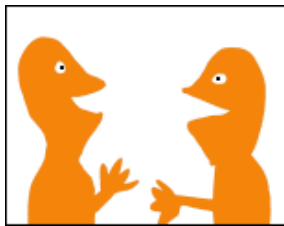
Art Draw or paint the death mask of Tutankhamun, while listening to [Ancient Egypt style music](#).

Chapter 12

In this chapter, Mr Lamb points out that toothpaste was invented in Ancient Egypt. What other inventions do we owe to the Ancient Egyptians?

Writing, paper, plough, sickle, irrigation, our calendar, clocks, police, surgical tools, wigs and makeup.

(For reference, see <https://discoveringegypt.com/ancient-egyptian-inventions/>)



On page 75, Kelvin says to Mo, “What have you found, Sherlock?”

Look at the note that Mo found in the bin. Discuss in pairs what seems odd about the note, and share theories about what might be going on. Release your inner Sherlock Holmes!

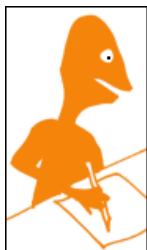
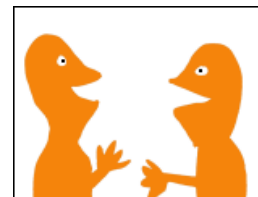
When the children read the beginning of the next chapter, their theories will be confirmed or disproved.

Chapter 13

Page 78 lines 15-17

They looked at Team Blue. There were no practical jokes being played. No spooky stories being told. No midnight feasts being prepared.

Chat with your talking partner about sleepovers you have been on. What would be the ingredients of your ideal sleepover?



Either

Do a piece of descriptive writing with the title ‘My Ideal Sleepover’.

Or

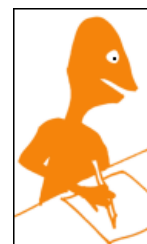
Write a story that begins with the following line: “When I arrived at the sleepover, I could never have imagined how disastrous it would be.”

Chapter 14

This chapter contains two similes. Miss Kenton is “snoring like a walrus” (page 83 line 7) and Draven climbs out of the coffin “like a spider out of a sink” (page 86 lines 9-10).

Look at other similes in the book, and write down an alternative simile for each one.

- Mr Lamb clapped **like a seal** (page 30 line 3)
- Her fingers [were] writhing and squirming **like excited eels** (page 44 line 4)
- “That must be Lord Carnarvon!” said Kelvin. “Look at his face – he looks **like my little brother does when he’s about to open his birthday presents**” (page 62 lines 4-5)



Chapter 15

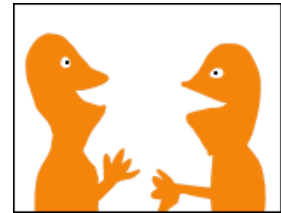
Stephen Says

“When I am writing a thriller (an exciting book), I try to do three things:

- 1. Limit the space.*
- 2. Limit the time.*
- 3. Raise the stakes.*

*For example, when I wrote my book **Survivor Titanic**, it was easy to limit the space (a sinking ship), limit the time (it will sink in less than three hours) and raise the stakes (there are not enough lifeboats, and anyone without a seat in a lifeboat will drown).”*

Read chapter 15 and discuss it with reference to the above quote. See how the author limits the space (our heroes are cramped underneath the desk in the control room), limits the time (when the criminals stretch their legs, they will discover the boys’ hiding place) and raises the stakes (“*Mo did not even want to think about what would happen [if they were discovered]. He began to wish that he had drunk the hot chocolate after all.*”)



Chapter 16

Stephen Says

“Chase scenes are great fun! Like any sort of action scene, a chase scene needs plenty of strong verbs.”

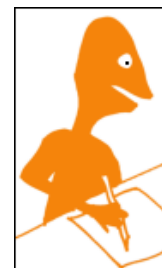
Read chapter 16 together, looking out for the following strong verbs.

ran	bounding	plunged
grabbed	staggered	dived
scrambled	skidded	dashed
snatching	slipped	ducked
jumping	crashed	
sprinted	seized	



Write a chase scene of your own, using a variety of strong verbs.

See if you can do it without repeating the same verb twice!



Chapter 17

Stephen Says

*“You might already know the proverb, ‘The darkest hour is just before the dawn.’ This is often true in stories. In every book I write, I try to bring my characters to a moment when they face certain failure and a complete loss of hope. I call this the **NCSHN** moment, which stands for **Nothing can save him now!**”*

Read chapter 17 together and challenge children to locate the NCSHN moment. It’s right at the start of the chapter on page 103:

They’re in, Mo thought miserably. The most heinous crime in museum history is about to take place, and there’s nothing I can do about it.

Can you think of any other examples of NCSHN in stories you have read, or films you have watched, where the hero completely loses hope just before making a breakthrough?

I enjoyed creating the hieroglyphic code in this chapter. If children want more of this sort of thing, I highly recommend *The Curse of the Tomb Robbers* by Andy Seed, which contains lots of exciting hieroglyphic codes to decipher.

The code leads Mo to the coffin of Naktankh, which I blogged about [here](#).



Chapter 18

Stephen Says

“There is a moment of peril on page 111, when Maria turns her head ‘as if in slow motion’ and looks directly at Mo, who is pretending to be a hologram. I used five whole paragraphs for one brief moment of time. This is a useful writing technique. Slow the pace of your storytelling at instants of great danger, to maximise suspense.”



Have a go at writing a few paragraphs about one brief moment in time. For example, imagine you come out of your bedroom and see a monster standing there. Write five whole paragraphs where nothing actually happens! You are simply describing the monster and your feelings of fear, drawing out the suspense for as long as possible.

Chapter 19

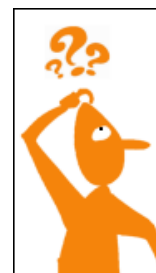
Stephen Says

"I lived for fourteen years in Burkina Faso, on the edge of the Sahara Desert. It was very sandy there, and people were very skilled at interpreting animal and human footprints. My friend Mamadou once tracked a thief's footsteps for three miles, all the way to the thief's house! This gave me the idea for the scene on page 120, where Debbie analyses the thief's footprints in the sand."

In 1891, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a detective story called *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, where Sherlock Holmes solves a crime simply by looking at footprints. Have a go at dreaming up an original idea for your own detective story, where the detective solves a mystery simply by analysing footprints.

If children are struggling with this, chat about the following:

- Someone with a limp has deeper footprints on one side or the other.
- You do not leave heel prints when you are running.
- A criminal might put their shoes on backwards – or walk backwards – to fool a detective.



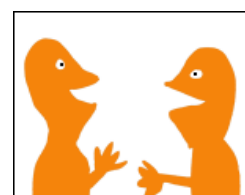
Chapter 20

Stephen says

*"The Latin phrase 'deus ex machina' means 'god out of the machine'. This phrase comes from Greek theatre, where actors who were playing gods were brought up onto the stage through a trapdoor, by some sort of crane. A 'deus ex machina' ending is a story resolution that seems to come out of nowhere. For example, an angel suddenly appears and saves your character. Or the criminal suddenly twists her ankle and has to give up. These are terrible ways to end a story. Resolution should come from your hero doing something clever or brave, and you need to make sure you plant the **seeds** of the resolution early on in your story."*

Read chapter 20 together and discuss it in the light of the above quotation.

The resolution of the story is that Mo uses a throwstick to sever the lines on Maria's paraglider. To plant the seeds of this resolution, I stressed Mo's fielding ability early on in the story (pages 8 and 43) and described in detail the throwsticks among Tutankhamun's grave goods (pages 66-67).



Can you spot any other examples of 'seeding' in the book?



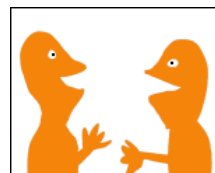
On page 106, Mo finds Debbie hiding in the coffin of Naktankh. Debbie is awake because she did not drink the hot chocolate with the other children. After writing this scene, I went back and planted a seed for it. When Mr Lamb declares on page 11 that "Everyone likes hot chocolate", Debbie mutters, "I don't."

Similarly, on page 94, Mo uses a pressed penny to undo the screws on a grate. I wrote this scene first and then went back and planted the seed for it (on page 7, the pressed penny sets off the metal detector at the museum entrance).

Chapter 21

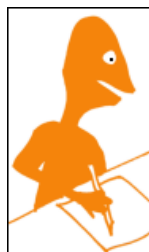
Read the last chapter together, and discuss it.

How do you feel about the ending of the book? Is it a satisfying ending? Are there any loose ends?



Stephen says

“Readers like to see justice done at the end of a book, and I worry that I should have given Dexter proper comeuppance for his unkindness. When I was writing the last chapter, I thought that Dexter’s double dose of the sleeping drug might have reacted badly with all those dates he ate, and that his sleeping bag might have been quite a mess when he woke up. In the end, though, I decided this was just too gross to write!”



Read the quotation above, then write an extra scene for the story, so that Dexter the bully gets his just desserts.

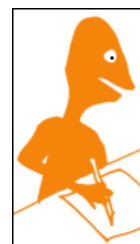
It doesn’t have to be anything gross!

If children are struggling for ideas, suggest a few, to get the ball rolling. For example, maybe a statue topples over on top of Dexter on his way out.

Bye for now

Students, why not write me a letter to let me know what you thought of the book? Tell me what you liked and what could have been better. We are all on the same journey, striving to become better writers. Let’s help each other!

Teachers, I do hope that you and your class have enjoyed *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover*, and that these notes have been helpful. If so, I would be ever so grateful if you or one of your colleagues could post a review of *The Ancient Egypt Sleepover* on Amazon.co.uk, recommending it as a whole class read. The link to the product page is [here](#).



School Visits



If the **Stephen Says** boxes have proved useful, there’s more where that came from! I love talking in schools and helping children with their creative writing. Email [Yvonne Lang](#) at Authors Abroad if you would like to enquire about arranging a visit. She’s ever so friendly and quick to respond to emails.