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Cultural Diversity in Ancient Egypt

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Pre-visit Activities:

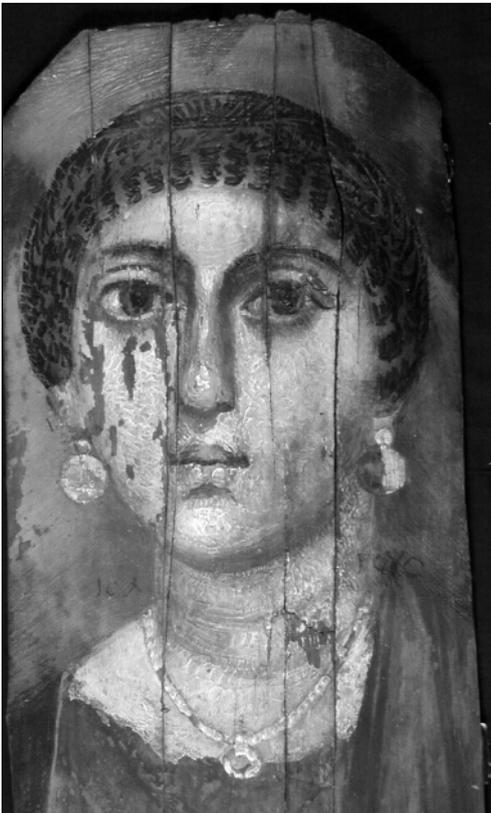
Cultural Diversity in Ancient Egypt

C CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Reading: 'The Diverse Cultures of Ancient Egypt'

When we study how, why and where an object is made we learn about the life of a people. Ancient Egypt is no different. By examining various objects in the Petrie Museum we learn that ancient Egypt, a period of history which covers over three thousand years, had diverse cultures. These different cultures included Greek, Roman, Islamic and Jewish people and influenced Egyptian ways of life. At the same time, new Greek and Roman rulers of Egypt had such great admiration for Egyptian art and culture that they retained some original Egyptian customs. The mummy portrait, the plaster portrait mask and the terracotta figure are three such examples of the Greek and Roman admiration for things that were Egyptian.

As you may know, ancient Egyptians had a complex set of burial traditions because they believed in life after death. When a person died, the body was preserved through mummification (treating the body so it does not decay) so that the soul (or spirit of a person) continued to live after death. Let us examine the mummy portrait and the portrait mask.



The mummy portraits are painted portraits that were placed over the head of mummies. Made between the first and third century Common Era (usually written CE), they are known as the Fayum portraits. Most were painted in the encaustic technique, a method that dated from Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries Before Common Era (BCE). In this technique, the artist created a picture by mixing colours (or pigments) to hot or cold beeswax, egg, resin and oil, making it look like an oil painting. The mummy portrait is probably a likeness of the person who had died and whose body is mummified. Making a portrait of someone was a Roman tradition.

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The second funerary object we are examining is the portrait mask. This was made in the Roman period, like the mummy portrait. The mould of the face was made first before being attached to the head-dress and torso of the body. Both the portrait mask and the mummy portrait look like a real person, which was not an Egyptian art tradition.



Both the mummy portrait and the portrait mask were made when Egypt had been ruled by the Greeks for about three hundred years and by the Romans for about a century. During this period the population in Egypt was made up of Greeks, Romans and the native Egyptians. Both these artefacts grew out of a diverse and multicultural Egypt and show an interesting mix of cultures. The art technique (encaustic paint) was Greek, the style (portraiture) was Roman but their use was Egyptian, as it formed part of the burial traditions needed for life after death according to Egyptian beliefs.

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The third object that shows the diversity of ancient Egypt is the terracotta figure from the time of Greek rulers, known as the Ptolemaic Period (246 – 222 BCE). This was the time when Egypt was ruled by kings who were descended from a Greek general named Ptolemy. This object was part of a complete figure showing a Ptolemaic ruler as the Greek god Dionysos. Dionysos was a strange god, who was sometimes shown with the horns of a bull. The horns symbolise the time Dionysos was torn to pieces when he was in the shape of a bull.



Dionysos is best known as the god of wine and theatre and has a dual nature. As the god of wine, he can be both positive and negative. Wine can be a pleasure to drink (positive) but people can become drunk in the process (negative). Actors in Greek theatre put on masks to show that they have lost their identity and are acting / playing some one else. Their identity is given to the god so what they show in the theatre is different from who they truly are. We too, wear masks in our lives, don't we? This figure, like the other two objects, is very realistic. However, this object was not used for funerary use. What do you think was this figure's function?

As you can see from this reading passage, ancient Egypt, like London today, had a variety of different cultures and these can be seen today in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. Are you surprised by this diversity? Do you think ancient Egypt benefitted from this diversity?

Adult ESOL Core Curriculum References
Rt/L1.3 Rt/L1.5

Pre-visit Activities: Cultural Diversity in Ancient Egypt

Questions from the Reading Passage

Work in groups.

1 How do we know that ancient Egypt was multicultural?

We know because _____

2 After reading the passage, finish filling in the table below.

name of object	period it was made	material used	function of object	origin
mummy portrait	2nd century CE			
portrait mask		plaster		Roman
portrait mask			royal portrait	

What conclusions can you draw from this table?

Discuss your thoughts with your group.

3 Summarise what you understand about the Greek god Dionysos.
Then tell your group what you think of this god.

Perhaps there is a similar god in your culture?

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Worksheet One: Mummy Portrait (UC19611)

Instructions

As an artist you want to understand the details of this mummy portrait. Work in pairs. Discuss the questions below and write your answers in the space provided.



- 1 Look closely at the mummy portrait.
Does it look like a painting? Circle your answer:
Yes, I think it does / No, I don't think it does

Why do you say that?

I say that because

- 2 Describe the following information in the table below:

Hair (colour, style)	
Eyes and eyebrows	
Jewellery (colour and style)	
Clothes (colour)	

- 3 Which part of the portrait stands out?
- 4 Do you think the woman actually looked like this portrait?
Or was it embellished (made prettier) to make her look good?
- 5 Do you think she was from a rich family? How do you know? Discuss your answer with your partner.
- 6 Choose another mummy portrait. Tell your partner what you like or dislike about it. Make notes.

Adult ESOL Core Curriculum References

Speaking: Sc/L1.1 Sc/L1.2 Sc/L1.3 Sd/L1.1 Sd/L1.2 Sd/L1.3 SdL/1.4

Listening: Lr/L1.1 Lr/L1.3 Lr/L1.4 Lr/L1.6

Reading (for object 3, terracotta figure only): Rt/L1.4

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Worksheet 2: The Portrait Mask (19622)

Instructions

You are an archaeologist and you have found this mask in Egypt. Since you have never seen anything like this before, you must look at it closely. Discuss the questions with your partner. Then write your answers.



- 1 What is the mask made of? (*read the information next to the object or ask some one at the museum*)

- 2 Describe this mask. Use as many adjectives as you wish.

a hair – shades of colour:

length:

curly or straight:

b eyes – colour and shape:

c beard – colour and style:

d eyebrows – thick or fine:

e Based on what you have seen, do you think he was a young or old man?
How do you know? (note the muscles of the neck)

f Do you think the portrait is realistic? Why or why not?

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Worksheet 3: Terracotta Figurine (UC48247)

Discuss the following questions with your partner.

Write your answers on the worksheet.



1a Look at the face of this figure carefully. Note the features.

b Draw what you see at the top of the head.

c What do you think it is? Is it a symbol?

d You have read about Dionysos in the reading passage. Is this the figure of the king? Why do you think the king wanted to look like Dionysos? Tell your partner.

2a Where do you think this figure was placed? Circle your answer:

temple house palace

b Why was the figure placed there?

c What was its purpose and function?

You are a university student at UCL, note how the information about the object is written in the academic style. If the information is not available, leave it blank or ask someone who works at the museum. With your partner, complete the following:

Museum Number	
Object Group	
Description	
Period	
Found at	
Material	
Measurements	

Post-visit Activities: Cultural Diversity in Ancient Egypt

Worksheet One: The Mummy Portrait

Research and Present

- 1a** Find another Fayum portrait either in the Petrie Museum or on the internet. Describe it to your friend without showing it to him/her. Get the friend to draw the portrait. Put it up in your classroom.
- b** Then write about this portrait and present it to your class. Tell them what you think about the portrait.

Presentation

- 2** If the mummy portrait could talk, what would she say about her life in ancient Egypt? Think of the many cultures she saw during that time.
-

Worksheet Two: The Portrait Mask

Speaking and Writing Instructions, Drawing a Portrait

Work in pairs

- 1** You are now famous for work you have done in your profession. An artist wants to do a portrait of you but you would like to give the artist some instructions on how you want to look for future generations. Below are a few questions to get you started. Write more questions.

Think about how you would like to look for future generations.

Do you wish to sit or stand in the portrait?

Would you change or embellish anything? For instance, would you make your nose a little longer to look more regal?

Is the portrait a real representation of you or who you would like to look like?

What do you want the portrait to suggest about you?

Now give your instructions to the artist.

Draw a portrait of each other taking into consideration how the person wishes to be seen.

Post-visit Activities: Cultural Diversity in Ancient Egypt

Worksheets One and Two: Compare the Two Portraits

Present a Point of View

- 1 Which of the two portraits do you prefer? Why do you say that? Tell the class of your preference.

Worksheet Three: Terracotta Figure

Draw a Mask and Explain Your Reasons

- Do you use masks in your culture? Do you use them in festivals or real life?
- Do you sometimes pretend to be happy when you are sad? Is this a mask? If so, do you wear a mask? Do we all wear masks?
- Draw a mask on both sides of a construction paper. Draw one that you show to some people and the other that you show to other people. Decorate it in any way you wish.
- Present the mask to your class. Explain your reasons in drawing the mask. your mask. You may choose to use various adjectives to describe yourself.
- Then put the masks up around the classroom.

If the above activity is not comfortable for you or if you do not wish to explain to the class the 'other' side of you, then fill in the chart below and tell only your tutor of your dual identity. Give reasons for your answer.

What I show to some people	What I show to other people (eg family)

Post-visit Activities: Cultural Diversity in Ancient Egypt

All Worksheets

Debate

London is like ancient Egypt, full of diverse cultures and identities.

Is living in a diverse culture like London a good idea?

Divide students into groups and then pair them up.

Students A say 'yes it's a good idea' but students B say 'no it's a bad idea.'

Have a short debate. Use the table below to help you plan what you will say .

Advantages of living in a diverse culture	Problems of living in a diverse culture

The following references are specifically for post-visit activities

Adult ESOL Core Curriculum References

Speaking Sc/L1.1 Sc/L1.4 Sd/L1.1 Sc/L1.2 Sc/L1.3 Sc/L1.4

Listening Lr/L1.2 Lr/L1.6

Writing Wt/L1.4 Wt/L1.5 Wt/L1.7 Wr/L1.1 Wr/L1.2 Wr/L1.3