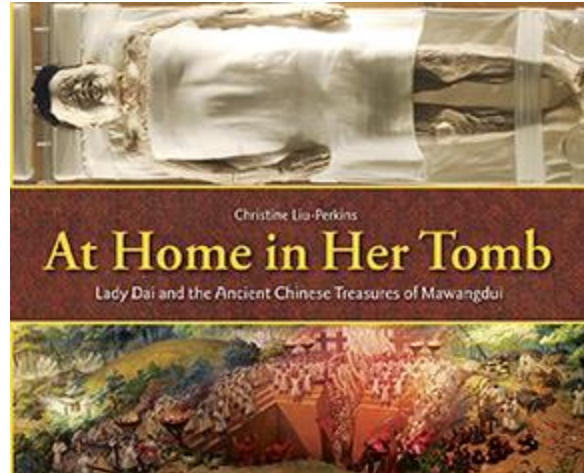



10 Learning Activities

At Home in Her Tomb

Lady Dai and the Ancient Chinese Treasures of Mawangdui

by Christine Liu-Perkins



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This teaching guide offers 10 learning activities related to *At Home in Her Tomb: Lady Dai and the Ancient Chinese Treasures of Mawangdui*:

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Included are further Resources on Mawangdui to explore with students:

- [Mawangdui on the Hunan Provincial Museum website](#)
 - [Articles & Chapters about Mawangdui](#)
 - [Documentary Film on Mawangdui](#)
 - [Resources on Multiple Archaeological Sites](#)
 - [Resources on Multiple Mummies](#)
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Time Line

Time lines help us understand the chronological order of events in relation to each other. While researching Mawangdui, I constructed several time lines, including the "Time Line of the Qin and Early Han Dynasties" (pages 72-73).

- Assign students to construct a time line of the excavation described in "Chapter 1: Excavation of a Time Capsule" (pages 6-17). Reconstruct the order of events, including those without specific dates.

Studying Artifacts

What can we learn from individual artifacts? Have each student choose one of the artifacts from Mawangdui. Research the artifact in *At Home in Her Tomb* and from other sources, including the website of the Hunan Provincial Museum, which features an [overview of the Mawangdui tombs](#) and descriptions of individual [artifacts from Mawangdui](#).

- Develop answers to questions such as:
 - describe and list the characteristics of the object—shape? dimensions? colors? materials? condition? patterns?
 - how was the object created?
 - who would have created the object?
 - how was the object used?
 - who would have used the object?
 - where would it have been used?
- Examine the artifact closely by making a drawing of it.
- Write a scene describing a person from the tomb (Lady Dai, the Marquis of Dai, or the son) who is using or creating the object.
- Note: the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science NetLinks has a lesson plan for introducing students to working with artifacts, [Learn to Think like an Archaeologist](#) including an [Observation and Recording](#) worksheet and an [Interpretations](#) worksheet.

Imagined Scenes

Chapters 2-6 each open with a double spread depicting an imagined scene: an illustration on the left page and text on the right page. The [More Notes about Imagined Scenes](#) page on my website explains how details of the illustrations and narratives were drawn from the Mawangdui tombs and other historical sources.

- Have students study the illustrations together with the text. How do the two work together? What additional details do each illustration show that supplement the text? Construct a table comparing the information revealed by the text vs. revealed by the illustration.
- Invite students to choose part of the text to write their own imagined scene and create an image or cartoon to complement it.
- Or students could choose part of the text to create a script and perform the scene as a short play.

Portable Library

The son's tomb contained a library box of maps and books on medicine, history, politics, natural phenomena, and military strategy.

- Ask students: If you had a box the size of a carry-on suitcase (or a large backpack): What books would you pack to be buried with you? What would each of those books reveal about your interests and personality? What would they reveal about what the world was like during your lifetime?
- Have students create mini-books or a collage representing the texts they chose for their libraries.
- Or students could create a set of cards and rules to play a game involving their chosen books.

Science of Death & Decomposition

Lady Dai's body did not go through the full process of decomposition. Discuss with students: what changes do bodies usually undergo in death and decomposition?

- Forensic anthropologist Elizabeth A. Murray introduces readers to the processes in her book, *Death: Corpses, Cadavers, and Other Grave Matters* (Twenty-First Century Books/Lerner, 2010. Grades 6 and up).
- Lesson plans on decomposition can be found online, including [Decomposition Unit](#) with field exploration, a Concept to Classroom workshop

Chapter 1 as Mentor Text

"Chapter 1: Excavation of a Time Capsule" reveals what it was like to discover what was hidden inside the Mawangdui tombs. It can serve as a mentor text for students to write about other archaeological sites.

- Invite students to research an archaeological discovery of their choosing, especially studying eyewitness accounts. See a list of [Resources on Multiple Archaeological Sites](#).
- Have students write about their chosen site's discovery process as it unfolded to the researchers—what did it feel like to be there? what questions ran through people's minds? what clues led them to figure out answers to their questions? what steps did they follow that led to the discovery?
- Have students create a picture book (text and images) to share with the class and/or younger students in your school.

More Mummies

Lady Dai is an unusual type of preserved body, but there are many other types.

- Discuss with students: why do people find mummies interesting?
- Introduce various kinds of mummies, including those preserved by natural conditions (dehydration, freezing, peat bogs, etc.) or by artificial methods (embalming, plastination, etc.). Find information from [Resources on Multiple Mummies](#).

- Have students choose one mummy (see [Resources on Multiple Mummies](#)). How was it discovered? How was the body preserved? What does it reveal about the person's life?

Memorials

Besides tombs, what are other kinds of memorials that people create to honor the dead? (These can include buildings, charitable donations, scholarships, museum collections, books, plaques, shrines, parks, art pieces, trees or gardens, documentary films, etc.)

- Assign students to choose a memorial and research its history. Who was it created to remember? Why was it created? Who created it? Who are the viewers or beneficiaries of the memorial? How does it remind viewers of the person and what he or she did?
- Have students create a presentation of their research to share with the class or other audience.

Analyzing Nonfiction Media

- Texts: have students read two or more other reports on the Mawangdui tombs (see [Articles & Chapters about Mawangdui](#)).
 - Compare and contrast the introductions, conclusions, structure, purpose, writing style, and how the information is presented in each report.
 - How does *At Home in Her Tomb* differ in its approach?
 - What does each account add to the student's understanding of Mawangdui and its significance?
- Documentary: have students watch the film, [The Legend of Mawangdui Tomb](#) (length: 24 minutes).
 - Compare and contrast the film with *At Home in Her Tomb* concerning how each presented the Mawangdui tombs.
 - What information was in both the film and the book? What information was in one and not the other?
 - What are strengths and weaknesses of books versus films? Of films versus books?

Inquiry & Problem-Solving

Identifying who was buried at Mawangdui and the artifacts in the tombs required the archaeologists and other experts to make inquiries and solve problems. Discuss with students:

- What questions did the researchers seek to answer?
- How did they figure out answers to these questions?
- What clues and evidence did they use?
- Did they have to change any of their initial answers?
- What questions are still unanswered?
- What issues do scholars disagree on or have multiple interpretations of?
- What questions do students still have?

RESOURCES ON MAWANGDUI

Mawangdui on the Hunan Provincial Museum website

The museum's [introduction to the Mawangdui exhibition](#) has descriptions and photographs of the excavations and artifacts, as well as information about the family of Lady Dai.

Further details are given about [individual artifacts](#) in the museum's collection, including lacquerware, silk, books, and more.

Articles & Chapters about Mawangdui

Bonn-Muller, Eti. "Entombed in Style: The Lavish Afterlife of a Chinese Noblewoman." *Archaeology* 62, no. 3, May/June (2009): 40-43. [[Full article](#) pdf on Bonn-Muller's website, [text](#) in EBSCOhost database, or a [short version](#) on *Archaeology*'s website.]

Article about Lady Dai's tomb publicizing a 2009 exhibit of Mawangdui artifacts at the China Institute in New York City. Grades 6 and up.

Buck, David D. "Three Han Dynasty Tombs at Ma-Wang-Tui." *World Archaeology* 7, no. 1 (1975): 30-45. [[Article](#) in JSTOR database or [here](#).]

Quite a complete summary with good line drawings of the tomb site and *feiyi* silk painting. Grades 7 and up.

Chow, Fong, and Cheng Yeh. "A Brief Report on the Excavation of Han Tomb No. 1 at Ma-wang-tui, Ch'ang-sha." *Artibus Asiae* 35, no. 1/2 (1973): 15-24. [[Article](#) in JSTOR database.]

Details of the tomb dimensions and numbers of artifacts. Includes a brief history of the four generations who held the title Marquis of Tai/Dai. Grades 10 and up.

Bahn, Paul. "The Wife of the Marquis of Dai." In *Written in Bones: How Human Remains Unlock the Secrets of the Dead*, 51-55. Toronto: Firefly Books, 2003.

A summary of Lady Dai and her tomb for Grades 7 and up, with six photos.

Editors of Time-Life Books. "A Woman out of the Past." In *China's Buried Kingdoms*, 145-157. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1993.

A colorful introduction—rich with photographs—to Lady Dai and her tomb. Grades 7 and up.

Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, Michèle. "Life in This World and the Next: The Mawangdui Tombs." In *The Han Dynasty*, translated by Janet Seligman, 41-60 and 226. New York: Rizzoli, 1982.

Good information about the three Mawangdui tombs and about Han life. Includes large photographs. Grades 7 and up.

Qian Hao, Chen Heyi, and Ru Suichu. "The Han Tombs at Mawangdui, Changsha: Underground Home of an Aristocratic Family." In *Out of China's Earth: Archeological Discoveries in the People's Republic of China*, 86-125. New York: Harry N. Abrams and China Pictorial, 1981.

Detailed introduction to the three Mawangdui tombs and artifacts with plenty of photographs. Grades 7 and up.

Werning, Jeanette. "Mummies in China." In *Mummies of the World*, edited by Alfried Wiczorek and Wilfried Rosendahl, 126-137. Munich: Prestel, 2010.

Information about Chinese mummies, including Lady Dai. Also discusses philosophies of death and practices for preserving bodies. Grades 8 and up.

Yu Yanjiao. "A Legend That Will Live Forever: An Introduction to the Han Tombs at Mawangdui." In *Noble Tombs at Mawangdui: Art and Life of the Changsha Kingdom, Third Century BCE. to First Century CE.*, edited by Chen Jianming, 1-16. Changsha, China: Yuelu Publishing House, 2008.

Good introduction to the three tombs, their artifacts, and the Li family. Many photographs. The entire book was produced by the Hunan Provincial Museum, home of the Mawangdui artifacts. Grades 8 and up.

Zhang Dongxia. "The Legend of Mawangdui." In *The Legend of Mawangdui: A Recount of the Past and a Revealing of the Secrets*, 50-83. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2007.

A lively account of excavating the three Mawangdui tombs with quotes from the archaeological team. Companion to the documentary video, [The Legend of Mawangdui Tomb](#). Grades 7 and up.

Loewe, Michael. "The painting from tomb no. 1, Ma-wang-tui." In *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality*, 17-59 (esp. pp. 17-30). London: Unwin Hyman, 1979.

Pages 17-30 give an overview of Lady Dai's tomb; the rest of the chapter focuses on the *feiyi* silk painting. Grades 9 and up.

Peng Long-xiang, and Wu Zhong-bi. "The Mawangtui-Type Cadavers in China." In *Mummies, Disease & Ancient Cultures*, edited by Aidan Cockburn, Eve Cockburn and Theodore A. Reyman, 328-35. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Dr. Peng led the autopsy of Lady Dai's body. This chapter is great for students interested in the biology of what made her body's condition unique. Grades 9 and up.

Documentary Film on Mawangdui

[The Legend of Mawangdui Tomb](#)

Terrific documentary footage and interviews with the archaeological team about the Mawangdui tombs—in Mandarin with English subtitles (24 minutes).

Resources on Multiple Archaeological Sites

Adams, Simon. *Archaeology Detectives*. Barron's Educational Series, 2009.

Lively introduction to archaeology and fifteen sites from Ice Age paintings to the Titanic. Grades 4-8.

Berger, Melvin & Gilda Berger. *Mummies of the Pharaohs: Exploring the Valley of the Kings*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic.

Gorgeous photographs and biographical explorations of several pharaohs and their tombs, including a detailed account of Howard Carter's discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb. Grades 4-7.

Ball, Jacqueline and Richard Levey. *Ancient China: Archaeology Unlocks the Secrets of China's Past*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007.

Introduction to several major archaeological sites in China. Grades 4-7.

Scheller, William. *Amazing Archaeologists and their Finds*. Oliver Press.

Good profiles about eight discoverers and their discoveries. Grades 4-8.

Halls, Kelly Milner. *Mysteries of the Mummy Kids*. Plain City, Ohio: Darby Creek, 2007.

Intriguing, informative accounts of child mummies from South America, Egypt, Europe & Asia, and North America. Includes interviews with scientists who found or studied them. Grades 5-8.

Sloan, Christopher. *Bury the Dead: Tombs, Corpses, Mummies, Skeletons, & Rituals*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2002.

Thoughtful exploration of cultural beliefs and rituals behind burials across history and continents. Beautiful photos and illustrations. Grades 5-8.

MacDonald, Fiona. *Amazing Archaeologists: True Stories of Astounding Archaeological Discoveries*. Capstone Raintree, 2014. Grades 5-8.

Hawass, Zahi. *The Curse of the Pharaohs: My Adventures with Mummies*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2004.

A famous Egyptian archaeologist writes about his work. Grades 5 and up.

Deem, James M. *Faces from the Past: Forgotten People of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

Detailed accounts of reconstructing the faces and histories of unknown people from their remains. Grades 6 and up.

Greene, Meg. *Buttons, Bones, and the Organ-Grinder's Monkey: Tales of Historical Archaeology*. North Haven, CT: Linnet Books, 2001.

A close look at mysteries solved by archaeologists at five American excavation sites. Grades 6 and up.

Archaeology

A magazine and [website](#) of the Archaeological Institute of America. Grades 6 and up.

Editors of Time-Life Books. *China's Buried Kingdoms*. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1993.

Informative, accessible history revealed in Chinese tombs from 1700 BCE to 220 CE, including a section on Lady Dai's tomb (pp. 145-157). Grades 6 and up.

Hunt, Patrick. *Ten Discoveries that Rewrote History*. New York: Plume, 2007.

The discoveries and revelations of key prehistoric and ancient sites. Grades 7 and up.

Bahn, Paul (Ed.). *Written in Bones: How Human Remains Unlock the Secrets of the Dead*. Toronto: Firefly Books, 2003.

Three dozen case studies reveal what can be learned from human remains from around the world, prehistoric to 19th century. Grades 7 and up.

Fagan, Brian M. (Ed.). *Eyewitness to Discovery: First-Person Accounts of More Than Fifty of the World's Greatest Archaeological Discoveries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Introductions to major finds from the archaeologists themselves. Grades 9 and up.

Resources on Multiple Mummies

[James M. Deem's Mummy Stories](#) lists his books and nine stories on various types of mummies. His books include *Bodies from the Ice* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. Grades 5-7), *Bodies from the Ash* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. Grades 4-6), and *Bodies from the Bog* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. Grades 5-7).

Reagan, Maggie. "[Classroom Connections: Death and Burial Across Cultures](#)."

This article in the January 2016 issue of *Book Links* includes annotations of children's books on mummies from around the world.

Tanaka, Shelley. *Mummies: The Newest, Coolest, and Creepiest from Around the World*. New York: Abrams, 2005. Grades 3-5.

Markle, Sandra. *Outside and Inside Mummies*. New York: Walker, 2005. Grades 3-5.

Sloan, Chris. *Mummies: Tanned, Dried, Sealed, Drained, Frozen, Stuffed, Smoked, Wrapped, and Embalmed. . . and We're Dead Serious*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Kids, 2010. Grades 3-7.

Putnam, James. *Mummy: Discover the Secrets of Mummies from the Early Embalming, to Bodies Preserved in Bogs, Sand, and Ice*. DK Eyewitness Books, 2009. Grades 3-7.

Halls, Kelly Milner. *Mysteries of the Mummy Kids*. Plain City, Ohio: Darby Creek, 2007. Grades 5 and up.

Brier, Bob. *The Encyclopedia of Mummies*. New York: Checkmark Books, 1998.
Fun A-to-Z reference to mummies and related topics. Grades 6 and up.

Bahn, Paul (Ed.). *Written in Bones: How Human Remains Unlock the Secrets of the Dead*. Toronto: Firefly Books, 2003. Grades 7 and up.

Wieczorek, Alfried and Wilfried Rosendahl (Eds.), 126-137. *Mummies of the World*. Munich: Prestel, 2010. Grades 9 and up.

Chamberlain, Andrew T. and Michael Parker Pearson. *Earthly Remains: The History and Science of Preserved Human Bodies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Grades 9 & up.

Cockburn, Aiden, Eve Cockburn and Theodore A. Reyman (1998). *Mummies, Disease & Ancient Cultures*, 2nd edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Grades 9 and up.



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