The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen
by Howard Carter

As you read try to imagine what it might have felt like to discover the tomb of an ancient king.

We . . . had before us the entrance to a tomb, but . . . there was always the horrible possibility . . . that the tomb was an unfinished one, never completed and never used: if it had been finished there was the . . . [chance] that it had been completely plundered in ancient times. On the other hand, there was just the chance of an untouched or only partially plundered tomb, and it was with . . . excitement that I watched the descending steps of the staircase, as one by one they came to light . . .

A sealed doorway—it was actually true, then! Our years of patient [work] were to be rewarded after all, and I think my first feeling was one of congratulation that my faith in The Valley had not been [without a reason]. With excitement growing to fever heat I searched the seal . . . on the door for . . . the identity of the owner, but could find no name . . .

While [studying] the seals I noticed, at the top of the doorway, where some of the plaster had fallen away, a heavy wooden lintel. Under this . . . I made a small peephole, just large enough to insert [a flashlight], and discovered that the passage beyond the door was filled completely from floor to ceiling with stones . . . additional proof . . . of the care with which the tomb had been protected.

It was a thrilling moment . . . I found myself, after years of [finding almost nothing], on the threshold of what might prove to be a magnificent discovery. Anything . . . might lie beyond that passage, and it needed all my self-control to keep from breaking down the doorway . . . then and there . . .

Carter's team of workers carefully remove sand and stones day after day until they come to a second door.

The day following [November 26, 1922,] was the day of days, the most wonderful that I have ever lived through, and certainly one whose like I can never hope to see again. . . In the middle of the afternoon, thirty feet down from the outer door, we came upon a second sealed doorway, almost an exact [copy] of the first. The seal impressions in this case were less distinct, but still recognizable as those of Tut-ankh-Amen . . .

Slowly, desperately slowly it seemed to us as we watched, the remains of passage debris that [blocked] the lower part of the doorway were removed, until at last we had the whole door clear before us. The . . . moment had arrived. With trembling hands I made a tiny [hole] in the upper left hand corner . . . and then, widening the hole a little, I inserted the candle and peered in . . . At first I could see nothing, the hot air escaping from the chamber causing the candle flame to flicker, but
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... as my eyes grew [used] to the light, details of the room within emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues, and gold—everywhere the glint of gold. For the moment—an eternity it must have seemed to the others standing by—I was struck dumb with amazement, and when Lord Carnarvon, unable to stand the suspense any longer, inquired anxiously, “Can you see anything?” it was all I could do to get out the words, “Yes, wonderful things.”

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Explain why Carter is excited to find that the first doorway to the tomb is sealed.

2. Carter calls November 26, 1922, “the most wonderful day I ever lived through.” Write a brief summary of what happened that day.

3. Carter’s book was published in three parts. This excerpt is from the first part, published in 1923. How long was that after the discovery? Do you think his descriptions are accurate? Why or why not?
Literature

CALL-OUT BOXES
1. it is black and white, it’s faded and cracked
2. out of curiosity, family pride, and for inheritance claims
3. a storyteller or poet-singer
4. A chieftain recited the history of his people. It lasted three days.

ANALYZING LITERATURE
1. It is important for people to keep records of their family lines in order to protect their land holdings and other possessions, their inheritance, and their rights of rulership.
2. Answers may vary. No, people may add events to the family “history” that might not be truthful.

Primary Source The Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. If the door is still sealed, the tomb has probably not been robbed. Most pharaohs’ tombs were robbed long ago. If the tomb has not been robbed, it might still be full of treasure.
2. They find the second sealed doorway and the writings that identify the tomb as belonging to Tutankhamen, clear the passageway, and finally get to peek at the “wonderful things” inside the pharaoh’s tomb.
3. The first part was published a year after the discovery. Possible answer: His descriptions are probably accurate because he wrote about the discovery when the details were still fresh in his mind.

Primary Source Photographs from King Tutankhamen’s Tomb

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. Answers will vary. Examples: Photographs create a record of the original site. If parts of the site were damaged during the excavation, people could still see how the objects had been arranged and what they looked like.
2. Answers will vary but should include descriptions of two or more objects.
3. Tomb objects can show how various articles were made long ago. They show what kinds of materials were used, the kinds of items people buried with their dead, and the food people ate. They show what everyday objects looked like. They provide information about the person buried in the tomb.

History and Geography

MAP ACTIVITY
1. Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, and South America will be labeled.
2. Colors will vary.
3. Pacific Ocean

ANALYZING MAPS
1. approximately 4,000 to 6,000 miles
2. approximately 16,000 miles
3. Bering Strait
4. One reason for people moving was a change in the climate. Another may have been that they were following herds of animals, and as the weather changed, the animals may have been moving to different areas in order to stay warm or look for food.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY
Students’ answers will vary. Sample answer: by walking most of the journey or sailing on rafts or canoes made from wood or animal bones.