

Family Guide to
The Quest for
Immortality
Treasures of
Ancient Egypt

National Gallery of Art, Washington

Use this guide to tour
the exhibition.

FLOOR ONE

Pharaohs, Sphinxes,
and a Scribe

FLOOR TWO

Preparing for the Afterlife

Gods and Goddesses

Voyage of the Sun

Look for these symbols on objects throughout the exhibition.



Re

The solar disk, a sign of the sun god Re. You'll find it everywhere!



Ankh

The hieroglyph for "life." It was one of Egypt's most powerful symbols. The dead were called "ankhu" because they had eternal life.

Living forever — that's immortality. Ancient Egyptians believed that after death, they could be reborn in the next world if they had led a good life. They hoped that magic spells, the assistance of many gods, and the protection of mummification would help them reach the afterlife.

Don't be fooled, though. The Egyptians gave all this attention to death because they loved life on earth! They hoped to go on living for eternity.

Want to follow their quest for immortality?

Track the objects on this tour. They come from tombs and temples built by royal and wealthy families from 3,500 to 2,000 years ago. They are very, very old but made in the hope that they would last forever!

The exhibition is organized by United Exhibits Group, Copenhagen, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Cairo.

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All works illustrated in the brochure are from the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

cover: Bronze cat, about 664 - 30 BC

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Pharaohs, Sphinxes, and a Scribe



1

Boat for the King

The journey to immortality was made by boat. Why? That's the way Egyptians got around in real life—by sailing on the Nile. Look for the goddess Maat, pictured with her wings outspread, at one end of this boat. She kept the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth going. This boat was placed in the tomb of Pharaoh (king) Amenhotep II, an expert horseback rider and archer. He died in 1400 BC, and his mummy was found, still wrapped, in 1898, over three thousand years later.

Do you see the pharaoh's beard? It's false—look closely to see the straps that held it in place. Kings of ancient Egypt wore false beards as part of their official costume.

Scribe

Have you noticed that many objects here are covered with writing? The written word was considered very powerful. Name something, and you can harness its magic.

Egypt's professional writers were called scribes. This scribe works on a scroll spread across his lap. Do you see what's hung over his left shoulder? It's a palette holding two round cakes of ink, which were usually black and red. The scribe's statue was in the temple of the god Amun. Some of his words promise to relay the prayers of visitors to the god. Apparently, many visitors accepted the offer and rubbed parts of the inscription smooth.



Kheper

Kheper means scarab beetle. The *kheper* sometimes lays its eggs inside a dung ball. Later, newborn beetles hatch from it as if magically created out of nothing. Ancient Egyptians believed that, like the beetle, the sun was reborn from death. Thus, the scarab beetle god Khepri became a symbol of the rising sun and rebirth.



2

Sphinx of Thutmose III

In the New Kingdom, the Egyptians believed the sphinx—part lion, part man—was a sun god. This one is carved with the face of Pharaoh Thutmose III. Magically, the sphinx transfers the lion's power to the king, along with the eternal life of the sun.

- 1 Boat from the tomb of Amenhotep II, 1427-1400 BC, painted wood
- 2 Sphinx of Thutmose III, 1479-1425 BC, granodiorite (stone)
- 3 Amenhotep, son of Hapu, as a scribe, 1390-1352 BC, granodiorite (stone)

3



Preparing for the Afterlife



Djed pillar

The pillar signifies “stability.” It is a sign of Osiris, god of the underworld. Egyptians thought it looked like his backbone.



Colors were symbols, too. Black stood for rebirth because black mud from the Nile made the soil good for planting. Red and yellow were colors of the sun. Green and blue were the colors of growth and therefore rebirth. Blue also reminded Egyptians of the Nile River and the heavens.

Passage to the afterlife was not automatic. Your body had to be prepared for immortality. Mummification was the first step.



4

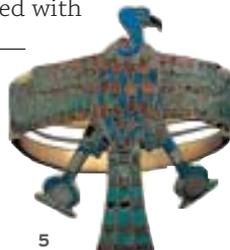
Canopic Jars

Step one: Your important internal organs were removed, dried in salts, individually wrapped in linen, and placed in canopic jars. See the lids? They represent the gods who protected the contents of these jars.

- Into the jar with the hawk head went the intestines.
- Into the jar with the jackal head went the stomach.
- Into the jar with the baboon head went the lungs.
- And into the jar with the human head went the liver.

Jewelry

Step two: Your body was dried with salts, perfumed with oils and herbs, wrapped in strips of linen, and decorated with jewelry and magic amulets—protective charms. In this room you can see charms



5

and jewelry once worn by royal mummies, such as this vulture bracelet. It belonged to Queen Ahhotep. The vulture was especially associated with queens.

Coffin of

Isis-em-akhbit

Step three: Now you’re a mummy! Once mummified, every dead person was called “Osiris,” the name of the king of the underworld. If you had enough money, you might be put in a coffin like this one, to give your body further protection on its journey to eternal life. This coffin top looks like the wrapped mummy inside. She was Princess Isis-em-akhbit. You can see that she wore black eye makeup, gold earrings and hair adornments, and rows of jewelry around her neck.



6

Sarcophagus of Khonsu

Step four: A sarcophagus was an outer coffin that provided yet another layer of protection for the deceased. It was usually made of wood or stone. This sarcophagus is painted with scenes of the journey to the afterlife described in the Book of the Dead.



Look for the mummy laid out on a lion-shaped bed. Leaning over, tending to the mummy, is the jackal-headed Anubis, the god whose job was to embalm and wrap the dead and protect them. At far left you can see the bird-bodied souls — called *bas* — of the deceased and his wife. The two *bas* sit before an offering table piled high with round breads and flowers. It was important to make offerings the dead could enjoy in the afterlife!

Ushebti

Small mummy-shaped figures called *ushebtis* or *shabtis*, are on view here and in the room before this. Egyptians believed that life in the afterworld would be like that on earth, but better. These tiny models were

made to do your work in the afterworld magically. For most people, life in Egypt centered on planting crops and working estates along the great Nile River. This *ushebti* holds a hoe in each hand and has a bag on each shoulder containing seeds to plant, all painted onto the statuette. Go back one room to see another *ushebti* with actual hoes, bags, and other tools made in miniature.



- 4 Canopic jars of Prince Hornakht, 874–850 BC, alabaster
- 5 Vulture bracelet of Queen Ahotep, 1550–1525 BC, gold, inlaid with lapis lazuli, carnelian, and turquoise
- 6 Coffin of Isis-em-akhbit, 959–945 BC, painted wood and gold
- 7 Detail, Sarcophagus of Khonsu, about 1270 BC, stuccoed, painted, and varnished wood
- 8 *Ushebti* of Khabekhnet, about 1270 BC, painted limestone



Horus

The falcon represents Horus, the god of the sky. Egyptians believed their pharaohs were the god Horus living on earth. So, when you see a falcon, it can suggest the presence of the pharaoh, too.



Wedjat eye

This is the eye of Horus. It combines a human eye with the markings of a falcon and means “the sound one.” The Egyptians believed that Horus’ eye had been restored after it was ripped apart by the god of chaos. So this sign was a powerful charm for health and for keeping the body whole – the aim of mummification.

Gods and Goddesses



Tyet (Isis knot)

Isis was the wife of Osiris, god of the underworld. She helped the dead reach the afterlife. This symbol, called the Isis knot, provided the magical protection for which this goddess was known.



Name of

Thutmose III

Names of pharaohs were written in hieroglyphs inside an oval frame, called a cartouche. This is the throne name of Thutmose III, Menkheperre. Recognize the sun (Re) and scarab (*kheper*)?



Bastet

The word for “cat” in Egyptian was *miu*, pronounced “mew,” the sound a cat makes. The sun god Re had seventy-five forms, and several of them were cats, including “Miuty aa,” the “great female cat.” The cat goddess Bastet was also considered a daughter of the sun god.

Egyptians kept cats as household pets, along with dogs, monkeys, even gazelles. Cats were also raised in temples and were made into little cat mummies.

Isis

Isis was the wife of Osiris, lord of the underworld. Through magic, she helped Osiris defeat death, so the Egyptians believed she could also ease the passage of ordinary people to the afterlife. Isis, like all important goddesses, was a mother—in her case of Horus, the falcon. Her horned headdress was worn by

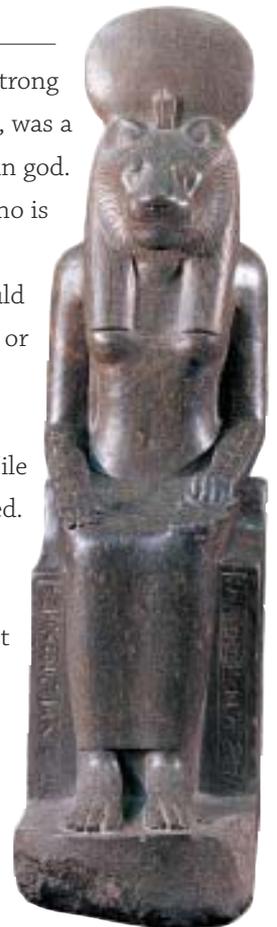


all major goddesses because it was associated with the sun and the heavens.

Sakhmet

The lionness Sakhmet, strong and sometimes vengeful, was a fierce protector of the sun god. Her names mean “she who is powerful”—powerful in magic especially. She could determine people’s good or bad luck, protect their health, and ensure the annual flooding of the Nile on which Egypt depended.

The inscription on this statue describes Sakhmet as “mistress of fear.” Traces of paint suggest that her eyes may have been colored red.



Osiris

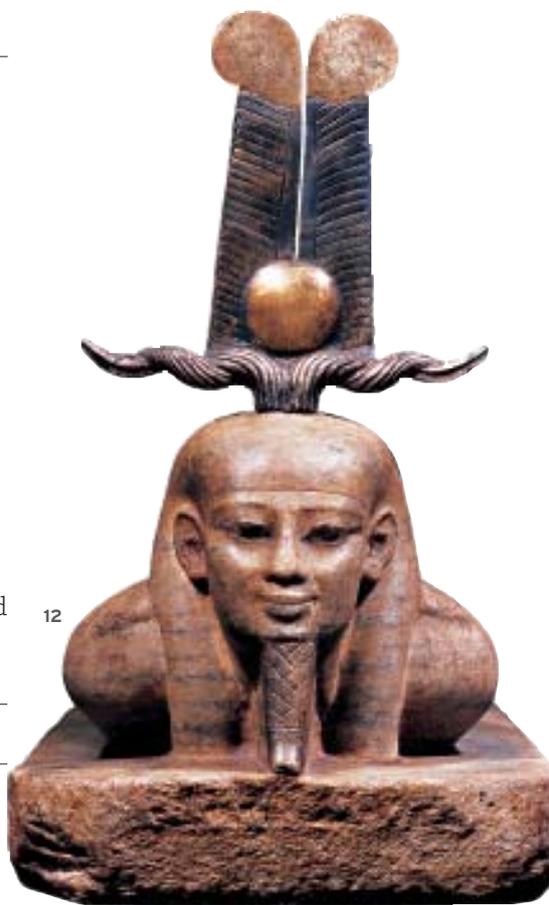
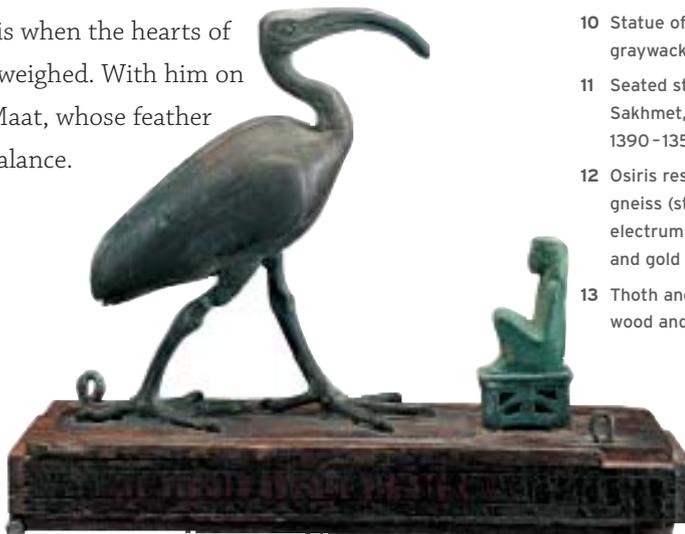
Osiris was the absolute ruler of the underworld but he began as a beloved lord of the earth. After he was killed and torn apart by his jealous brother, his wife Isis collected the parts of his body, and Anubis wrapped them together, returning him to existence. In this statue, Osiris is just beginning to rise up and live again.

One of Osiris' roles was to judge the souls of the dead. The deceased's heart was weighed against a feather, known as the feather of truth, to determine whether he or she merited admittance to the afterlife.

Thoth

Thoth, a moon god, was responsible for writing and knowledge. He is sometimes shown as an ibis, as here, sometimes as a baboon. Since Thoth was the scribe of the gods, he was the one who recorded the verdict of Osiris when the hearts of the dead were weighed. With him on this statue is Maat, whose feather provided the balance.

13



12

- 9 Bronze cat, about 664–30 BC
- 10 Statue of Isis, 664–525 BC, graywacke (stone)
- 11 Seated statue of the goddess Sakhmet, “mistress of fear,” 1390–1352 BC, granodiorite (stone)
- 12 Osiris resurrecting, 664–525 BC, gneiss (stone), with headdress in electrum (alloy of gold and silver) and gold
- 13 Thoth and Maat, 664–332 BC, wood and bronze



Red crown

At one point in ancient times Egypt was two kingdoms, one in the north and another in the south. The red crown was worn by the ruler of the north.



White crown

The white crown was worn by the ruler of the south.



Flail and crook

The pharaoh carries these symbols of his power as king-shepherd and master of his people.



Palm branch

Each year the Egyptians notched a palm branch, so this symbol represents the passage of time.



14

Hathor

Hathor, like Isis, was often seen as the mother of the pharaoh. She was also a goddess of love, music, and dancing.

Though she often wears a crown with cow horns, this pendant shows her with cow ears instead. The blue stone is lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, which was highly prized. The Egyptians thought its blue color imitated the heavens. Details are inlaid in gold, which the Egyptians called “the flesh of the gods” because it retained its brilliance for all eternity.

Maat

Maat, who wears a feather crown, personified the natural order of the universe. She also represented the proper conduct required during life. It was against her feather—the “feather of truth”—that the hearts of the dead were judged.



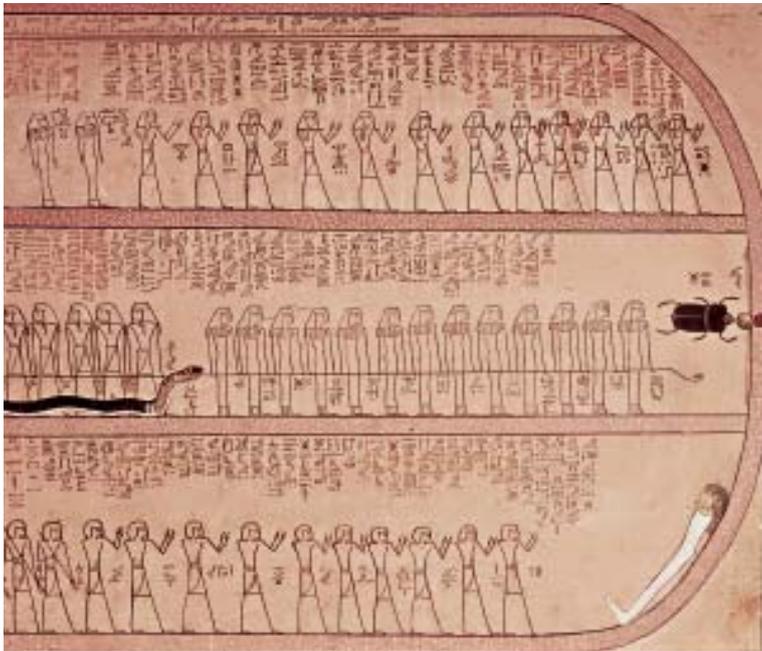
15

14 Pendant in the form of a Hathoric head, 874–850 BC, gold and lapis lazuli

15 Goddess Maat, about 800–700 BC, lapis lazuli and gold

Voyage of the Sun

16



Let's say you're a pharaoh. You've been mummified. Placed in coffins and a sarcophagus. Your organs are in canopic jars. You've got magic *ushebtis*. But you can't reach the afterlife until you take that dangerous trip through the netherworld. As pharaoh you have a special book called the Amduat that describes the journey. Pharaoh Thutmose III had the whole book painted on the walls of his burial chamber. It is re-created in this last gallery.

An oval room? It mirrored the shape of the sun's daily voyage and the shape of the universe. Pharaohs enclosed their names in an oval, or cartouche, because this indicated their rule over the whole area of the sun's daily circuit. The oval sarcophagus room did the same thing.

The Egyptians believed that the sun did not simply set each evening but actually died and was reborn at dawn. The dead pharaoh follows the voyage of the sun through the twelve hours of night to reach the afterlife. His boat moves along the river in the center. There are deserts and snakes. Demons try to halt the boat. No fewer than 471 deities offer help along the way. In the

twelfth and final hour, the pharaoh is reborn into the afterlife, and the sun appears at dawn as the solar beetle.

17



16 Detail, Twelfth Hour of the Amduat, about 1425 BC

17 View of the tomb of Thutmose III, Valley of the Kings, Thebes (present-day Luxor), Egypt



Hetep (offering table sign)

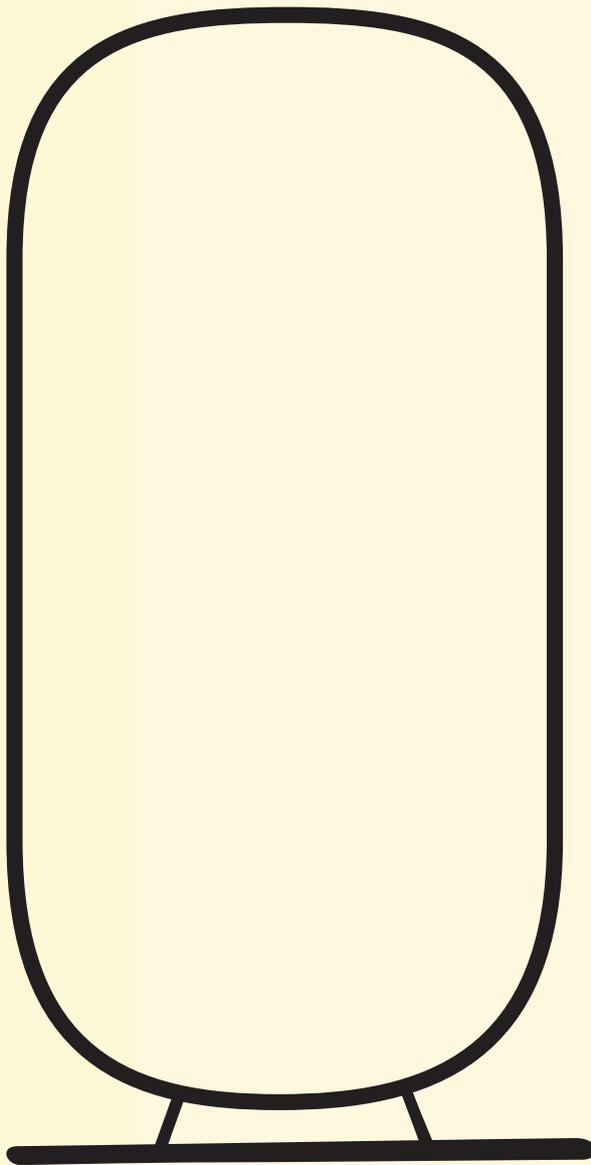
This sign has the shape of a loaf of bread on an offering table. It means to "offer" or "be content."

HOME ACTIVITIES

The Afterpage

The Name Game

Egyptians believed that writing someone's name inside the shape of a cartouche (oval frame) indicated a king. Using the hieroglyphics chart on the back cover, create your own cartouche. You can also use hieroglyphics to write secret messages to your family and friends. Save the chart to help decode the message.



Sorting Symbols

Match the symbols on the left with the words on the right.



ankh



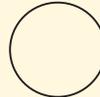
kheper



djed pillar



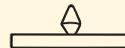
Horus



wedjat eye



tyet (Isis knot)



red crown



white crown



flail and crook



palm branch



hetep (offering table sign)



Re

Sar-box-agus

Create a mini-sarcophagus from a shoe box. Cover the box and lid using construction paper or a brown paper bag. Next, using the symbols from this family guide and others you may have seen in the exhibition, create a colorful pattern of protective symbols and good fortune on the lid and sides of the sarcophagus. Now, you can use the box to store the things that you would like to keep forever!

Did You Know...

True or false? Test your knowledge about Egypt.

1. Egypt is located in Africa.
T__ F__
2. It also borders on the Middle East.
T__ F__
3. Egypt's main river is the Amazon.
T__ F__
4. Camels have always lived in Egypt.
T__ F__
5. An ancient Egyptian week had ten days.
T__ F__
6. Mummification included removal of the brain.
T__ F__
7. Mummy spelled backward is yummy.
T__ F__

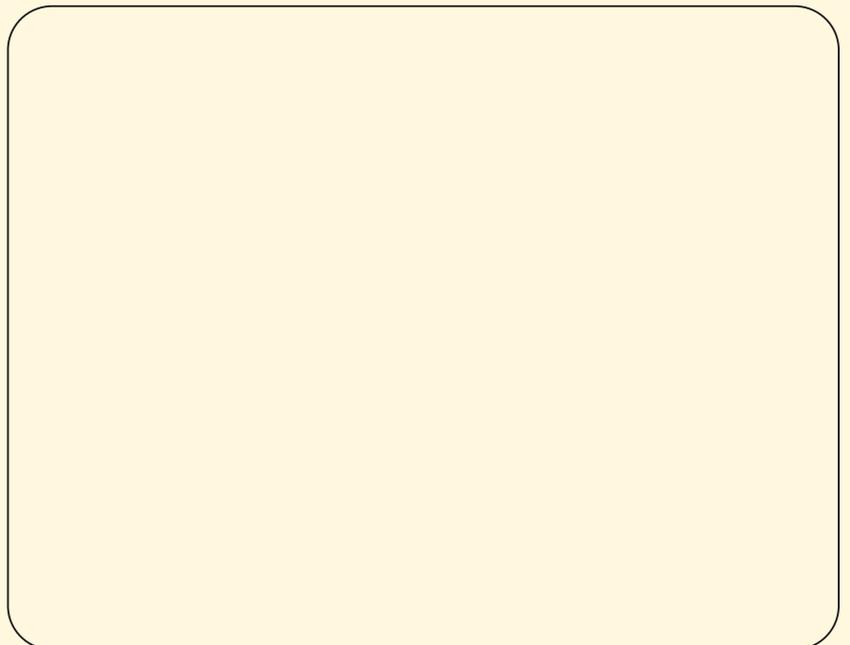
(Answers are on next page.)

Sphinx Yourself

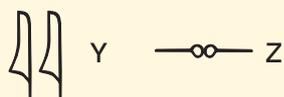
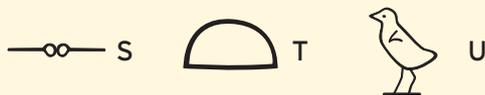
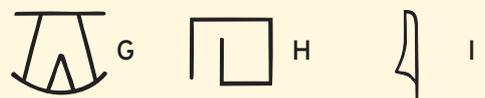
In the Sphinx of Thutmose III, we saw that joining the lion's body with Thutmose's face magically gave the pharaoh power. Create a portrait of yourself as part human, part beast. Which animal parts would you select — the quick legs of a cheetah, the powerful wings of an eagle, the sleek fins of a dolphin? You decide.



Draw here:



Hieroglyphics Chart



Netherwebs

Check out these web sites for more.
Mummify an apple and other activities.
<http://www.ktca.org/newtons/13/mummy.html>

For an interactive, mummy-making experience, consult “I Read It in the Book of the Dead.” Once at this url, click *Begin Tour* and then [18](#), “Mummification.”
www.chicagowebdocent.org/Public/index.html

Try these Egyptian math problems.
<http://cuip.uchicago.edu/wit/99/teams/egyptmath/mathproblems.htm>

Learn how to play *senet*, an ancient Egyptian board game.
<http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/life/activity/main.html>

Find more information, puzzles, and games.
<http://www.rom.on.ca/egypt/>
<http://touregypt.net/kids/>
<http://www.seaworld.org/Egypt/egypt.html>

Answer Key to Did You Know. . .

- 1: T
- 2: T
- 3: F—It’s the Nile.
- 4: F—There were no camels in ancient Egypt.
- 5: T
- 6: T
- 7: F—You must be hungry!