

## READING CHALLENGE

# The Discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb

*The moment Howard Carter opened a door that had been sealed for 3,200 years*

True Stories | B1 Level | ~15 min read | 5 Quiz Questions

<b>Level</b>	B1 (Intermediate)
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens (11–16)
<b>Skill</b>	Reading
<b>Topic</b>	True Stories
<b>Duration</b>	~20 minutes
<b>Vocabulary</b>	15 words with definitions
<b>Quiz</b>	5 multiple-choice questions

## Article

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On the morning of 26 November 1922, a British **archaeologist** named Howard Carter stood at the bottom of a stone staircase in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. In front of him was a sealed doorway — a thick wall of plaster and stone that nobody had touched for more than 3,200 years. With shaking hands, Carter made a small hole in the plaster and held up a candle. As his eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness beyond, he saw something that took his breath away. His sponsor, Lord Carnarvon, was standing behind him and asked nervously: "Can you see anything?" Carter paused for a long moment before whispering his famous reply: "Yes, wonderful things."

### Years of Searching

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Howard Carter had spent his entire career in Egypt. Born in London in 1874, he had first travelled to Egypt at the age of seventeen to help document ancient **inscriptions** on the walls of temples. He quickly fell in love with the ancient world and became one of the most skilled **excavation** experts of his generation. By 1907, he was working for Lord Carnarvon, a wealthy English aristocrat who funded archaeological digs in Egypt as a hobby. Carter became convinced that the **tomb** of the boy **pharaoh** Tutankhamun — who had ruled Egypt during the 18th **dynasty**, around 1332–1323 BC — had never been found. Most of his colleagues disagreed. They believed the Valley of the Kings had already given up all its secrets. The valley had been thoroughly explored, they said, and there was nothing left to find. Lord Carnarvon himself grew tired of spending money on unsuccessful digs. In 1922, he told Carter that he would fund only one final season of excavation. If they found nothing, the project would end for good. Carter, however, refused to give up.

### The Discovery

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On 4 November 1922 — just three days into that final season — one of Carter's Egyptian workers discovered a stone step hidden beneath the sand. Carter's heart leapt. He ordered his team to dig carefully, and within two days they had uncovered a full flight of sixteen steps leading down to a sealed doorway. Stamped into the plaster of the door were the **hieroglyphics** of royal seals. Carter sent an urgent telegram to Lord Carnarvon in England: 'At last have made wonderful discovery in Valley; a magnificent **tomb** with seals **intact**; re-covered same for your arrival; congratulations.' Carnarvon sailed immediately from England and arrived in Luxor on 23 November. Three days later, Carter made his famous small hole and peered through. What he saw was a golden **antechamber** filled from floor to ceiling with **artefacts**: **gilded** furniture, painted boxes, golden chariots stacked in pieces, and statues of the **pharaoh** himself standing guard. The room had been undisturbed for over three millennia.

### Who Was Tutankhamun?

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Tutankhamun — whose name means 'living image of Aten' — became **pharaoh** when he was just eight or nine years old, probably around 1332 BC. He ruled ancient Egypt for approximately ten years before dying at the young age of eighteen or nineteen. The exact cause of his death has been debated by historians and scientists for decades. Modern CT scans of his mummy have revealed a broken leg, signs of malaria, and a rare bone disease. Some scientists believe a combination of these conditions killed him. Others have suggested he may have been involved in an accident, possibly a chariot crash. Despite his short reign, Tutankhamun — often called 'King Tut' — is today one of the most famous pharaohs in history, almost entirely because of the spectacular discovery of his **tomb**. He belonged to the 18th **dynasty**, one of the most powerful royal dynasties in Egyptian history, a period known as the New Kingdom. His father is widely believed to have been Akhenaten, the controversial pharaoh who attempted to change Egypt's religion from many gods to a single god.

## Inside the Tomb

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Over the next ten years, Carter and his team painstakingly catalogued every single object in the **tomb**. It was the most careful archaeological **excavation** ever carried out at that time. Carter numbered each **artefact**, photographed it in its original position, and wrote detailed notes before anything was moved. In total, more than 5,000 objects were found in the four rooms of the tomb. The most spectacular discovery was in the innermost room — the burial chamber itself. There, inside three nested coffins, lay the mummified body of the young king. The innermost coffin was made of solid gold and weighed 110 kilograms. Over Tutankhamun's face sat the famous golden death mask: a stunning portrait of the young **pharaoh**, made of gold and lapis lazuli, weighing 10.23 kilograms. The **mummification** process had preserved his body remarkably well across more than 3,000 years. The burial chamber was surrounded by a series of enormous wooden sarcophagi, each one fitting inside the next like a set of nesting boxes. The outermost **sarcophagus** was carved from a single block of yellow quartzite. On its walls were painted scenes from the Egyptian Book of the Dead — a guide for the soul's journey into the afterlife, covered in **hieroglyphics**.

## The 'Curse of the Pharaohs'

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Shortly after the **tomb** was opened, a series of unfortunate events led newspapers to invent a dramatic story: the 'Curse of the Pharaohs.' Lord Carnarvon, who had sponsored the dig, died in Cairo on 5 April 1923 — less than five months after the tomb was opened. He had been bitten by a mosquito, the bite became infected, and he died of blood poisoning at the age of 57. Legend says that at the exact moment of his death, all the lights in Cairo went out mysteriously, and back in England his dog howled and died at the same moment. Some newspapers claimed there was an **inscription** above the tomb's entrance warning: 'Death shall come on swift wings to him that toucheth the tomb of the **pharaoh**.' In fact, no such inscription was ever found. Scientists have

since studied the deaths of everyone present at the opening and found no unusual pattern. Howard Carter himself lived until 1939 — a full sixteen years after entering the tomb — and died peacefully at the age of 64. The 'curse' was a brilliant newspaper story, but nothing more.

## A Revolution in Egyptology

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The discovery changed archaeology forever. Before Tutankhamun, most of the royal **tombs** in the Valley of the Kings had been **looted** in ancient times — thieves had broken in centuries or even millennia before modern **archaeologists** arrived, taking the gold and jewels. Tutankhamun's tomb had been slightly disturbed twice in antiquity, but the robbers had been caught before they could take much, and the tomb was resealed. This is why it remained so extraordinarily **intact** when Carter found it. The thousands of **artefacts** from the tomb are now held at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, where they have been studied by **curators** and scientists from around the world. In 2023, a brand-new Grand Egyptian Museum opened near the pyramids at Giza, which now houses the complete Tutankhamun collection in a purpose-built gallery. The **gilded** death mask remains one of the most recognised objects in the entire history of human civilisation. Carter's ten-year project of documenting the tomb is still considered a model of careful, patient archaeology. He once said that the most important tools an archaeologist could possess were not a shovel and a brush, but 'time and patience.' The story of Tutankhamun reminds us that beneath our feet, the ancient world is still waiting to be discovered.

## Vocabulary

These 15 words appear in the article. Study them to improve your reading comprehension.

Word	Definition
<b>archaeologist</b>	a scientist who studies human history by digging up old objects and buildings
<b>excavation</b>	the process of digging carefully in the ground to find ancient objects or structures
<b>pharaoh</b>	a ruler of ancient Egypt, treated as both a king and a god
<b>tomb</b>	a large underground room or cave where a dead person is buried
<b>artefact</b>	an object made by humans in the past that has historical or cultural importance
<b>hieroglyphics</b>	a writing system used in ancient Egypt that uses pictures and symbols instead of letters
<b>mummification</b>	the process of preserving a dead body by removing organs and drying the flesh
<b>sarcophagus</b>	a large stone box used in ancient Egypt to hold the coffin and body of a dead person
<b>inscription</b>	words or symbols carved or written on a surface such as stone or metal
<b>dynasty</b>	a series of rulers from the same family who govern a country one after another
<b>loot</b>	to steal valuable objects, especially from a place during a time of war or disorder
<b>intact</b>	not damaged, broken, or missing any parts; still complete and in its original condition
<b>curator</b>	a person who is in charge of a collection of objects in a museum or gallery
<b>gilded</b>	covered with a thin layer of gold, giving something a rich golden appearance
<b>antechamber</b>	a small room that leads into a larger, more important room

## Comprehension Quiz

Choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each question.

### 1. What did Carter whisper when Lord Carnarvon asked 'Can you see anything?'

- A. 'I cannot see a thing — it is too dark.'
- B. 'Yes, wonderful things.'
- C. 'There is gold everywhere.'
- D. 'The tomb is completely empty.'

### 2. How many steps led down to the sealed doorway that Carter's team uncovered?

- A. Eight steps
- B. Twenty-four steps
- C. Sixteen steps
- D. Twelve steps

### 3. Approximately how old was Tutankhamun when he died?

- A. About 8 or 9 years old
- B. About 30 years old
- C. About 25 years old
- D. About 18 or 19 years old

### 4. What was special about the innermost coffin that held Tutankhamun's body?

- A. It was made of lapis lazuli and weighed 200 kg
- B. It was carved from yellow quartzite
- C. It was made of solid gold and weighed 110 kg
- D. It was made of painted wood with golden handles

### 5. Why did Howard Carter's tomb survive so well compared to other royal tombs in the valley?

- A. It was protected by a powerful magical curse inscribed above the door
- B. Carter had paid Egyptian guards to protect it for many years

C. It was built deeper underground than any other tomb

D. Ancient robbers were caught before they could take much, and the tomb was resealed

## Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	B	'Yes, wonderful things.'
2	C	Sixteen steps
3	D	About 18 or 19 years old
4	C	It was made of solid gold and weighed 110 kg
5	D	Ancient robbers were caught before they could take much, and the tomb was resealed