

A Curriculum Guide to

Pyramid Hunters: *The Iron Tomb*

By Peter Vegas

About the Book

Sam arrives in Egypt expecting a boring summer with his archaeologist uncle, not the adventure full of danger and intrigue that he embarks on instead. His uncle has disappeared, with the police and some scary-looking strangers on his tail. And now they're following Sam. Who can the boy trust as he scrambles through sewers, hides in a speeding truck, and finally comes close to the buried ship his uncle was seeking? Solve clues and puzzles along with Sam as he plunges into a world of pyramids, mythology, alchemy, and the hunt for a priceless treasure.

Discussion Questions

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1, 2, 3, 4) (RL.5-6.5)

1. Sam leads an unusual life. Describe what you learn about him as a character, and about his life at boarding school. Brainstorm a list of adjectives that fit him. How does he change in the course of the story, and what brings about the changes?
2. Sam has mixed feelings about his uncle that evolve during the novel. Describe his uncle and his work. What is Sam's attitude toward him when the book opens? Analyze how his views of his uncle change by the end.
3. Name some of the obstacles and setbacks that keep Sam from finding his uncle. Describe what happens to him in the sewers. Choose another scene where he faces difficulties, giving details about what takes place and how Sam deals with it.
4. Discuss the interactions between Hadi and Sam. What motivates Hadi in his choices? Explain why Sam is still willing to try to rescue Hadi at the end. What do their actions tell you about the boys?
5. Sam starts having doubts about Mary, the girl he meets on the plane. In what ways does she help him? What reasons does Sam have for not trusting her? Use details to explain who she is and why she's involved in Sam's quest.
6. Sam's parents are often on his mind. Describe what you learn about them through Sam's feelings about them. What gives him hope at the end of the book regarding his parents?
7. Mary's grandfather is another character who isn't present in the story but has a big effect on what happens. What was his mission in 1942, and how did it turn out? What do you find out about him and his fate from the notes he left behind?

8. Describe the different people who are chasing Sam. What are they after? Which ones of them are dangerous to Sam? Why does the short-haired man want to kill Sam, Hadi, and Uncle Jasper?
9. Sam and Mary use several resources to help them research Uncle Jasper's clues and figure out where to go. What specific books and maps do they use? How do the resources help them?
10. Sam and Mary also use technology as they go along. Describe the different types of technology they use and how it helps.
11. The king Akhenaten is at the heart of the quest. Why does Mary call him "the heretic king"? Give details on what you learn about him in the novel. What is his connection with the Ark? Explain whom Mary's grandfather thinks Akhenaten may have been. What's his reasoning?
12. What is the Ark of the Covenant? Why are Uncle Jasper, Mary's father, and others looking for it? How could it have ended up on the ship? What did Mary's grandfather do to try to ensure its safety?
13. Which characters in the book care about historical items? Explain what motivates each of them. Sam values history more by the end of the book. What makes him change?
14. It's hard for Sam to know whom he can trust. Describe why he has doubts about different people he encounters. Who proves to be worthy of his trust?
15. Describe different parts of Egypt where Sam goes. How is the setting important to the story? Could the story have been set elsewhere? Find some phrases from the text that paint vivid pictures of places in Egypt.
16. This is a very fast-paced story. Point out scenes that are particularly gripping and make the reader want to know what happens next. Analyze how the author creates suspense and excitement in these scenes.
17. Why is the book titled *The Iron Tomb*? What kind of image does the title create in your mind? Find parts of the story that are connected with the title. The series is called Pyramid Hunters. Connect the series title to this book and to hints at the end about what the next book might explore.

Extension Activities

The following activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (W.4–7.3, 4, 7) (RL.4–7.1) (SL.4–7.1, 5, 7)

Egyptian Gods, Pharaohs, Kings, and Queens

The novel mentions various Egyptian gods, pharaohs, kings, and queens. Have students choose one of these, or one not mentioned in the book, to research with print and online sources. Once they've gathered information, each student should create a large poster that conveys their findings with words and illustrations. In small groups, have students use the posters to explain what they've learned.

Breaking News

Have students pose as news reporters who are interviewing Sam about his adventures and discovery. The students should brainstorm a list of questions and write them down. Students should then pair up and each answer the other person's questions in writing. In small groups, have the students act out their interviews, acting out the roles of the reporter and Sam.

Deciphering Hieratic Numerals

Sam has to interpret a message written with hieratic numerals. Luckily, Mary sends him a list of such numerals to help. Have each student think of five numbers and write them down using hieratic numerals. Each number should require at least three numerals. Then students can exchange their lists and decode them to come up with the five numbers.

Wish You Were Here

Sam has some friends at boarding school who might like to know what he's up to. Have students create postcards from each major setting in the novel, drawing pictures including stamps and writing messages that Sam might send to his friends. Have students compare what they drew and wrote for each setting.

A Parade of Pyramids

Have students break into small groups to research a specific pyramid in Egypt or elsewhere, using print and online resources. They should gather images as well as information, including a map, and develop a multimedia presentation to share with the class. This *Smithsonian Magazine* article about pyramids is a good starting place: smithsonianmag.com/history/ancient-pyramids-around-the-world-10343335/?no-ist.

Sensational Storyboard

The action-filled plot would make an exciting movie. Have students create a storyboard, which is a chronological graphic organizer with squares for sketches and lines for short descriptions. Students should convey six or eight of the most exciting scenes on the storyboards. They could use a template (printablepaper.net/category/storyboard) or make their own. Have students meet in small groups to discuss their choices and talk about how they envision the movie.

Guide written by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian and Chair of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee. She gives professional development workshops on books for young people and is the author of Great Books for Girls and Great Books about Things Kids Love.

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