

Shawabtis: MUMMY'S LITTLE HELPERS

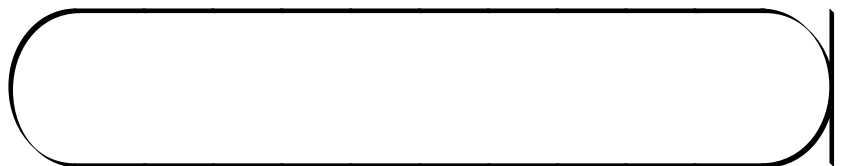
In the ancient Egyptian and Nubian afterlife the god of the underworld, Osiris, could require you to do chores, such as hard labor in the fields. The idea of passing along undesirable but necessary chores to someone else was as attractive to them as it is to some of us today. The solution was to be buried with shawabtis (sha-wab-tis). Shawabtis are statuettes (stat-û-ettes) or little figurative sculptures that were carved from stone and faience in the likeness of the dead. They were thought to have sprung to life the moment Osiris had work to be done. Royal persons of Egypt and Nubia have been found buried with as many as a thousand or more shawabtis. Hundreds were found in the tomb of Nubian King Anlamani.

The Egyptians used an elaborate system of writing called hieroglyphs (hie-ro-glyphs), the system is made up of over 700 different picture symbols. Find the Shawabti of Anlamani in the Egyptian gallery on the first floor. Can you identify some the picture-symbols on it? The writing on this figure is a magic spell to help him in the afterlife. A royal person's name was always written within an oval border, called a cartouche (car-toosh). Can you find the cartouche?

OUR ALPHABET IN HIEROGLYPHS



IN EGYPT A ROYAL PERSON'S NAME WAS ALWAYS WRITTEN WITHIN AN OVAL BORDER, CALLED A CARTOUCHE
Write your name using hieroglyphs in the cartouche to the right.

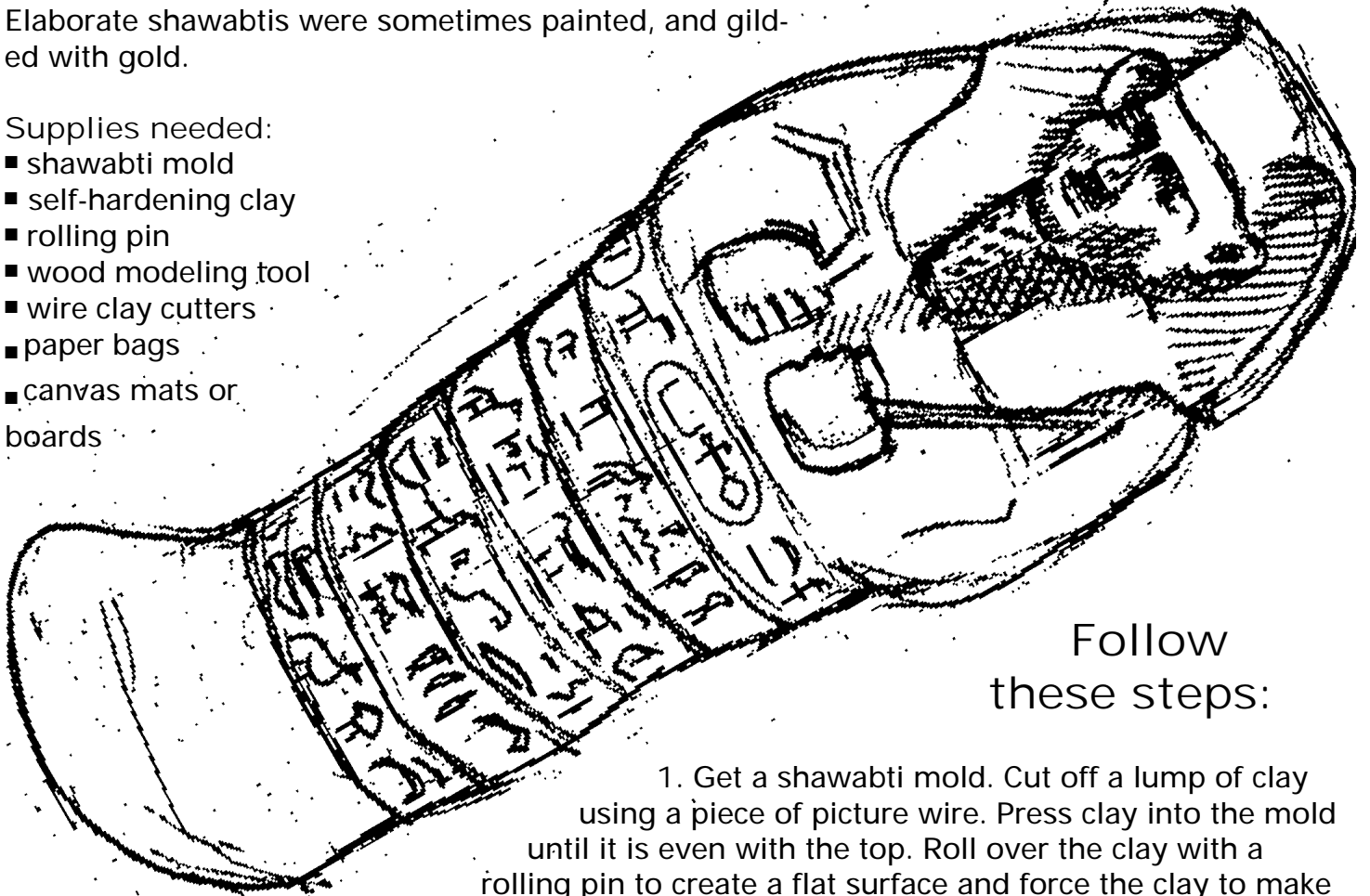


Shawabti Figure Sculpture Art activity

Shawabtis are small sculptures the ancient Egyptians believed would do work for the dead in the afterlife. The Shawabti of Anlamani, in the Egyptian gallery, was one of over a hundred found in his tomb. Shawabtis were often carved from stone. Elaborate shawabtis were sometimes painted, and gilded with gold.

Supplies needed:

- shawabti mold
- self-hardening clay
- rolling pin
- wood modeling tool
- wire clay cutters
- paper bags
- canvas mats or boards



Follow these steps:

1. Get a shawabti mold. Cut off a lump of clay using a piece of picture wire. Press clay into the mold until it is even with the top. Roll over the clay with a rolling pin to create a flat surface and force the clay to make a good impression.

2. Gently pry the clay figure up from the mold with a clay tool. Turn it over, carve and model the details of the face and add hands. Some ancient shawabtis held a shepherd's staff, called a crook, in one hand and flail for threshing grain or an adze, a carpenter's tool, in another. What would you like your shawabti to hold?

3. Decorate your shawabti by carving a few hieroglyphic symbols below his waist. Use the hieroglyphic chart on the reverse of this page to help you. Don't forget to write your name on the back.

Note to teachers and parents: Allow the shawabti to air dry slowly at room temperature and away from heat. Rotate occasionally so all surfaces are exposed to air. Air dried clay is extremely hard and durable but not water-proof. When dry, shawabtis can be painted.