



## The Pharaoh's Secret by Marissa Moss: Activities and Discussion Questions



### DESCRIPTION

Filled with intrigue and surprises, *The Pharaoh's Secret* includes Marissa Moss's original illustrations throughout. The novel skillfully weaves history with a personal story full of heartache and family tensions that will entice and enthrall readers.

When Talibah and her younger brother, Adom, accompany their father, an academic, to his homeland of modern Egypt on his research assignment, they become involved in a mystery surrounding an ancient, lost pharaoh—a rare queen ruler. Someone has tried to wipe her from the official record, to make it appear as if she never existed! She needs Talibah to help her and her high priest,

Senenmut, reclaim their rightful place in history. Exotic locales, mysterious strangers, and a sinister archaeologist round out an adventure that is full of riddles, old tales, and, most surprisingly of all, a link to Talibah's and Adom's mother, who died mysteriously.

### Standards (NCTE/IRA):

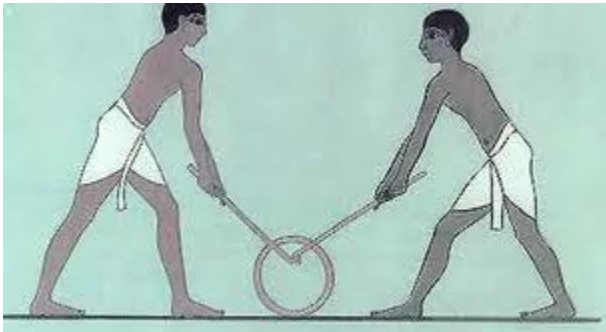
- 4– Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- 5– Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- 6– Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- 8 –Students use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- 11– Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.



# Mosswood Connections

## Activities

- Have the students figure out what their names would be in Hieroglyphics.  
Here is a website: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/egypt/translator.html>
- Sports were important to the ancient Egyptians. Have the kids research what sports were popular. <http://www.ancient-egypt-online.com/ancient-egypt-sports.html>
- Have a “sports day” (tug of war, pass the hoop).



- Explore the symbolism of different animals that are featured in the ancient Egyptian culture.  
(More information on pages 7–8.)
- Discuss foreshadowing in literature (More information on page 8.)
- Discuss rising action. Here is a website for lesson information and worksheets:  
[http://www.kerpoof.com/edu/plans/The\\_Plot\\_Thickens/The\\_Plot\\_Thickens.pdf](http://www.kerpoof.com/edu/plans/The_Plot_Thickens/The_Plot_Thickens.pdf)
- Make an amulet out of model magic. Research examples here:  
<http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/mummies/story/page9.html>

- Writing topic ideas:

Be a tour guide. Research Egypt and make a brochure of the historical sites in Egypt.

Research the climate and do a weather report.

Research and compare the female pharaohs.

Write a newspaper article about Hatshepsut.

Write an afterward for the book. What do you think happened to Talibah and Adom when they returned to their home?

- Research Ancient food. Make one of the recipes.



We made basbousa.

Recipe here: [Basbousa](#)



# Mosswood Connections

- Play a trivia game about the Pharaohs
- Vocabulary (Pages 9-11)
- Play Senet. (Game and rules on page 12-14.)

## Discussion Questions.

### Chapter 1:

What do you think Talibah meant when she said that she expected that Cairo would feel familiar to her?

Have you ever heard so much about something that when you finally experience it seems familiar?

Why do you think that Talibah did not tell her father about the stone carving?

### Chapter 2:

What is papyrus?

What is the Book of the Dead?

(It is an ancient Egyptian guide book for how people cross over from the world of the living to the world of the dead.)

Who is Anubis?

(He weighs the dead person's, a heart heavier than a feather means that heart is evil)

Why do you think that Talibah's and Adom's dad does not talk about their mother?

Talibah starts to have strange dreams. Are they just dreams or something else?

### Chapter 3:

What happens in this chapter? Why might it be important to the story?

Do you think that Rashid's ring is magic?

What is the relationship between Talibah and Adom?



## *Mosswood Connections*

Where is Rashid taking them?

Chapter 4:

Where do you think Talibah was in her dream?

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What is Luxor?

Talibah has a ‘gut’ feeling about Rashid. Has that ever happened to you? If you have those feelings what should you do?

Why did they call Hatshepsut the “Daughter of Justice”?

(Her pharaoh name was Maat-kare meaning keeper of Maat, the principle of order. She helped bring order to Egypt.)

Chapter 5:

What does Adom see on their way to the temple complex?

Is the snake dangerous?

Do you know the symbolism of a cobra in Egyptian mythology?

When Talibah enters the temple it feels familiar why?

Who was Senenmut?

What is a cartouche?

Who is Maat-Ka-Re?

Chapter 6:

Why doesn’t Talibah want to go with Rashid?

Talibah thinks that she found something out about Senenmut and Hatshepsut. What was it?

Why did Senenmut have 2 tombs?

Chapter 7:



## *Mosswood Connections*

What does Talibah find at the library?

Why does the author choose to tell the story of Senenmut through the writings of the scribe?

What do we learn from Meru's writings?

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Chapter 8:

We meet Neferure; who is she?

Why would she have to marry her half-brother?

What happens to Talibah in the pool?

Talibah finds a scrap of paper. Adom tells her about the old lady "maid" who smells of spices. Why might that smell be important to the plot?

Chapter 9:

What does Talibah discover in this chapter?

What does Senenmut show Meru in Hatshepsut's tomb?

Why was Meru shocked?

Chapter 10:

What do you think was the reason for Hatshepsut depicting herself as male?

Why do you think Hatshepsut's name was erased from the tomb? Jealousy of her step son? Did erasing her name allow Thutmose III to pretend he was of royal blood?

Chapter 11:

What would it be like to have to take care of a younger sibling?

Why does Talibah cry?

Chapter 12:

What happens to Adom?



## *Mosswood Connections*

What does he find?

Chapter 13:

What happened to Neferure?

How does Senenmut feel? Do you believe that is historical fact or fiction?

Chapter 14:

What is delivered to Talibah?

Whose name do you think was in the cartouche that Talibah saw?

What does it mean when the demon devours Hapuseneb?

Chapter 15:

Should Talibah tell Adom everything that was going on with her? Why or why not?

What do they discover about their connection to Senenmut?

Chapter 16:

What does Talibah's fear of water foreshadow?

What does Hatshepsut's mummy threaten in Talibah's dream?

What is the hieroglyph on Rashid's ring? (Hapuseneb) What do you think that this means?

What happens to Talibah on the boat? Is this still rising action or the climax?

Chapter 17:

What happens in this chapter?

Does what takes place make sense to you or just bring up more questions?

Chapter 18:

How does Talibah explain her "vision"?

Chapter 19:



## *Mosswood Connections*

Their fathers returns. What do you think that this signals?

What does the name Talibah mean?

What is the origin of the bracelet that Adom bought for Talibah?

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Chapter 20:

What happens with at the tomb with Rashid?

Chapter 21:

What is special about Talibah's bracelet?

Who is she related to?

What does the man tell her that she has to do?

Chapter 22:

What plan does Adom come up with?

Do you think that this is a good plan? What would you do?

Chapter 23:

Would you go to the tomb in the dark? Why or why not?

How does Talibah know that they are getting closer?

Whose cartouche was on the statue they found by the ring?

Did you agree that the ring should be put in the rubble of Senenmut's second tomb? Why or why not?

Who finds them in Hapuseneb's tomb?

What is the connection between Rashid and Hapuseneb?

Chapter 24:

Why did the backpack burst into flames and how does that help the story?



## Mosswood Connections

Do you think that their mother's death had anything to do with the curse?

What happened to Rashid?

### Symbolism of Ancient Egypt

#### Crocodiles:

The Egyptians both respected and feared the power of the crocodile as they were a real danger to them. The Nile, which was full of crocodiles, was important to the livelihood of the Egyptians. It therefore made good sense to have a god which could appease these ferocious beasts. Crocodiles were represented by the god called Sobek. Possessing the strength and nature of a crocodile, which Egyptians would both fear and respect, he was a symbol of the Pharaoh's power.

#### Cobra:

Appearance: The cobra was almost always portrayed rearing up and with its hood dilated. The Greek word uraeus is typically used to describe the cobra in this pose. The word may have its origins from the Egyptian words which meant "she who rears up". The species of cobra represented as the uraeus is the *Naja haje*. Meaning: According to the Story of Re, the first uraeus was created by the goddess Isis who formed it from the dust of the earth and the spittle of the sun-god. The uraeus was the instrument with which Isis gained the throne of Egypt for her husband Osiris. The uraeus was a symbol for various things from early times including: the sun, Lower Egypt, the king and a number of deities. As the sacred creature of the Delta city of Buto, the reptile was known by the same name. She soon became an emblem of all of Lower Egypt. The uraeus was often depicted with the vulture Nekhebet who served the same function for Upper Egypt. Together they symbolized the unification of the two lands.

#### Scarab:

Egyptians observed how newborn scarabs emerge from the dung, and how the adult beetles spend most of their lives rolling the feces in order to feed their offspring, until mysteriously, the scarab becomes aware of a pair of wings which had always been there, and they courageously fly away to explore life outside the dung. The brief life of the scarab, then, reveals a beautiful message – just like the scarab beetle lives among the feces until it discovers its hidden wings. The human soul is also trapped in the physical world (symbolized by the dung ball) until it discovers its ability to fly.





# Mosswood Connections

## Scorpion:

The scorpion is a constant reminder that death walks with us. In the mythology of ancient Egypt, the scorpion stands for Seth, the Trickster and brother of Nephthys, queen of the Land of the Dead. He is the nemesis and opponent of Osiris, and Isis the Magician.

The Egyptian goddess of transformation, Isis (or, Aset,) was liberated by the god of wisdom, Toth, from the room in which Seth had her at work weaving a shroud. She was given a company of seven scorpions to serve as her bodyguard, which forms a circle around her.

## **Definition of Foreshadowing**

**Foreshadowing** suggests events that have yet to occur in a work of literature. Writers use foreshadowing to build their readers' expectations and to create suspense. Example: A weapon found in a drawer early in a story might **foreshadow** a future crime in the story.

## **Apply**

There are examples of foreshadowing in your book. Some are more obvious than others are.

1. Name the event that is foreshadowed earlier in the book.
2. Identify the clues that foreshadow the event. Write the page number and sentence/paragraph in which the foreshadowing is found. Include a second page number and sentence/paragraph that foreshadows the event if possible.

## **Challenge Question**

1. Name a second event that is foreshadowed in the book.
2. Identify the clues that foreshadow the event. Write the page number and sentence/paragraph in which the foreshadowing is found.

## **Vocabulary**

### **Vocabulary Words #1-#4**

"Instead, I see cement **slums**, cardboard **shanties**, and then, as we get closer to the center of the city, the same **anonymous** buildings you see everywhere, sleek-glass-and-high-metal high-rises next to crumbling cinder block **monstrosities**."

1. **Slums**- *n.* a thickly populated, run-down, squalid part of a city, inhabited by poor people.
2. **Shanties**- *n.* a crudely built hut, cabin, or house.
3. **Anonymous**- *adj.* lacking individuality, unique character, or distinction.
4. **Monstrosities**- *n.* the state or character of being monstrous.

### **Vocabulary Words #5-#8**



## Mosswood Connections

"I can tell he's imagining that he is rummaging through a pirate's lair where treasures from exotic voyages have been heaped up while waiting for the captain's return with yet more loot."

5. **Rummage**- v. to search thoroughly or actively, especially by moving around, turning over, or looking through contents.
6. **Lair**- n. a secluded or hidden place, especially a secret retreat or base of operations; a hideout or hideaway: *a pirate's lair*.
7. **Exotic**- adj. of foreign origin or character; not native; introduced from abroad.
8. **Heaped**- v. a group of things placed, thrown, or lying on top of each other; pile.

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### Vocabulary Words #9-11

"I'm not a big person---one of the few things Dad says about Mom is that I inherited her slender build--- and I feel even smaller in the elaborate gilt car."

9. **Inherit**- v. to receive (a genetic character) by the transmission of hereditary factors.
10. **Slender build**- n. a thin, small complexion.
11. **Elaborate**- adj. marked by intricate and often excessive detail; complicated

### Vocabulary Words #12-#14

"Her most important achievement was solidifying the order that her father had restored to the kingdom after the invasions of the Hyksos."

12. **Achievement**- n. something accomplished, especially by superior ability, special effort, great courage, etc.; a great or heroic deed.
13. **Solidifying**- v. in the present tense, to unite firmly or consolidate.
14. **Restore**- v. 1. To bring back to a former, original, or normal condition, as a building, statue, painting, or country.

### Vocabulary Words #15-18



## Mosswood Connections

“Instead of a **solemn procession** of sphinxes, there’s a tangle of modern streets and shops displaying **alabaster** bowls, **gaudily** painted miniature mummies and brightly colored clothes.”

15. **Solemn**- *adj.* gravely or somberly impressive; causing serious thoughts or a grave mood.
16. **Procession**- *n.* a line of, typically the same thing, persons or things coming from a source.
17. **Alabaster**- *adj.* resembling alabaster in the sense of color and touch; smooth and white shine.
18. **Gaudily**- *adj.* cheaply showy in a tasteless way.

### Vocabulary Words #19-22

“Instead of neatly organized books and **gleaming** computer **terminals**, the library Rashid leads me to is a labyrinth of dusty shelves; rusted **filing cabinets**; and piles of books **massed** on tables, chairs, and the floor.”

19. **Gleaming**- *n.* a flash or beam of light.
20. **Terminals**- *n.* occurring at or forming the end of a series, succession, or the like; closing; concluding.
21. **Filing Cabinets**- *n.* a place to store important documents or papers.
22. **Massed**- *v.* a considerable assemblage, number, or quantity.

### Vocabulary Words #23-24

“He **pivots** the scarab back like a lid, **revealing** a small space big enough for a coin or a gem, but not much more.”

23. **Pivot**- *v.* a pin, point, or short shaft on the end of which something rests and turns, or upon and about which something rotates or oscillates.
24. **Revealing**- *v.* in present tense, to lay open to view; display; exhibit.

### Vocabulary Words #25-28

“I don’t remember hearing the name before, but as I read it, a stabbing pain shoots through me, **blooming** into a **ragged gouge** deep inside me.”

25. **Blooming**- *v.* in present tense to flourish; prosper.
26. **Ragged**- *adj.* full of rough or sharp projections; jagged.
27. **Gouge**- *n.* a big sharp cut made deep down inside.





# Mosswood Connections

## Senet

Each player uses 7 counters, which in Ancient Egypt would have been spools  and cones 

### Playing

1. One player puts 7 counters on the odd-numbered squares, 1-13, and the other player puts 7 counters on the even-numbered squares, 2-14.
2. Each player drops the throw-sticks. (Make your own out of Popsicle sticks.)
  - 4 decorated surfaces up scores 5
  - 4 plain surfaces up scores 4
  - 3 plain surfaces up scores 3
  - 2 plain surfaces up scores 2
  - 1 plain surface up scores 1
3. The first player to score 1 starts, and has to use whichever counters are on the even-numbered squares.
4. At the start of each turn, a player drops the four throw-sticks. The player can then move any counter as many squares as the throw has scored, but the counter can only be moved to an empty square or to one occupied by an undefended opposing counter.
5. A counter is undefended if the squares to either side of it are empty or are occupied by one or the other player's counters in adjacent squares, they are safe from attack.
6. If an undefended counter is attacked it is moved back to the square that the attacking counter came from.



## *Mosswood Connections*

7. If a player cannot move any counters forwards, a counter must be moved back by the score thrown. If no counters can be moved, the score is lost.

8. A throw of 5 gives a player an extra turn.

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9. All the counters have to land on Square 26 before they can go any further. The exact number must be thrown to reach this square.

10. Once on Square 26, a throw of 5 takes the counter off the board. Throws of 2, 3 or 4 take it to Squares 28, 29 or 30 respectively. To leave the board from Square 28 requires a throw of 3, from Square 29 a 2 and from 30 a 1.

11. If an undefended counter on Squares 28, 29 or 30 is attacked it moves back to Square 27. A player with a counter on Square 27 cannot move any other counters until a 4 has been thrown to remove the counter on Square 27 from the board.

12. The first player to remove all his or her counters from the board is the winner.

Here is another board:



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

4 **D E C O R A T E D** SURFACES UP SCORES 5  
 4 **P L A I N** SURFACES UP SCORES 5  
 3 **P L A I N** SURFACES UP SCORES 3  
 2 **P L A I N** SURFACES UP SCORES 2  
 1 **P L A I N** SURFACE UP SCORES 1



*Mosswood Connections*