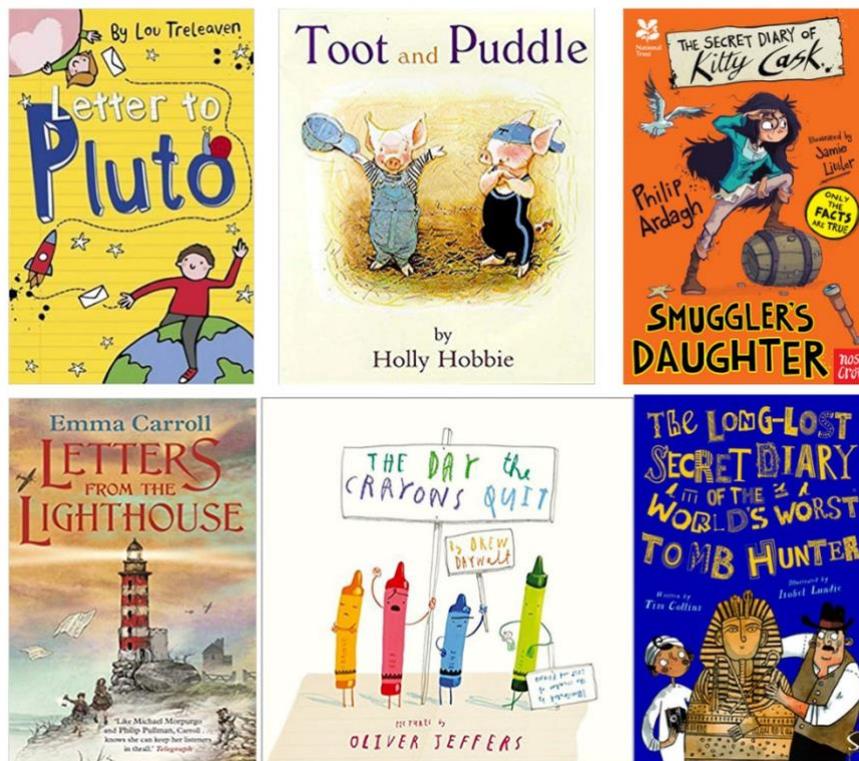




Letters, Diaries and Memoirs

Chatterbooks activity pack



Reading and activity ideas for your Chatterbooks group

Letters, Diaries and Memoirs

About this pack

In this Chatterbooks activity pack you'll find some great suggestions for books for your group to explore, read and enjoy together. From secret diaries to tales told through letters and emails, you'll find a range of stories in the form of memoirs, journals and epistolary fiction. We hope you enjoy them, together with all the discussion and activity ideas, and further reading suggestions.

This pack is brought to you by **The Reading Agency** and their publisher partnership **Children's Reading Partners**.

The Reading Agency has run Chatterbooks, the UK's largest network of children's reading groups, since 2001. Reading for pleasure has more impact on children's success than education or social class; Chatterbooks groups, which are run in libraries and schools, help children develop a lifelong reading habit. Chatterbooks is a flexible model that can be used with children from 4 to 12, for all different abilities and in targeted or mixed groups.

Find out more at: www.readinggroups.org/chatterbooks

You can buy Chatterbooks packs in The Reading Agency shop:

<https://shop.readingagency.org.uk/collections/children>

You can find hundreds of free resources for children on the Chatterbooks resources page:

<https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=chat>

The Reading Agency is a national charity that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. We work closely with partners to develop and deliver programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England. www.readingagency.org.uk

The Reading Agency's partnership programme brings publishers and literature prize coordinators into a closer relationship with libraries across the country to support the delivery of author events, promotions and reading resources directly to readers.

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[Tips for your Chatterbooks session](#)

Talking about the books: some book-talk questions

Read the first chapter of a book aloud and get everyone to share their first responses. This could be with the whole group or class – or children could discuss in small groups, and then share feelings and questions with everyone.

Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to each story, the characters, and the way the stories are told; some have illustrations linking in with the text.

Have a good to-ing and fro-ing discussion – everyone will have their own feelings and opinions about the book, and the things they like, or don't like!

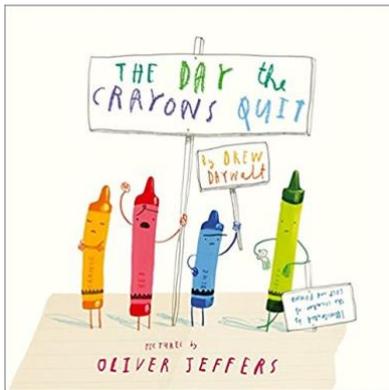
Here are some questions to get you going:

- What did you like about the book/s?
- Was there anything that you didn't like?
- What three words would you use to describe the book/s?
- Was there anything that puzzled you?
- Who are your favourite characters? What did you like most about them?
- Some of these books are told through letters or emails, or in the form of diary entries – what did you think about this? Does it make the story easier for you to read?
- How would you describe these books to a friend?
- What did you think about the beginning– did the beginning get you interested?

You'll find some more book suggestions at the end of this pack.

Have sheets of flip chart paper and pens handy for collecting everyone's thoughts and ideas.

The Books



Drew Daywalt & Oliver Jeffers *The Day the Crayons Quit*

Harper Collins 978-0007513765

Poor Duncan just wants to colour in. But when he opens his box of crayons, he only finds letters, all saying the same thing: We quit.

Beige is tired of playing second fiddle to Brown, Blue needs a break from colouring in all that water, while Pink just wants to be used. Green has no complaints, but Orange and Yellow are no longer speaking to each other. The battle lines have been drawn. What is Duncan to do?

Drew Daywalt is an award winning, #1 New York Times bestselling children’s author. Drew loves to play Rock, Paper, Scissors, but most of the time he can’t decide fast enough which one to pick and ends up making some bizarre shape with his hand that looks like a weird octopus with a hat. He’ll claim Weird Octopus with Hat beats everything, but don’t let him pull that nonsense on you.

Oliver Jeffers is an artist, designer, illustrator and writer from Northern Ireland. From figurative painting, collage and installation to illustration and picture books, Oliver’s practice takes many forms. His picture books have been translated into over 30 languages and have won awards including The New York Times Best Illustrated Books, the Smarties Award, Irish Book of the Year, and The Blue Peter Book of the Year.

Discussion

Read *The Day the Crayons Quit* aloud – your group could take turns reading the crayons’ letters – or watch the video from *Books Alive!*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2CY0OhhToY>

The crayons wrote letters to Duncan to help him understand their different points of view.

- Which crayons wrote the most persuasive letters?
- Can you identify the words and emotions that make these letters effective?

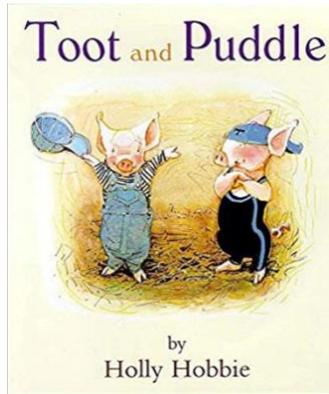
After reading the letters, Duncan comes up with an idea to make his crayons happy again.

- How does Duncan respond to the crayons’ letters?
- Do you think this is a good solution? Why/why not?

Activity

Write a persuasive letter of your own. You could choose another colour and write a new letter from a crayon to Duncan. How does your crayon feel? What would they like Duncan to do differently?

Alternatively, you could write a letter from your own perspective. Choose a subject that is interesting or important to you – it could be something happening at school, or in the wider world. Explain how you feel and use examples to help others understand your point of view. What are your suggestions for solving this issue?



Holly Hobbie *Toot and Puddle*

Wayland 978-0750028271

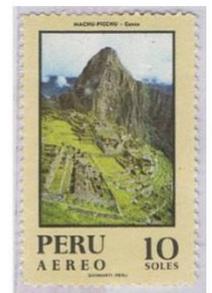
Toot and Puddle are the best of friends. But when Toot leaves Woodcock Pocket to travel and see the world, Puddle chooses to stay at home. Just when Puddle begins to miss his old friend, he embarks on some of his own adventures-right at home. Finally, after Toot returns from his year-long trip, the two discover that true friendship knows no boundaries.

Holly Hobbie has worked as an artist for more than thirty years and is the author of the highly acclaimed Toot & Puddle picture books, as well as an illustrated memoir, *The Art of Holly Hobbie*. The mother of grown children, she lives with her husband in Conway, Massachusetts.

Discussion

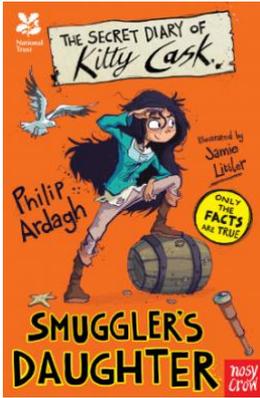
Toot sends Puddle postcards so they can stay in touch while Toot is on his travels around the world.

Take a look at these stamps from around the world. Can you name the different countries they represent? Even though the stamps are from different places, you will see they share some similarities. What features do they have in common?



Activity

Use the templates on Page 10 to design your own stamp. Try to include some of the common features you discussed earlier. Your stamp could celebrate a special event, show a place (real or imaginary), or even be inspired by your favourite person or animal.



Philip Ardagh & Jamie Littler *The Secret Diary of Kitty Cask, Smuggler's Daughter* Nosy Crow 978-1788000574

Kitty Cask is a smuggler's daughter. In the Cornish coastal village of Minnock, Kitty and her family make their living as "free traders" - secretly bringing contraband goods into the country while evading the corrupt redcoats who work for the King. Kitty isn't supposed to be involved in any of her father's schemes... but she's very good at creeping out at night, and before too long she is caught in the thick of the action - salvaging shipwrecks, staging prison breaks, and staying one step ahead of the tyrannical excisemen!

Philip Ardagh is an award-winning author of over 100 books. He is a "regular irregular" reviewer of children's books for The Guardian, and is currently developing a series for television.

Jamie Littler is an illustrator who graduated from the Arts Institute at Bournemouth in 2008, and has won a High Commendation in the Macmillan Children's Book Award. His interests are pretty wide and varied; although he does have a soft spot for wild animals and things that go bump in the night.

Discussion

In the 17th and 18th centuries, goods such as tea, brandy, tobacco, and silk arrived in Britain on ships from around the world. The central Government and the King imposed high import taxes on these luxury goods, making them expensive to bring to Britain. They also charged excise taxes on everyday items like salt, leather and soap, meaning they cost ordinary people a lot more to buy in Britain than in other countries. The money raised through taxes went to the Government, where some of it was spent on fighting wars against America and France. Instead of sailing to the ports and harbours, where taxes would be collected, smugglers in Cornwall would sail to isolated beaches where they could hide their goods in caves and use secret routes inland to sell their products to people at lower prices.

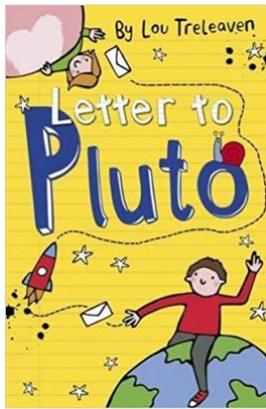
- What qualities do you think you would need to be a successful smuggler?
- What challenges do you think smugglers faced at sea and on land?

You can also use your library to discover tales of famous smugglers from Cornwall and other parts of Britain!

Activity

These words appear in Kitty's diary. Can you match them to their definitions?

Contraband	A knowledgeable woman
Excise men	Stealing (18th century slang)
Blue-stocking	British soldiers, named for their uniforms
Condiddling	Goods that have been imported or exported illegally
Redcoats	Men in charge of the taxes people had to pay on imported goods



Lou Treleaven *Letter to Pluto*

Maverick Arts 978-1848862319

Jon's teacher Mrs Hall wants to keep the art of letter writing alive, much to Jon's annoyance. He is assigned Straxi as a penpal and they exchange letters telling each other about their families, where they live and sending presents, like quills and very smelly Vomblefruit!

When the President of Pluto decides to get rid of the smelly Vomblefruit trees in hope that it will encourage tourists to visit Pluto, he ends up causing more damage than he expected. Everything on the planet begins to die and Jon and Straxi are in a race against time to save the planet by sending back the only Vomblefruit left in existence - the one in Jon's garden.

Lou Treleaven is the author of Professor McQuark and the Oojamaflip, The Snowflake Mistake and Letter to Pluto published by Maverick Arts Publishing. She loves writing in rhyme and will spend days searching for the right word, often muttering aloud to herself as she walks her dog through the fields in Bedfordshire. She also loves drawing, crafts and writing books, plays and musicals but most of all she loves reading!

Dicussion

Penpals Jon and Straxi send each other lots of drawings and pictures so they can learn about each other's lives on Earth and on Pluto. Jon even helps Straxi save her planet after the plant life starts to perish by sending the last remaining Vomblefruit seed back to Pluto in a space shuttle. What items would your group send into space to teach beings on other planets about your lives on Earth?

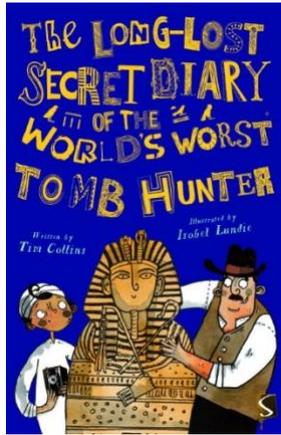
Activity

Create a holiday poster for another planet like the posters at the beginning of *Letter to Pluto*. You can use your library to find out more about the planets and moons in our solar system, or even research planetary systems from across the galaxy.

Uranus is one of the coldest planets in our Solar System, so it's perfect for skiing holidays! From Jupiter you can see beautiful light displays called auroras, similar to our Aurora borealis, also known as the Northern lights.

Here are some suggestions of things you could include on your holiday poster:

- A picture of your chosen planet
- How hot or cold it is, so visitors know what clothing to pack!
- Special features to look out for such as volcanoes, oceans, or orbiting moons
- How long it will take a spacecraft to travel there from Earth
- Activities for visitors to try, such as skating on Saturn's rings, or taking advantage of Mercury's long days to catch up on some reading



Tim Collins & Isobel Lundie *The Long-Lost Secret Diary of the World's Worst Egyptian Tomb Hunter*

Scribo 978-1912537440

Ahmed is an apprentice photographer in Egypt who becomes involved in Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon's hunt for the final resting place of the boy pharaoh Tutankhamun and his treasures.

Will Ahmed help the team to uncover Tutankhamun's tomb? And will he fall victim to the tomb's supposed curse? Come to think of it, given all the disasters he keeps causing, is he cursed already?

Tim Collins has published over fifty books that have been translated into over thirty languages, including *Wimpy Vampire*, *Cosmic Colin*, *Monstrous Maud* and *Dorkius Maximus*. He has won awards in the UK and Germany.

Isobel Lundie graduated from Kingston University in 2015 where she studied Illustration and Animation. She has always been interested in how to make books interactive so children can lose themselves in the narrative. Having worked as an illustrator, she is particularly interested in how exciting, colourful and distinctive artwork can transform stories for children.

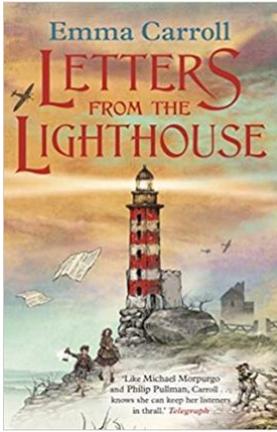
Discussion

By 1914, lots of Egyptian archaeologists thought that all of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings had been discovered, but Howard Carter was convinced he could find the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Lord Carnarvon paid for Howard's search, but almost stopped after five years with few results. Luckily Howard persuaded Lord Carnarvon to pay for one more year, but now the pressure was really on. Finally, in 1922, Howard found a step which was the beginning of a stairway leading to King Tut's tomb. The tomb was filled with thousands of treasures, such as statues, gold jewellery and paintings – and of course, a mummy.

- How do you think Howard Carter and his team felt when they uncovered Tutankhamun's tomb? How do you think they were feeling the day *before* the discovery of the first step? What advice would you have given Howard if you were a member of his team?
- Egyptians believed the items they were buried with would accompany them to the afterlife and there were over 5,000 objects in King Tut's tomb. How long do you think it took the archaeologists to catalogue everything? What other kinds of items do you think King Tut was buried with?

Activity

Ancient Egyptians used pictures of animals, people, and everyday objects to communicate in writing. We call this system 'Egyptian hieroglyphs'. Unlike the Roman used to write in English, the hieroglyphic system didn't normally include signs representing vowels. Try writing a sentence or paragraph without using vowels (e.g. Kng Ttnkhamn's tmb ws dscvrd n 1922). Swap your message with someone else in the group and try to decode what they've written!



Emma Carroll *Letters from the Lighthouse*

Faber and Faber 978-0571327584

February, 1941. After months of bombing raids in London, twelve-year-old Olive Bradshaw and her little brother Cliff are evacuated to the Devon coast. The only person with two spare beds is Mr Ephraim, the local lighthouse keeper. But he's not used to company and he certainly doesn't want any evacuees.

Desperate to be helpful, Olive becomes his post-girl, carrying secret messages (as she likes to think of the letters) to the villagers. But Olive has a secret of her own. Her older sister Sukie went missing in an air raid, and she's desperate to discover what happened to her. And then she finds a strange coded note which seems to link Sukie to Devon, and to something dark and impossibly dangerous.

Emma Carroll is a secondary school English teacher. She has also worked as a news reporter, an avocado picker and the person who punches holes into filofax paper. She recently graduated with distinction from Bath Spa University's MA in Writing For Young People. She lives in the Somerset hills with her husband and two terriers.

Activity

Can you find these words hidden in the wordsearch below? Words can run forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonally. When you've finished, use your library to research any words you don't already know.

e	s	u	o	h	t	h	g	i	l
c	l	d	w	p	l	o	x	o	j
o	e	e	f	o	q	r	n	z	c
u	g	v	t	s	k	d	r	a	w
p	u	o	r	t	o	t	s	v	h
l	f	n	y	n	e	e	b	g	y
o	e	w	a	i	r	r	a	i	d
t	r	a	i	n	u	c	s	o	h
c	o	u	r	a	g	e	l	z	t
f	r	i	e	n	d	s	h	i	p

lighthouse

letters

Devon

London

train

air raid

friendship

secret

refuge

post

war

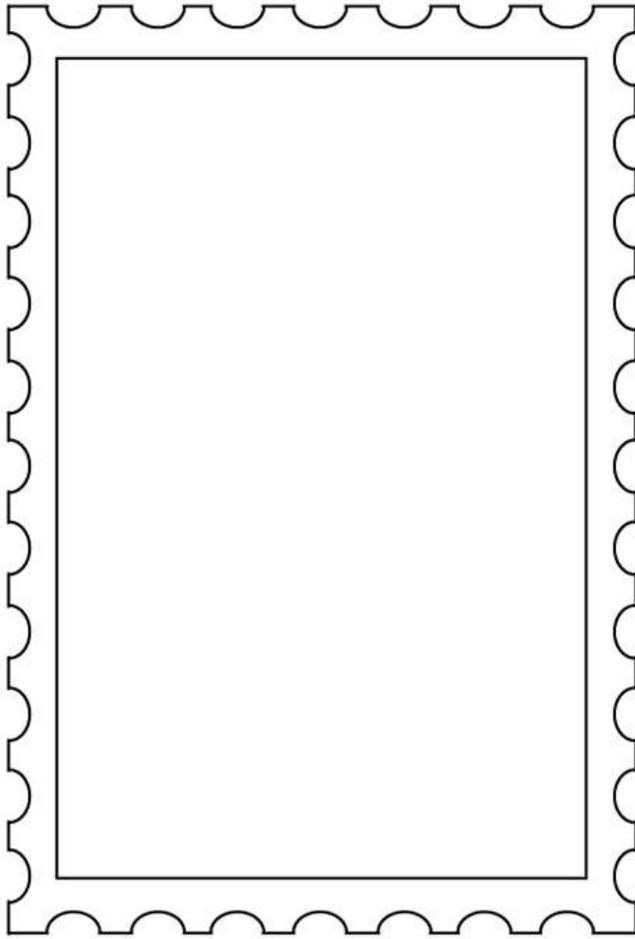
courage

plot

Here are more suggestions for memoirs and books in the form of letters and diaries

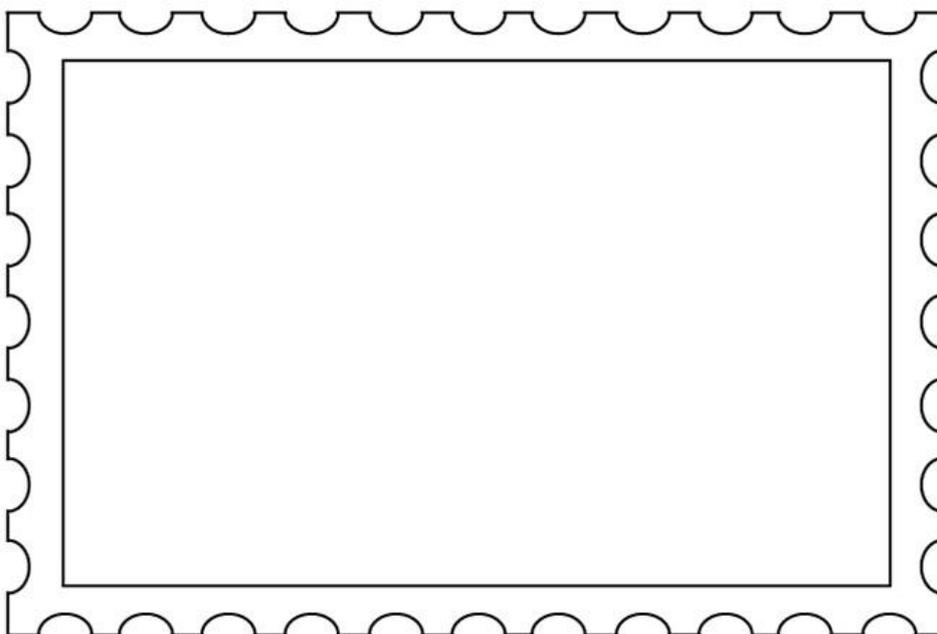
AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	ISBN
Janet Ahlberg and Allan Ahlberg	The Jolly Postman and Other People's Letters	Puffin	978-0670886241
Ambassador Zindzi Mandel, Zazi and Ziwelene Mandela and Zondwa Mandela	Grandad Mandela	Lincoln Children's	978-1786035943
Javaka Steptoe,	Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat	Little, Brown	978-0316213882
Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith,	The True Story of the Three Little Pigs	Puffin	97-80140540567
Ilyasah Shabazz	Betty Before X	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	978-0374306106
Rachel Renée Russell	Dork Diaries: Birthday Drama	Simon and Schuster	978-1471172762
Simon Beecroft	Star Wars: A Queen's Diary	DK	978-1405327800
Holly Goldberg-Sloan and Meg Wolitzer	To Night Owl From Dogfish	Egmont	978-1405294836
Sue Townsend	The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾	Puffin	978-0141315980
Josh Lacey and Garry Parsons	The Dragonsitter in the Land of the Dragons	Andersen Press	978-1783448005
Jacqueline Wilson and Nick Sharratt	Secrets	Yearling	978-0440867616
Steven Butler and Steve May	The Diary of Dennis the Menace	Puffin	978-0141350820
Anne Frank and David Polonsky	Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation	Penguin	978-0241978641
Sita Brahmachari	Artichoke Hearts	Macmillan	978-0330517911

Design your own stamp



Use the templates to design your own stamp.

Your stamp could celebrate a special event, show a place (real or imaginary), or even be inspired by your favourite person or animal.



Answers

Stamps from around the world

Japan	USA	India	Afghanistan	Peru
Canada	Ghana	Spain	Thailand	Wales

Kitty Cask's diary definitions

Contraband	Goods that have been imported or exported illegally
Excise men	Men in charge of the taxes people had to pay on imported goods
Blue-stocking	A knowledgeable woman
Condiddling	Stealing (18 th century slang)
Redcoats	British soldiers, named for their uniforms

King Tut's tomb

*It took Howard Carter's team ten years to catalogue the treasures they discovered in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Other objects found inside included three nested coffins to hold the mummy and canopic jars containing the king's organs; royal chariots; model boats; board games; throwing sticks used for hunting; and dishes.

Wordsearch

