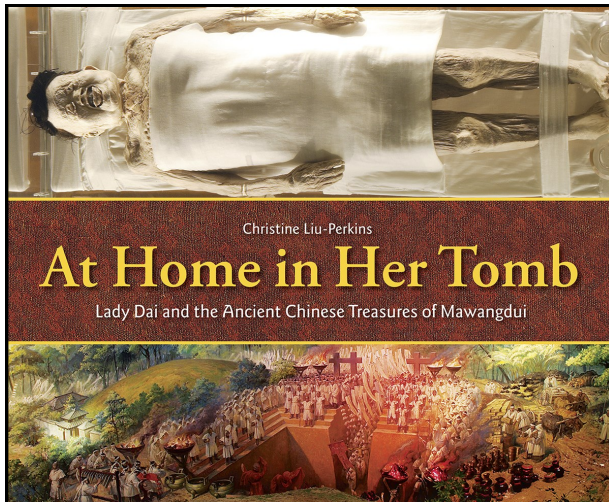


At Home in Her Tomb

Lady Dai and the Ancient Chinese Treasures of Mawangdui



By Christine Liu-Perkins with illustrations by Sarah S. Brannen
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Ages 9–12 • 80 pages

**Meets the Common Core State Standards for
Grades 6–12 in History/Social Studies,
Science, and Technical Studies**

Discussion & Activity Guide

The body of Lady Dai of Mawangdui (mah-wahng-dway) was so remarkably preserved that scientists were able to perform an autopsy—more than two thousand years after her death. They discovered 138 ½ muskmelon seeds in her digestive tract, the remains of her last meal. All her internal organs were in place. Her skin was soft and moist.

The tomb that protected Lady Dai’s body also protected long-lost artifacts from the Han dynasty. When archaeologists excavated the tombs of Lady Dai and her family, they unearthed a treasure chest—and a time capsule holding forgotten secrets gives us clues to daily life in ancient China.

Who was Lady Dai? How was her body preserved? What did she enjoy doing in life?

Enter her tomb and find out.

Before reading

- Ask students if they are familiar with archaeology. Discuss what they think an archaeologist does.
- Ask students if they have ever seen a mummy before. What are their thoughts about seeing the body of a person who lived a very long time ago?
- Take a look at the cover of *At Home in Her Tomb*. The top photo is of the mummified remains of Lady Dai of Mawangdui. The bottom image is a modern day painting of the burial of Lady Dai. Ask students who they think Lady Dai was. Was she an important person? Was she admired?
- Take a look at a map of China. Can students find where the tombs of Mawangdui might have been in the county of Dai, near the city of Changsha in the Hunan province?
- Has your class been studying Ancient China? Tell students that Lady Dai and her family lived at the start of the Han Dynasty. What do students know about the Han Dynasty?
- From this discussion, ask students what they hope to learn in *At Home in Her Tomb*.



After reading

- In 1972, when excavation of the Mawangdui tombs began, Hou Liang, the director, enlisted the help of local high school students. Would your students want to participate in an archaeological dig?
(Kids interested in archaeology digs can check out archaeology summer camps at <http://www.kidscamps.com/academics/archaeology.html>.)

- What do scientists mean when they use the term Mawangdui-type cadaver?



- Lady Dai was buried with a great amount of silk material. Ask students why they think silk was important.
 - On page 48 there is a photo of the *feiyi*, the T-shaped silk painting that lay on top of Lady Dai's coffin. Using a magnifying glass, can students make out the portrait of Lady Dai? Ask students if they think the portrait of Lady Dai is of her earthly life or of her journey to paradise. What evidence can they give?
 - There were three tombs at Mawangdui. Ask students why Lady Dai's was in such perfect condition.
 - In what is thought to be Lady Dai's son's tomb, archaeologists found a chest full of silk books. Ask students why they think this was a significant discovery.
 - The symbol in the bottom right corner of this page plays a significant role in *At Home in Her Tomb*. Can students find the translation and discuss its meaning?
- Take a look at the time line on pages 72 and 73. Ask students to calculate how long the Qin Dynasty lasted. How long did the Han Dynasty last? You may want to point out that the years BCE count down to year 1, which begins the Common Era.
 - Both the Qin and the Han dynasties provided many changes to China. Can students name some of the advances?
 - Ask students to discuss some of the major differences of the Qin and the Han dynasties. Which dynasty would they have preferred to live under?
 - Author Christine Liu-Perkins first wrote about Lady Dai and the tombs of Mawangdui in an article printed in *Dig* magazine. Ask students to suppose why Ms. Liu-Perkins decided to also write a book about this story.
 - Ask students to research who was emperor when Lady Dai becomes Marquise. Who was emperor when she died? Assign students to research more about one of the emperors of the Han Dynasty and what it might have been like to live under his rule.
 - Ask students to think about their lives and the world in which they live. What music do they listen to? What games do they like to play? Who are the important people in their lives? How do they spend their time? Ask students to write an inventory of what future archaeologists would find in their tombs. What items of significance would they think should be buried with them so future generations could get to know them and be able to learn about the times in which they lived? Why?
 - Assign students to write a short fictional story. They should place themselves in the role of an archaeologist discovering an ancient tomb. Where are they? Who is with them? What do they find? What happens when they open the tomb?

