

How the Sphinx Got to the Museum

Jessie Hartland (Illustrations)

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Acclaimed author and illustrator, Jessie Hartland, beautifully presents this informative and fascinating history of the Hatshepsut sphinx: from its carving in ancient Egypt to its arrival in the hallowed halls of New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. This is essential reading for junior Egyptologists!

How the Sphinx Got to the Museum Details

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From Reader Review How the Sphinx Got to the Museum for online ebook

Sarah W says

This picture book is what happens when *This is the House that Jack Built* gets mixed up with history, Egyptian history to be precise. A museum worker (docent) is telling students about Hatshepsut and the art created in her honor. This leads students to asking what a sphinx was and how artwork destroyed after her death landed in a museum.

The docent then recounts the history of the sphinx from the order of its creation to its destruction and on to its discovery by archaeologists all the way until its existence in a museum today. Each person or category of people in the telling has a unique styling of background and letters. This would help students join in on saying those names and titles in a read-aloud.

The book is a great introduction to a number of occupations children may never have thought about or encountered outside of *Indiana Jones*. From curators to conservators, archaeologists to docents, they all have a place in this book. The book also provides a great way to discuss recreations and replicas, including why recreated parts are not painted to exactly match the original material.

Betsy says

One of the most frequent requests I get from parents in my library is a desire for books on "community workers". Which is to say, their children have been given an assignment in school on writing about the people who work in their neighborhood, and so we are charged with coming up with books about sanitation workers, doctors, bus drivers, etc. This being New York City, I always kind of wish that I'd get a request for a community worker a little out of the ordinary. How about a request for a book on a conservator? Or a museum registrar? Why do docents always end up with the short end of the stick? Of course, even if I did get a request for one of these, I'd actually have to produce a book that says what such museum folks actually do. Still, that's no problem since the publication of *How the Sphinx Got to the Museum*. Basically author/illustrator Jessie Hartland came up with a radical notion. Why not combine a book that explains the jobs people do with a real life mystery (how a busted sphinx was returned to its full splendor for display in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) and then present it in a cumulative tale format? Why that's so crazy it just might work. And work it does in a story that satisfies a child's need for story while also working in some pretty cool details about why museums are full of statues from other countries far far away.

A group of kids visit The Metropolitan Museum of Art and are told a strange fact. Before their eyes sits a sphinx created for the Pharaoh Hatshepsut. The kicker? That same statue was destroyed a mere twenty years after its creation on orders from Hatshepsut's successor and stepson. So how on earth has it come to reside fully intact in a museum in America? To answer that you have to begin at the beginning. And so the docent recounts the many steps and people who contributed to the sphinx's story. Hatshepsut commissioned, the sculptors sculpted, the priests admired it, and the stepson had it destroyed. From there the story takes a turn, rediscovered centuries later in a pit by an archaeologist, brought to America, and restored. As each piece of the puzzle falls into place we are consistently reminded of the people who came before, until at long last we reach the present day. A section called "More History" at the end clarifies many of the details and gives kids additional information on the real statue and its current location.

The real trick here, as it is with any cumulative tale, is to know how to tell a story with a lot of repetition without making it boring. I should clarify what a cumulative tale is by this point, yes? Basically what I'm talking about is a book that tells a story the same way you would in a classic like *This is the House that Jack Built*. It's where you introduce an element and then build on it, always returning for a kind of chorus. The books that are successful at this (like *The Apple Pie That Papa Baked*) know how to keep a reader interested, even as the same information is conjured up time and time again. In the case of *How the Sphinx Got to the Museum*, Hartland has the advantage of telling a true story. As a result, the more you repeat what happened to the sphinx (it was . . . "secured by the Art Movers, supervised by the Department of Antiquities, found in a pit by the Archaeologist") not only are you bringing up the true story of its travels, you're also teaching kids about certain jobs by having them repeat the wordy occupations over and over again. Teachable moments! Woot!

The fact that the book is mostly factual places it in a funny position in libraries. Where do you put it? It kind of looks like a picture book, and indeed might be interesting there, but in the end it tends to end up in the Ancient Egypt section of nonfiction. Interesting since there are some details that were stretched a bit to fit the telling. At the end of the book Hartland admits freely that "The part of this book when Hatshepsut orders several statues from the sculptor is somewhat made up." I trust her as an author, but when I read that I kind of want to know how many other details were true. Did the Sphinx really get sent to America on a ship called *The Cingalese Prince*? I mean, it had to, right? Who would make that kind of thing up? A little Bibliography or section at the end recommending websites or books for further reading would not have been out of place here. I liked the "More History" but found myself wanting more for the interested kids out there.

Hartland has a bit of a Maira Kalman style about her. That incredibly flat, near two-dimensional quality of her art. The book offers no hints on her style or what medium she uses, and her website is equally mum on the subject. What's kind of cool is that she has in her short picture book career already created books for Candlewick, Penguin, Chronicle, Bloomsbury, and now Big Apple Books. In the case of this particular book, Hartland has chosen to set many of the images here against relatively uncluttered backgrounds. There's always adequate room for her text, which doesn't sound impressive until you realize how long the cumulative collection of folks involved with the statue really are. After a while, you also begin to notice that each person's designation ("Department of Antiquities", "Egyptian Priests", etc.) is granted its own distinctive font. That's a detail that keeps the book visually stimulating, even if you don't notice it right off the bat.

Of course the best news to leave you with is the fact that this is not Hartland's sole journey into this kind of nonfiction cumulative fare. Following up this title will be a similar book about how a dinosaur got to what I believe will be The Smithsonian, as well as a third title about how a painting (to be determined) got from artist to permanent gallery display. Clearly this is a fun concept with a lot of different applications one can work with and the first in the series is a true keeper. If you, like myself, are a bit sick of the endless identical Ancient Egypt children's fare out there and would like to see something original, Hartland has your number. Consider this a great way to bridge the past and the present for your kids.

Ages 4-8.

Shanna says

We are working through *The Story of the World*. Vol 1: Ancient Times. This was an excellent compliment to Chapter 13 about the first female pharaoh of Egypt - Hatshepsut. This book is about the history of specific sphinx statue commissioned by Hatshepsut. The kids enjoyed the book as did I and we learned a lot about

how the MET operates. I have been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art twice and have found the Egyptian Art to be my favorite. The registrar number for the sphinx listed in the book is accurate; it was fun to visit the MET website and look up the sphinx by it's number. My kids and I also searched for other items in the MET related to Hatchepsut. It turns out that I had taken a picture of one of the statues of Hatchepsut without realizing it's significance. I love teaching my kids history especially when I can find resources like this book.

Eric Finn says

This is such a great non fiction read for those kids who love to say why and learn about museums and how they come to have so much great memories in them. I would definitely use this book after a trip to a museum and make sure to visit some sort of Egyptian section just as a precursor to the book, if possible, if not then some sort of big monument in the museum to use as a reference. Great for any age really because after the main story gets established it goes over how the Sphinx went from an idea to a monument to being destroyed to reassembled and back to where we can see it today and every step that it goes through to get there. I was drawn to the book from my early days of wanting to be an archeologist as a kid from my love of dinosaurs and this is a great way to realize what everything goes through to be put on display for us to view and relive how magnificent things used to be.

Lori Calabrese says

Egypt has reopened many of its museums and historical sites, which were in jeopardy during the uprising that led to President Hosni Mubarak's ouster. But at the time of the uprising, many historians were afraid how much damage the museum and other sites of ancient art had suffered. Egyptian art is revered and has been studied for years and years, so what better way to teach young readers about preserving these ancient artifacts than with *How The Sphinx Got To The Museum*.

How The Sphinx Got To The Museum leads young readers through the process of preserving the granite sphinx of Hatshepsut, a female Egyptian pharaoh. Young readers will be fascinated to learn what a sphinx is, how it was made, how it's preserved, and how it made its way to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Told in a cumulative style, much like "This is the House That Jack Built," they learn about the Sphinx admired by the Egyptian Priests, sculpted by the sculptor and ordered by the Pharaoh while also learning about some of the people influential to a museum--the conservator, the curator, the riggers, etc...

Additional facts and figures are provided at the end of the book and you can even learn where other granite sphinxes can be found today. I love how Hartland lays out the process in a simple manner while her unique illustrations are fun to look at. At a time when Egypt's artifacts have been front and center in the news, *How The Sphinx Got To The Museum* reminds us all about the importance of preserving our history.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Nope, this one didn't work for me at all. First, I disliked the way it was told, in a "House That Jack Built" repetitious manner. The longer the repetitive list, the more I tended to lose sight of the new fact being presented to me. I also hated the illustrations. The sphinx's face kept changing expressions, which gave the impression that it wasn't the same statue. Yes, it was interesting to learn how an artifact like that gets from a

broken up pile of pieces to a reconstituted whole on display in a museum, but it could have been told better. It did, however, make me want to take a trip to the museum in New York City to see the actual sphinx. By the way, a photo of the real statue might have been nice at the end of the book.

Shelli says

This book would have been a 5 star book if it was not written the way it was. The information is easy for young readers to follow and learn about how artifacts can be found and then put on display in a museum. Many people work to accomplish this task to preserve history. The way the book was written was in the same writing style as "There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly." While that book is amazing for that simple story it was a poor choice for the information being given in this book. If the author had just told the story then at the end did a small recap of all the people involved in bringing the Sphinx to the Metropolitan Museum of art that would have been plenty. As it was the story was long, redundant, and I would not recommend as a read aloud or for children.

Violeta Tistova says

Genre: Historical Fiction

Copyright Date: 2010

Thoughts: I learned so much! This book could be shown to readers of all ages. I think it was fascinating and I loved the illustrations.

Classroom Use: This showed how the sphinx was made, found by archeologists and then taken to the museum. It would be great to show students how things are chosen to be displayed at the museum before going there for a fieldtrip so that the kids really understand the value of the things they are going to observe.

Lauren says

"How the Sphinx Got To The Museum" is a great non fiction text sharing the history of how Hatshepsut's sphinx got to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This book does a great job of sharing facts in a fun manner. The history of the journey and of the Sphinx itself is presented through a class field trip with school children and a tour guide. The book teaches the history of Pharaohs and ancient Egypt through fabulous illustrations. We then learn how a museum archaeologist uncovers the sphinx and works with Egypt's Department of Antiquities to excavate the site. After the long trip across the world, the Sphinx arrives in New York and we learn even more about the many people who work at the Museum and collaborate to restore and preserve the Sphinx. This book does a nice job teaching the history of this one particular piece and the era that it came from in addition to introducing readers to the types of jobs available within a museum. I chose to pair this book with "From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E Frankweller. This is one that has been on my to read list for while. Though I do not know the whole story I do know this is about a girl who decides to run away to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, home of the Sphinx. I think this book would provide a completely different perspective on the Met, through the eyes of a child on a grand adventure. Her journey to

the Met was slightly different than the Sphinx's journey but I thought they would make a fun pair.

Sarah Duggan says

With a clever repeating rhythm and fun pictures, this book covers centuries of history at the perfect pace. It's also a fantastic introduction to how museums acquire new art and all the staff required to make an exhibit happen. It should inspire many a blossoming museum nerd!

Shaniah says

Fun book about the history of the Hatshepsut sphinx. The book goes over how it was created, dug up, and carried over to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art. I would categorize this book under Historical Fiction because it's a true story, but a picture book. In the classroom, I would use this book for grades 1-5 because it's more wordy and historical.

Reader says

A cumulative tale with a purpose. How did a sphinx destroyed just after the reign of Pharaoh Hatshepsut end up in one piece in the Metropolitan Museum of Art? The answer involves a whole host of people. From Egyptian priests to curators to the very docent telling the story, kids will see how works of art travel around the globe to museums, and the people involved in their restoration. A smart take on a too little visited nonfiction topic, with art that resembles nothing so much as accessible Maira Kalman. - B

Lily Avila says

Genre: traditional nonfiction informational
Copyright date: 2010

There is far more behind a pieced exhibited in a museum. Here we learn vocabulary that we are all to come across at any museum or history book. Great for an Egyptian lesson.

Kelli Bratten says

history, rocks, trip to ,museum, re-enactment, sequence. A fabulous book that is told as if it is a fiction book but is very informational. This would be fantastic for a unit on ancient Egypt. This could also be an extension to go into rocks/science and which ones would work best for building a statue. Math could also be integrated by having them figure out how height measurements and distance from Egypt to NYC. If I am fortunate enough to go to a museum, this would be a good read beforehand to let them know about the different people who make a museum work and come together! Moreover, this can be a geography lesson for places in Egypt. There is plenty of information in the back of the book that can be used to add more to each lesson as well!

Heather Jo says

megan fall reading 2018, children's book, nonfiction, non-fiction, museums
