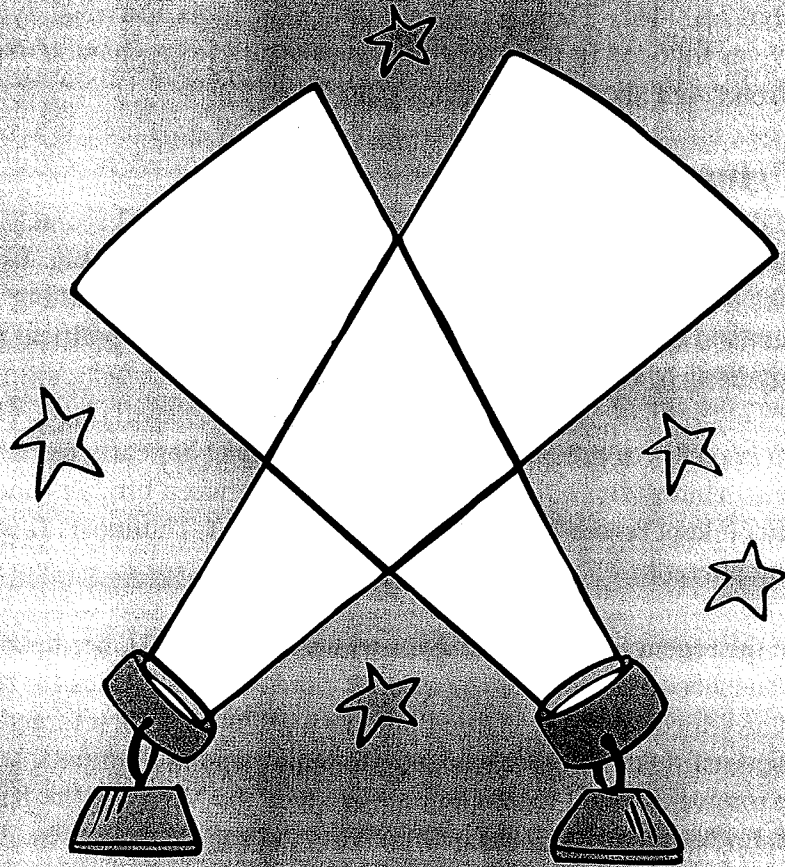


# READERS' THEATER



**HER MAJESTY,  
HIMSELF**

## BACKGROUND: HER MAJESTY, HIMSELF

### Egyptian Kingdoms

Egypt was settled by farmers as early as 6000 B.C. The first great era of power began with the Early Dynastic period about 3100 B.C. There were a series of kingdoms and royal dynasties until 1070 B.C. The New Kingdom was founded in 1550 B.C. Hatshepsut ruled as a pharaoh during this era. She came to power about 1498 B.C. and died about twenty years later.

### The Reign of Hatshepsut

Hatshepsut was the daughter of Pharaoh Thutmose I who recognized her intelligence and curiosity. She learned to read and write and was trained to be the wife of a future pharaoh. However, he also included her in some activities that were usually the preserve of boys, including hunting expeditions. Hatshepsut was trained to understand the importance of religious ceremonies and political rituals that were regarded as essential to maintaining Maat, a sense of order in the world.

Hatshepsut grew up in an era of prosperity. She was married in her early teens to her father's son by a member of his harem, Thutmose II. (Arranged marriages between brothers and sisters were common for Egyptian royalty. It kept power consolidated in the family.) Thutmose II was sickly and died a few years after becoming pharaoh.

Hatshepsut became the regent in charge of Egypt while Thutmose III, her husband's son by another wife, was a child. Hatshepsut soon began to assume more responsibilities for running the two kingdoms of Egypt. She sent an expedition to the fabled kingdom of Punt which returned with many riches. She waged one brief, successful war with Nubia, and she built many monuments, temples, and statues. Hatshepsut had her tomb excavated within a mountain near the Valley of the Kings. She had a temple built for her at Deir El-Bahri near the Nile, not far from the capital at Thebes. It had a particularly beautiful and advanced style.

Hatshepsut gradually assumed the powers of a pharaoh and even wore a false beard as a sign of her power. She often had herself portrayed or referred to as a male. When Hatshepsut died, Thutmose III finally assumed power as pharaoh. He had a very long and successful reign. He also tried to obliterate every sign of Hatshepsut's existence. Her name and features were carved out of stone monuments and statues. She was unknown until modern historians rediscovered her.





## **SCRIPT SUMMARY: HER MAJESTY, HIMSELF**

The setting for this script is a palace courtyard where the future pharaoh, Thutmose III, is talking to a general, an engineer, a scribe, and a priest, all of whom are members of Hatshepsut's inner circle of advisors. The discussion centers around the behavior and achievements of Queen Hatshepsut, the first Egyptian queen to assume the role of Pharaoh. There had never been a successful female ruler before her.

The characters describe the expedition sent to the fabled kingdom of Punt which returned with many luxurious items, including gold, ivory, exotic animals, and myrrh plants valued for their perfume. Her successful military action against Nubia is evaluated and much attention is paid to her many monuments, temples, and engravings which celebrate the queen's achievements. The scribe and engineer loyally describe her many successes. The general and priest are satisfied with the orderliness of her rule.

It is clear that Thutmose III is angered by the power and decisions of the queen. He is also infuriated by her assumption of the male role of Pharaoh and her involvement in sacred ceremonies, sometimes dressed as a male. The narrator informs the audience that after her death, Pharaoh Thutmose III tried, quite successfully, to eradicate every evidence of her existence.

### **Assignment**

Read the readers' theater script "Her Majesty, Himself." Prepare for the performances and share your interpretations of the scripts with the class.

### **Extensions: Writing, Art, and Literature**

- Write a script based on one of the events listed below or another one related to life in ancient Egypt. Use the background information section, biographies, textbooks, and Internet sources for help.

The conflict between Akhenaten and the priests of Egypt

The life of Ramses II

Life of a craftsman, peasant, slave, or priest in ancient Egypt

Getting a tomb ready for a pharaoh

The life and death of Tutankhamen (King Tut)

- Use modeling clay, craft sticks, and other objects to recreate a sarcophagus, tomb, mummy, or pyramid. Be creative. Use books and pictures for models.
- Read the young adult novel, *His Majesty, Queen Hatshepsut* by Dorothy Sharp Carter. Use one episode or a chapter as the basis for a readers' theater script about the female pharaoh. Other good books include the humorous *Tut* by Jon Scieszka and the biography *Hatshepsut: Her Majesty, Herself* by Catherine M. Andronik.

## SCRIPT: HER MAJESTY, HIMSELF

This script is set in a palace courtyard in Egypt about 1485 B.C. when Hatshepsut was the first successful queen of Egypt who ruled as a female pharaoh. There are six speakers.

- Narrator:** Ancient Egypt had been ruled from 3100 B.C. to 1500 B.C. by 18 dynasties or royal families. When there were no male heirs for a pharaoh, the Egyptian king, a relative or respected general took over as pharaoh and established his own dynasty. When Pharaoh Thutmose I died, the new pharaoh was his son Thutmose II, a sickly young man who was married to his half-sister, Hatshepsut. He soon died and she became the regent, the acting ruler, for Thutmose III, her husband's baby son by another wife. Hatshepsut soon began to assume more and more power and control over the government of Egypt. This group of Egyptian court officials is talking with Thutmose III, now in his twenties.
- General:** Her Highness, Pharaoh Hatshepsut, has accomplished another magnificent achievement, most honored Thutmose. All of Thebes and the regions around our capital city are talking of the return of the expedition from the land of Punt.
- Engineer:** The ships we sent out two long years ago have returned filled to overflowing with the treasures of that fabled land. I did not truly believe that Punt existed. I thought it was an imaginary land dreamed up by the storytellers.
- Scribe:** You should see the wares the crew unloaded for Her Majesty. There were casks of perfumes and barrels of gold. Ivory and ebony were carried off in huge crates.
- Thutmose III:** I suppose Her Majesty, the Pharaoh, my father's wife, was delighted with such things.
- Priest:** Yes, and the animals were truly remarkable. Panthers, leopards, spotted cats unknown to any of our people, giraffes, monkeys, and baboons were all placed in the royal zoo. There were even strange dark people from that land speaking a language no one knows.



## **SCRIPT: HER MAJESTY, HIMSELF** *(cont.)*

- Engineer:** The most remarkable objects were myrrh trees. They were planted near Her Majesty's temple that she calls the "Holy of Holies." The special perfumes of these trees are very rare and, of course, especially valuable.
- General:** It must be admitted that Pharaoh Hatshepsut has been a remarkably successful ruler, for a woman.
- Thutmosis III:** No woman should rule Egypt. It has never been done before. Females don't have the intelligence or the courage to rule our double kingdom of Upper and Lower Egypt. They allow themselves to be influenced by others who are not even warriors or priests.
- Scribe:** I suppose that you are referring to me, most respected Son of a Pharaoh, but Hatshepsut was trained by your grandfather, her father, to do many things that only a pharaoh does. Maybe he saw the future and anticipated that she would one day rule Egypt. He observed that she could read and write as well as our most learned people. He trained her in all the intricacies of court behavior and dealing with foreign powers. He explained all of the mysteries of our gods and religious practices. He took her to many places when he traveled. He even took her crocodile hunting as a father does his son.
- Thutmosis III:** Girls in dresses shouldn't hunt crocodiles or wild cats either.
- Engineer:** I was there. Hatshepsut often dressed like a boy. She was as comfortable in a tunic as in a dress.
- Priest:** Girls should not wear boys' clothes. She wears that golden beard when she makes proclamations as Pharaoh. I worry that the Maat, the proper order of religion and life in Egypt, will be disturbed by her behavior. But the other priests support her, and life in Egypt under her leadership was been very peaceful and well ordered. The crops have been good every year, and the Nile River has favored us with fertile soil and water.
- General:** Her one military campaign against the Nubians was successful.

## **SCRIPT: HER MAJESTY, HIMSELF (cont.)**

- Thutmosis III:** But she did not carry on the war until final victory. She accepted a quick victory. We might have subjugated the Nubians.
- Scribe:** Or, lost the entire war if it had gone badly.
- Engineer:** I am greatly impressed by her respect for the next life. She has carefully overseen every part of the construction of her burial chamber in the Valley of the Kings. Hatshepsut has even decided to bring her father's remains to her tomb where they will be safer from grave robbers and vandals.
- Scribe:** She has carefully hidden the location of her tomb. It will be safe from vandals. I have been fortunate enough to purchase a sarcophagus for myself near the tomb of Her Majesty. I hope to serve her in death as in life.
- Thutmosis III:** A lowly scribe does not deserve to be buried among the mighty.
- Priest:** You'd better be careful, or you will lose your place as a scribe at court as have others who have taken advantage of their positions. Hatshepsut wants no challengers to her power or authority.
- Scribe:** I have been her friend since childhood.
- Thutmosis III:** A true pharaoh does not have friends—only servants to obey his orders.
- Engineer:** One must admit that Hatshepsut does know how to celebrate. Her jubilee celebrating fifteen years as Pharaoh was magnificent. The two obelisks she had raised near her father's tomb at Karnak are among the greatest engineering achievements in all history. These golden-tipped tributes to the sun god, Re, were so tall that the rays of the sun reach them first before they strike the ground. They are the tallest structures ever built in Egypt. No one has ever seen such magnificent work.
- Priest:** Her monuments offer great praise to the gods of Egypt . . .
- Thutmosis III:** . . . and herself. They are made of stone. They will fall in time.



# READER'S RESPONSE: HER MAJESTY, HIMSELF

## Directions

- These discussion activities and questions may be used in small groups or with the entire class. They may also be used by the actors as a part of their preparation for the reading.
- Refer to the script “Her Majesty, Himself” when responding to all questions. You may also find useful facts in the background information section, biographies, textbooks, and Internet sources.
- Make notes on the lines provided below each question before the group discussion.

## Discussion

1. Why do you think Thutmoseis disliked Queen Hatshepsut? Give several reasons.  
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2. Which of the characters in the script is most supportive of Hatshepsut as Pharaoh? Explain your choice.  
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\_\_\_\_\_
3. Who do you think the priest and the general would support in a conflict between Hatshepsut and Thutmoseis? Explain your choice.  
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\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your opinion of life (and death) in ancient Egypt?  
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\_\_\_\_\_

## Making It Personal

Would you like to have been an Egyptian pharaoh? Why?

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\_\_\_\_\_

Do you admire what Hatshepsut accomplished or do you support the attitude of Thutmoseis? Explain your choice.

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Thutmoseis says the pharaoh should have no friends—only servants. What do you think of his comment?

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