

TEACHER SCRIPT

(Read aloud to students.)

In ancient times, caretakers in the palaces and museums of Afghanistan established a tradition for keeping their treasures safe and protected. The four student volunteers will describe this tradition by reading their role cards aloud.

(Teacher passes out four role cards and asks each student to read the role, starting with the Key Holder –*Tabilwidar*.)

After students read the role cards aloud, teacher asks discussion questions:

- Why do you think they follow the key holder (*tabilwidar*) custom in Afghanistan?
- What might museums in America do to ensure the safety of precious artifacts?

(Teacher continues reading script.)

In 1979, archeologists excavated an amazing treasure trove of jewelry and other objects made of gold and semiprecious stones from a collection of graves at a site called Tillya Tepe in Northern Afghanistan. It was referred to as the Bactrian Hoard. Soon after, the Soviets invaded the country and battles ensued for ten years. After this, the country was in turmoil, with warlords struggling for control and then occupation by the Taliban. For many years, almost no one knew what had happened to the treasure. Some people thought that the precious objects had been stolen from the Kabul Museum and sold on the black market, or that the gold had been melted down. But in fact, in 1989 when the troubles began, a few members of the staff at the Kabul Museum had secretly placed this treasure of more than 20,000 objects in sealed crates in a vault in the Presidential Palace.

Finally in 2003, the government announced that they believed that the objects were intact and secure in the Presidential Palace. On the day they finally opened the vault in 2004, the Minister of Culture, diplomats, officials, and Viktor Sarianidi, the Russian archaeologist who had discovered the Bactrian Hoard more than twenty years earlier, stood anxiously by. With trembling hands, Sarianidi picked up a small plastic bag with an old label, opened it, and with a broad smile announced that this was, in fact, the long lost treasure!

In 2004 archaeologists were invited to formally view the objects and make an inventory.

May I have six volunteers from the class? (Teacher passes out a role card to each volunteer.)

These six students represent six members of Bactrian Treasure Inventory Team. Please come forward and line yourself according to the numbers 1–6. Starting with number 1, please read your title and a description of your job.

(Students one-by-one read their role card, and may mime the action if possible.)
(After the six students read their cards, Teacher continues.)

This process continued for each of the items, a project that took three months to complete. The team ended up listing 22,607 objects, of which 20,587 were from the Tillya Tepe site. The remainder came from archaeological digs in other parts of Afghanistan. The new inventory system uses international standards of museum description while following the Afghan traditional museum system of having a key holder or *tahilwidar*. The exhibit at the Asian Art Museum includes items from this precious treasure.

Discussion Question:

- What are the important features of this type of inventory?