

Travel with the A-Mazing Mendes Cohen

While the Museum is closed to the public, the JMM team has created family activity packets for you to enjoy in your own homes. Each collection of materials is inspired by our exhibits, Jewish History, and Jewish holidays.

All of the activities we share are designed for families to complete together and use supplies you probably have in your house.



(left) Portrait of Mendes Cohen wearing a turban and ceremonial jacket, c. 1835. Courtesy of the [Maryland Historical Society](#). (center) The ceremonial jacket Mendes purchased during his travels. Gift of Mary Adair Dockery (University Collection, Johns Hopkins University), 1996.169.1. (right) title page of Mendes' travel journal, 18729. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

Mendes Cohen had numerous fascinating phases to his life, one of which was the time he spent in travelling the world. For almost three years he travelled much of Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East. [If you have a look here](#) you can see Mendes' travel log.

Travel at this time was much more complicated than it is today. It took Mendes nearly three weeks to make the crossing from New York to Liverpool, England! During his three years of travel, Mendes would encounter multiple shipwrecks, revolts and narrowly avoid bandits.

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While the exhibit was on view here at the Jewish Museum of Maryland, we celebrated this phase of Mendes' life with various family programs. Below are a few of our favorite activities you can enjoy at home and will give you a better sense of this time of his life.

You can learn more about the amazing Mendes Cohen and explore the digital exhibit at TheAmazingMendes.com. Plus you will find [even more hands-on activities](#), including:

- Meet Flat Mendes
- Test Your Geography Skills
- Practice Using Primary Sources
- You Have Mail
- The Mendes Maze

Make sure to share photos of you enjoying our crafts and activities on our [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [Tumblr](#) pages and use #MuseumFromHome and #AmazingMendes!



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Magical Shabtis



(left) Display of shabti at the Museum der Universität Tübingen. [Via.](#) (center) Shabtis collected by Mendes Cohen, courtesy of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum. (right) Display of shabti at the Manchester Museum. [Via.](#)

Mendes spent about four months in Egypt, during which time he began to collect antiquities, items that dated to Ancient Egypt. The items he gathered varied from tiny amulets to statues and even mummies. In total, Mendes collected almost 700 items! The collection he amassed was donated after his death, becoming one of the founding collections of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum.

From Mendes' travel journal: Thebes, Egypt, June 26 and 27, 1832

"Remained aboard all day to purchase antiquities, which were brought down, having passed around the tombs occupied by the gatherers of these things. When my guide made proclamation that I should be in my boat 2 days for the purpose of buying antiquities, after which I should depart. At this time many of the people brought out things, of which I bought a few. Ibis were in peak abundance. Crockery, vases, figures, mummies, snakes, crocodiles, dogs, sheep heads, etc."

"Remained on board, many little things were brought down, from which I made a small collection. Purchased two mummies and after spending the evening at Mr. Hay's and taking leave, returned on board at midnight when the two mummies had been brought."

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Loaned objects from the Johns Hopkins University Archaeological Museum, on display at the Jewish Museum of Maryland during The A-Mazing Mendes Cohen exhibit.

Shabti dolls (also known as *shawbti* and *ushabti*) were funerary figures in ancient Egypt who accompanied the deceased to the after-life. [Learn more about shabtis here.](#)

Shabtis form a huge part of the collection that Mendes gathered. These small figurines are one of the most common items in museum Ancient Egyptian collections. This is because they were produced in huge quantities out of sturdy materials, which helped them survive intact through the ages.

In this activity you can try your hand at designing your own shabtis.

What you will need:

- Print out of the shabti template or paper
- Pencil and markers

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Flying the Flag



(left and right) Young visitors participate in the “Raising the Flag” interactive in the Amazing Mendes Cohen exhibit. (center) The flag Mendes created during his travels. Gift of Mary Adair Dockery (University Collection, Johns Hopkins University), 1996.169.2.

One of our favorite artifacts in *The Amazing Mendes Cohen* exhibit was an American flag that Mendes flew as he sailed down the Nile. Mendes made this flag himself (with the help of a servant)!

From Mendes’ travel journal: Manfalut, Egypt - May 3, 1832

“Purchased red, white and blue cotton to make a flag – returned on board and cut it out, my servant making it” ... “Having ... completed the flag and hoisted it under a salute, each of the sailors... on the elevation of the flag agree to defend it if necessary.”

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Showing his patriotism and pride in America was important to Mendes, even while traveling. In this journal entry, Mendes' shares how important celebrating Independence Day was to him.

From Mendes' travel journal: Sarmastar, Egypt – July 4, 1832

"I have not forgotten that this is the anniversary of our independence and although remote from my country where I can well imagine the festivities all going on in all parts of the union, yet on this day is doubly valuable having seen so much of the despotism of Europe and Asia. At break of day, 4 o'clock a.m., I fired a salute, which at this early hour amazed the Arab sailors not a little, who were yet asleep on the deck. At sunrise hoisted the national flag and continued floating down the Nile against a very strong headwind."

In this activity you can create your own Star-Spangled Banner – as you do, think about what the flag means to you.

Learn more about the history of the Star-Spangled Banner in [this online exhibit](#) from the National Museum of American History. You can also [explore many resources online with The Star-Spangled Banner Flag House](#), home and workshop of Mary Pickersgill, who sewed the actual flag that inspired Francis Scott Key's writing of our national anthem.

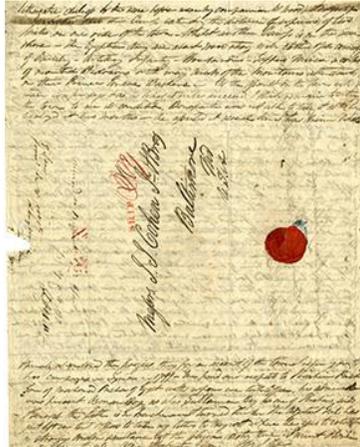
What you will need:

- Paper, ideally red white and blue
- Glue or tape
- Paint stirrer
- Scissors

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Letters Home



(left) Mendes' portable writing desk. Gift of Sadie B. and Rosetta Feldman, JMM 1987.149.5. (center) Letter written by Mendes Cohen. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society. (right) Wax seal of Mendes Cohen. JMM 1980.3.1.

Mendes relied upon letters to stay in contact with his family. They could take weeks to arrive but when they did they delivered exciting news from his adventures abroad. One item Mendes carried throughout his travels was his beautiful travel writing desk, filled with paper, ink, and his personal wax seal.

In this activity, learn about the importance of his seal and how to make your own. You can learn more about [the history and importance of seals here](#).

Try reading [one of Mendes' letters here](#). To maximize space, Mendes has written very small and between the lines - it can be very challenging to decipher, especially with our modern eyes! But reading his letters yourself can give you great insight into Mendes and his travels.

Why not write a letter of your own? Share what you've been up to with friends or family you are missing – you can even use your new seal to add an extra special element to your letter.

What you will need:

- Clay or model magic
- Tools for scraping, cutting, and shaping your seal material

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Magical Shabtis

Many of the ancient Egyptian objects found in museums today, including everything in *The A-Mazing Mendes Cohen*, originally came from tombs. The ancient Egyptians believed that death was much like life, so they would need many of the same things, including a body! This is why mummification was so important.

The small figurines that were displayed in the exhibit are called *shabtis*. The Egyptians believed that by reading the spell on the *shabtis* they could magically come alive and do work for the tomb owner. At the height of their popularity Egyptians would be buried with three hundred and sixty five shabtis, one for each day of the year.



What you will need:

- Print out of the shabti template or paper
- Pencil and markers

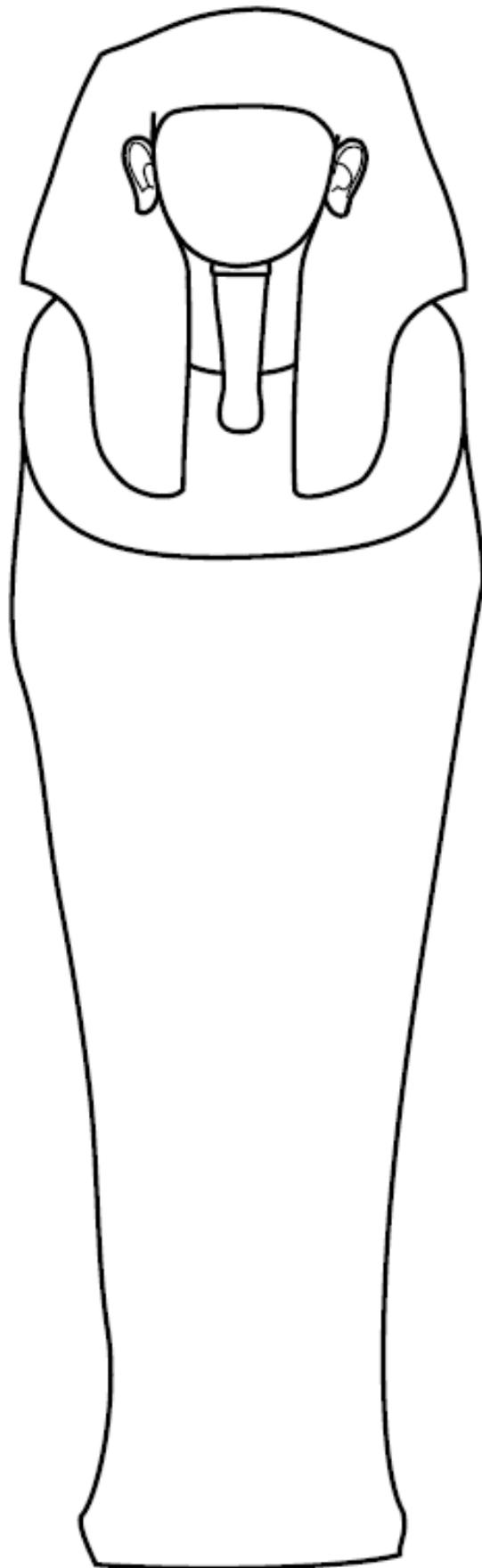
Magical Shabtis

What to do:

- Print a copy of the shabti on the next page or draw your own version. Now decorate your shabti, they could be made from a variety of materials including stone, wood and pottery, which could be painted with bright colors. Alternatively one of the most popular materials used was faience, a type of ceramic with an especially shiny surface which the Egyptians would often make bright blue to resemble lapis lazuli a precious stone.
- Once you have finished decorating your shabti write on his back the magical spell that will bring him to life, you can use the one below or make your own.

Shabti of Irtu

The Illuminated One, The Royal Scribe, The Overseer of the Horses of the Lord of Two Lands, He says: O' these shabtis who are numerous, if this one is assembled to any work in the Necropolis, to cultivate the fields, to irrigate the riverbanks, to ferry sand of the east to the west, or any unpleasant task that is imposed upon him there, as a man at his duties. "I am here," shall you say, The Royal Scribe, Keeper of the Horses [for the Lord of the Two Lands, Irtu.



Flying the Flag

Mendes was a proud American, he is believed to have been the first person to fly the American flag in Egypt. In 1832 he made the flag below with the help of a servant aboard his boat on the Nile. At the time our flag looked a little different than today, with thirteen stripes and just twenty four stars. If you look closely below you will see that Mendes didn't make quite enough stars or stripes, this is more likely due to how difficult it can be to make the flag than his knowledge of how it should look. Try making your own flag, our instructions below are to replicate Mendes flag but you could try making the correct 1832 flag.

What you will need:

- Paper, ideally red white and blue
- Glue or tape
- Paint stirrer



What to do:

- Start with one full sheet of white paper and five strips of red paper. Evenly spread the red strips across the white paper, be certain to leave white bands at the top and bottom so you will have a total of eleven stripes.
- Next create the pennant, the blue square and attach it to the top corner of the flag.
- Now cut out thirteen stars and arrange them as in the image above. If you have stickers available that would be a great shortcut.
- Finally attach a paint stirrer to the reverse of the flag behind the pennant and fly your flag with pride.

Letters Home

Whilst on his travels Mendes was a prolific letter writer, these letters have been exceptionally helpful in helping us to learn about Mendes and his world. One of the most important parts of his letters are the seals.

During Mendes lifetime there were no self-adhesive envelopes so people had to seal letters in a different way. Wax was the best option, you could heat a small amount of wax which when cool would hold your letter sealed. Many people also added an extra impression to this wax seal with the use of a stamp. These stamps acted as proof that the letter really came from who they claimed and that the letter had not been tampered with.

Below is a picture of Mendes seal, it reads in Hebrew “Our feet were standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Mendes son of “Asher Abraham” the Cohain”.

Try to create your own seal.

What you will need:

- Clay or model magic
- Clay tools

What to do:

- Take a piece of the red clay and form into a roughly circular shape.
- Using the tools create a seal impression that in some way reflects your personality, it could be a drawing, writing or a combination of both.
- Leave to dry and use as a seal the next time you send a letter.

