

LESSON PLAN

Step 1

ARCHAEOLOGICAL THINKING

Objectives

- Identify “artifacts” from a contemporary setting.
- Describe the function of each artifact.
- Interpret possible associations between artifacts.

Materials

- Four or five small paper or plastic bags.
- Artifacts (nontoxic refuse from the school building).
- Copies of Worksheet 1, page 7.
- Pens or pencils.

Subjects

Social studies, science, language arts

Procedure

1. Choose four or five areas in your school with which students are familiar (e.g., your classroom, the cafeteria, and the library). Observe each location, noting what students commonly do there (e.g., study, eat, and socialize). After school hours or when the areas are clear of students, examine the trash and recycle bins and the floors for evidence of those student activities. Select artifacts (e.g., portions of candy wrappers, plastic from pen caps, and portions of student papers) that can help to tell

the story of each site. Place each site’s artifacts in a separately numbered bag (numbered 1 through 4 or 5).

2. At the beginning of the next class, discuss the difference between historians and archaeologists by asking your students how we know that an event happened in the past. Answers may vary, but students will probably conclude that information about the past event was recorded in some form. You may wish to have your students suggest various methods of documenting past events (e.g., oral histories, written records, video and audio recordings, and digital data) and have them evaluate how each method differs from the others. Tell your students that historians use all of these recorded sources to understand the past. (*Be sure to note that not all societies have kept records and that records can often be incomplete or biased.*) Next, ask your students how they might learn about a past event if they could not read about it or view it on videotape. Some students may find this question difficult. Ask them to think about the work of an archaeologist—what does this type of researcher look for? Students should conclude that an archaeologist seeks physical evidence (clues) of the past.



Artifacts are uncovered by the careful removal of surrounding soil with brushes and trowels. (Medicine Creek Reservoir, Nebraska)

3. Using the Introduction as a guide, tell your students that they will be learning how archaeologists use physical evidence in the form of artifacts (human-made objects) to learn about the past. Tell them to imagine that an archaeological expedition at your school has recently uncovered a number of artifacts that the class must now examine and interpret. Stress that the students were picked for this job because they were the foremost experts on the archaeological sites.

4. Divide your class into four or five groups of equal size. Give each student a copy of Worksheet 1 and provide each group with one of the numbered bags of artifacts. Direct your students to open the bags and carefully examine each object. Ask them to consider what each

object is made of and how it may have been used. (*Tell students to put this information on their worksheets.*) Students may find some objects easier to identify than others. Walk among the groups and provide hints as necessary. After the students have identified the objects, ask them to speculate where these objects may have been found. (Tell students to put this information on their worksheets.)

5. Conclude the activity by having a representative from each group explain its interpretation of the objects. Provide explanations of the objects and their contexts as necessary. Emphasize that archaeologists are often challenged with interpreting artifacts that they cannot immediately identify or date.

WORKSHEET 1

Archaeological Thinking

Group number _____

Artifact bag number _____

Directions: Use this worksheet to record your observations of the artifacts provided by your teacher.

| Object | Material it is made of | What it was used for (function) |
|--------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | |