

ASSIGNMENT DISCOVERY ONLINE CURRICULUM

Lesson title:

What Artifacts Reveal about the Past

Grade level:

6-8

Subject area:

Archaeology and American History

Duration:

One class period

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Discover how to analyze artifacts to learn about life in colonial America
2. Apply what they learn about analyzing artifacts to objects found in our own culture

Materials:

For the class:

- Computer with Internet access (optional but very helpful)
- If Internet access is not available, print copies of the following artifact images:
 - Broad axe: <http://www.apva.org/ngex/c5baxe.html>
 - Cooking pot: <http://www.apva.org/ngex/c1cook.html>
 - English coins: <http://www.apva.org/ngex/c6coins.html>
 - Ring: <http://www.apva.org/ngex/c4signet.html>
 - Copper necklace: <http://www.apva.org/ngex/c3copper.html>

For each group of students:

- One image of an artifact (If computer Internet access is not available, copies of the images may be used.)

For each student:

- Pencils
- One copy of Classroom Activity Sheet: Analyzing Artifacts from Jamestown
- One copy of Take-Home Activity Sheet: Analyzing Artifacts from Our Culture

This lesson can be enhanced by viewing the documentary *Discover Magazine: The Real Story of Jamestown*, which airs on the Discovery Channel March 2, April 6, May 11, and June 15. To purchase the video call 1-888-892-3484.

Procedures:

1. Begin the lesson by asking students to brainstorm what they know about archaeology. Write their ideas on the chalkboard. Then tell them that archaeology is the study of the remains of another culture—often one that existed a long time ago—in order to learn about life during another time. Archaeologists study *artifacts*, objects that are found by digging in areas where archaeologists think other societies once flourished. To look for artifacts in a specific place, archaeologists dig large holes called *excavation sites*.
2. Tell students that during this lesson they are going to have an opportunity to be amateur archaeologists. They are going to look at artifacts from Jamestown, Virginia, the first colony the English established in the New World in 1607. Archaeologists found the artifacts at the Jamestown excavation site in the mid-1990s.
3. Divide the class into five groups. Each group will be assigned a different artifact excavated from Jamestown. These images can be viewed directly on a computer monitor or on a printed copy (see Materials for the Web URLs). A brief description of each artifact follows:
 - a. Broad axe: An important tool of the colonists, this axe has a very sharp blade and was used for cutting timber and shaping the wood into smaller pieces suitable for fires and other purposes.
 - b. Cooking pot: Archaeologists think that this pot was used in Jamestown between 1630 and 1645. Its remains, the handle, were discovered in 1995. It may have been crafted by one of the first potters working in Jamestown.
 - c. English coins: Coins are a particularly useful find for archaeologists because they are one of the few artifacts that have a date on them. But in Jamestown, there was a shortage of change, so coins often were used for a long period of time. This means that archaeologists have to be careful about attributing a specific date to the coin.
 - d. Ring: This ring has been attributed to a colonist named William Strachey, who was in Jamestown for only a year, between 1610 and 1611. While sailing to Jamestown on the *Sea of Venture*, he ran into intense storms, which left him shipwrecked in Bermuda. Apparently his account of the adventure inspired William Shakespeare to write the play *The Tempest*.
 - e. Copper necklace: The colonists made jewelry out of copper to trade with the Indians in exchange for food.
4. Have each group answer the following questions about the artifact on the Classroom Activity Sheet: Analyzing Artifacts from Jamestown:
 - What is the artifact?
 - What is the artifact made of?
 - How do you think it was used?
 - Who do you think used it?
 - What does the artifact tell us about life in Jamestown?

5. After students have completed their analyses, bring the class back together for a discussion. Have each group share its ideas about the artifact. If students don't agree with the group's conclusions, encourage them to offer their own suggestions about what the artifact is. If no one came to the correct conclusion, share with students what the artifact actually is.
6. Assign the Take-Home Activity Sheet: Analyzing Artifacts from Our Culture. The following day, have a class discussion about students' ideas. Did students think the activity was difficult? Did they have a hard time putting themselves in the shoes of someone who did not know what the objects were?

Adaptation for older students:

Archaeologists have to make many choices when gathering evidence. In fact, certain situations can pose ethical dilemmas that need to be resolved so that the work of archaeologists can continue. Present the following dilemmas to your students. Have them discuss and then write down their ideas about how each dilemma should be resolved:

- Do artifacts belong to the person who finds them?
- Should artifacts be taken home or given to a museum?
- Who owns underwater archaeological sites?
- Is it legal to dig holes on land that is not your own?

Questions:

1. What is the value of the archaeology? What does the study of artifacts teach us about a culture that we couldn't learn in other ways?
2. How do you think a team of archaeologists decides where to excavate? What kinds of records should the team consult before starting to dig?
3. What types of tools do archaeologists use? How has technology changed how archaeologists do their work?
4. Using library sources or the Internet, find another site that archaeologists have excavated. Try to find one in another part of the world, such as the Middle East or Africa.
5. What are the limitations of archaeology? What *can't* we learn about another culture by studying fossils and artifacts?
6. Would you consider pursuing archaeology as a career? What do you think would be rewarding about it? What do you think would be frustrating?

Evaluation:

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson. Students should be evaluated on how successfully they worked in groups, whether they were able to answer the questions about the artifacts, and whether they participated in the class discussion about what the artifacts are and how they were used.

Three points: students worked effectively in their groups, were able to answer the questions about the group's artifact, and participated actively in the class discussion.

Two points: students worked somewhat effectively in their groups, were able to answer most of the questions about the group's artifact, and contributed somewhat to the class discussion.

One point: students had difficulty working together in their groups, were able to answer one question about the group's artifact, and contributed a little to the class discussion.

Extension:

Looking for More Artifacts

Have students go to the Jamestown Web site (<http://www.apva.org/finding/artifact.html>) and find additional artifacts excavated from Jamestown. What additional information about life in Jamestown can students learn by analyzing these artifacts?

Suggested Readings:

The Paradox of Jamestown: 1585-1700

Christopher and James Lincoln Collier, Benchmark Books, 1998.

An overview of the history of Jamestown, this book relates the circumstances surrounding its founding, the difficulties that life there presented to the settlers, and the relations of the English to the Native Americans in the area. There is also discussion of trends that began in Jamestown that would influence the area for hundreds of years, including the introduction of representative government, tobacco, and slavery.

Web Links:

History of Jamestown

Web site sponsored by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. Includes historical facts and timeline, photographs, lists of settlers' occupations, settlement findings, and research resources.

<http://www.apva.org/history/index.html>

Captain John Smith

Information on Captain John Smith. Part of a Williamsburg web site which has interdisciplinary classroom lesson plans.

<http://www.history.org/other/journal/smith.htm>

Virtual Jamestown

Includes teacher resources and lesson plans, maps and images, timelines, and primary source materials, such as court records and letters. Extensive bibliography is listed. Students retrace the early days of Jamestown through an online odyssey. Site offers lesson plans and a teacher resource page.

<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vcdh/jamestown/page2.html>

The Settlement of Jamestown by Captain John Smith

Information and links to historical documents.

<http://www.nationalcenter.org/SettlementofJamestown.html>

Jamestown–The First Permanent Settlement in the New World

Through an online cyberguide and webquest, students work collaboratively to create a historical newspaper. Very complete unit, including teacher-student resources, formats of different types of newspaper articles, and a grading rubric.

<http://www.nevada.edu/~rpeters/peterswebquest.htm>

Jamestown Virtual Colony

A resource for teaching about Jamestown with lessons, activities, annotated bibliographies, research materials, and additional web sites. Part of University of Virginia's Social Studies Education web site.

<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/curry/dept/cise/soc/resources/jvc/>

Jamestown Historic Briefs

Information on a variety of Jamestown-related topics, timelines, key historic personalities, industries.

<http://www.nps.gov/colo/Jthanout/JTBriefs.html>

Vocabulary:

archaeology

Definition: The scientific study of past cultures by analyzing artifacts and monuments.

Context: Archaeology involves digging in the ground to uncover physical remains of another culture that thrived a long time ago.

artifact

Definition: An object made or modified by people.

Context: The archaeologist carefully brushed off the newly discovered artifact, revealing a bowl with intricate designs.

culture

Definition: The customary beliefs, social forms, and traits of a racial, religious, or social group.

Context: It's amazing that archaeologists can learn so much about a culture that flourished long ago just by studying relics and remains dug up from the ground.

excavate

Definition: To dig a large hole or cavity for the purpose of locating and removing artifacts.

Context: The archaeologists located a site where they believed a society once flourished and began to excavate the area to see if any artifacts remained.

Academic standards:**Grade level:**

6-8

Subject area:

History

Standard:

Understands the historical perspective.

Benchmark:

Knows about different types of primary and secondary sources and the motives, interests, and biases expressed in them (e.g., eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, photos, magazine articles, newspaper accounts, hearsay).

Grade level:

6-8

Subject area:

History

Standard:

Understands the historical perspective.

Benchmark

Understands that historical accounts are subject to change based on newly uncovered records and interpretations.

Credit:

Marilyn Fenichel, educational writer with more than 15 years' experience writing curriculum materials for kids; Wendy Goldfein, sixth-grade teacher, Fairfax County School District, Springfield, Virginia, and freelance writer.

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Analyzing Artifacts from Jamestown

Use this sheet to record your group's ideas about your artifact.

1. What is the artifact?

2. What is the artifact made of?

3. How do you think it was used? What clues lead you to that conclusion?

4. Who do you think used it? Why?

5. What does the artifact tell us about life in Jamestown?

Analyzing Artifacts from Our Culture

In class, you analyzed a tool, a cooking pot, a piece of jewelry used for trade, a coin, and a ring from Jamestown. Now choose one modern-day item from our culture. Imagine our society fell into ruins and was rediscovered by archaeologists 400 years from now. How might that artifact be interpreted? Answer the questions below from the perspective of an archaeologist of the future. Remember, your answers don't have to be "correct" - they just need to show how an archaeologist might interpret the clues from your artifact.

1. What is your artifact?

2. What is the artifact made of?

3. How do you think it was used? Who do you think used it?

4. What does it tell us about life during this time?
