

Introduction to Archaeology: a Mapping Lesson Plan
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Purpose: To help students understand the purpose and methods of archaeology and how it helps us understand culture and the diffusion of culture over space and time.

Objective: Students will be able to:

1. Define archaeology as a science and the methodology use archaeologists in the study of human artifacts.
2. Explain how archaeologists study artifacts and use these artifacts to try to interpret culture.
3. Identify and explain how human artifacts found in specific areas can explain cultural diffusion over space and time.

Materials:

1. Select an “artifact” chosen from around the home; hopefully something unique or cultural, but not too valuable
2. Graph paper, ruler, pencils

Methodology:

Day 1: Lesson will focus on the meaning of archaeology. Students will learn what an archaeologist does and the methods that they use to find remains of human artifacts and features. Students will also learn about what those artifacts tell us about culture. This would mostly be in lecture/discussion format. Key terms that the students should know at the end of class are:

Site, Culture, Archaeology, Ethnoarchaeology, Stratigraphy, Feature, Ecofact, Shared Culture

As an assignment, students are to pretend that they are archaeologists who are on a dig in their own home. I do not think that their parents would approve of a big hole in their living rooms. They will locate an artifact from a site and draw a site map of it on their graph paper. This artifact should be drawn in reference to other artifacts finds and parts of the house or “site”. They will then bring in both their site map and their “artifact” for study in class. Their artifact should not be something too valuable, breakable, or a family heirloom, since I cannot be responsible for them.

Day 2: Students will work in groups of two or three to analyze the artifacts. I will hand out at random the site maps that go along with the artifacts. The students will then analyze the artifacts as to their function and possibly cultural orientation. Some of the questions that they should be asking are:

1. Is the artifact made from natural materials or manufactured?
2. Can the artifact be made locally, or does it have to be imported?
3. What do you think people used these artifacts for (what was its primary function)?
4. What is the function of the artifact in relation to the area where it was found (i.e., secondary function)?
5. Do the surrounding artifacts seem to have similar functions (i.e. do they belong in a kitchen)?
6. Does the artifact look like it came from the same time period?
7. Does the artifact look like it was made by the same culture or group of people?
8. What does the location and function of the artifact tell us about the people who may have used it? Is it wealthy society for instance?
9. What does the finding of the artifact tell us about cultural diffusion and/or cultural assimilation?

Conclusion: The students in the group will turn in a written report on their findings, paying close attention to the last two questions. These findings will then be discussed in class.