
LESSON 1: THE BASICS OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Students will learn the basic terminology relevant to the science of archaeology.



Level: Grade 5

Subjects: Social Studies, Science, Language Arts

Estimated Duration: 40 minutes

MATERIALS

- 6 recipe cards per student
- class set of *Archaeological Terms* worksheet

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- become familiar with appropriate terminology such as archaeologist, artifact, site, data, features, excavation, plotting, shard, survey to describe their inquiries and observations
- use appropriate vocabulary, including correct archaeological terminology, in describing their investigations and observations

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Archaeologists are specialists in the science of archaeology. They are important because they:

- use artifacts and features to piece together stories about people, places and things
- teach us about the past
- increase appreciation and respect for all cultures
- promote care of archaeological and historic sites

Zooarchaeologists analyze animal bones from archaeological sites. To do this they:

- compare bone fragments to a reference collection of recent skeletons
- find out what part of the skeleton is represented and what kind of animal it belongs to
- use bone data to learn about food habits and diet of site inhabitants; seasonal patterns in stock-raising, hunting and fishing; and changes in the local environment

HOOK: HAVE YOU EVER MADE A PUZZLE?

Read the following passage to the class. Ask the students if they know an archaeologist and what they know about archaeology.

Have you ever made a puzzle? I bet you have. They're fun! Have you ever made a puzzle for which you didn't have a picture? Or one that had some pieces missing? Well, that's what archaeology is like — putting together bits and pieces to make a picture of how people lived in the past, when you don't know what the past looked like. The puzzle detective who tries to put all the pieces together is called an archaeologist and archaeology happens wherever people want to learn more about the past.

If you tried to guess what your final puzzle should look like, one puzzle piece wouldn't provide many hints. But by the time you build half the puzzle you can start to guess. Archaeologists are different. They don't try to guess what the picture will look like until they have all of the pieces they can find in front of them. And even then, they don't really like to make guesses. They want to prove everything from the artifacts (objects made a long time ago), and features (signs that people lived here), they found at the site. That's because they don't like to make any unqualified assumptions.

We have laws in Canada to protect places where we have pieces of the past. Our Heritage Act says that if you find an artifact you should leave it where you find it and tell someone of your find. Places where we can find artifacts and features are called cultural sites and only archaeologists licensed by the province can dig there.

(From page 6, *Discover the Spirits of the Little Bonnechere: A Cultural Heritage Activity Book for Youth*, Friends of Bonnechere Parks 1998; available from the electronic bookstore of www.bonnecherepark.on.ca).

PROCEDURE

1. To demonstrate how the science of archaeology works, group the class into pairs and provide students with 6 recipe cards.
2. Have each student write a short story about 6 to 10 sentences; they should incorporate word clues that link the sentences. Each sentence should be written on a different recipe card.
3. Have each student shuffle their cards and exchange them with their partner. How accurately can the students piece together their partner's story?
4. Distribute *Archaeological Terms* worksheets to the class. Have students match definitions to terms.

EXTENSIONS

Have students illustrate a paper plate, tear it into pieces, and then exchange the pieces with a fellow student. Ask students to piece together their plates. Withholding a piece of each item would show students how sometimes we don't recover the entire artifact.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TERMS

Match definitions to terms.

Archaeologist	A record created by people who actually saw or participated in an event and recorded that event or their reactions to it immediately afterwards (e.g. newspapers, diaries, letters).
Artifact	Where someone/something comes from originally.
Borden number	A piece of personal property passed down from generation to generation.
Cataloguing data	A small, hand-held tool with a flat, sharp metal blade used by archaeologists to remove soil above and around artifacts. It is also used to scrape the earth to feel for artifacts and soil texture.
Country of Origin	A maker of articles, especially a factory.
Culture	Anything used by humans, such as pottery, arrowheads, stone tools, and animal (or human) bones with cutmarks.
Excavation	Systematic removal of soil layers to explore an archaeological site.
Feature	A specialist in the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of physical remains.
Field Note	The matter from which a thing is made.
Heirloom	Custom, opinion or belief handed down through the years.
Manufacturer	A recorded set of measurements, diagrams, maps and observations kept by an archaeologist while excavating a site.
Materials	The unique identifier for the site location where an object was collected. Used only in Canada.
Period	One square in a grid, usually one metre by one metre in size.
Primary source	The customs, civilization, technology and achievements of a particular time or people.
Site	A distinct span of history, or a time forming part of a geological era.
Tradition	Information recorded by the archaeologist on artifacts recovered from an excavation, includes recorder's name, date, site name, Borden number, unit, artifact number, location, level, and description.
Trowel	A designated area of interest that may be archaeologically investigated.
Unit	Something made by a human that cannot be moved (e.g. hearth, well, stain in the earth, rock painting).