



Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center
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This lesson was created by a teacher participating in a Wisconsin ESEA Improving Teacher Quality grant entitled Inquiry Based Technology-Mediated Teacher Professional Development and Application.

- Title: Contextual Clues
- Submitted by: Cheryl Awtrey
- Grade Level: With some minor changes, this lesson could be used with any grade level.
- Subjects: Science, Social Studies
- Objectives: By observing and interpreting an artifact in different contexts, students will:
1. Understand the importance of leaving artifacts in context in order to correctly understand their meaning.
 2. More fully appreciate the need to observe what is around an object to interpret its possible uses.
- WI Standards: -Science A.8.3, A.8.7, B.8.5, C.8.4, C.8.6
-Social Studies B.8.4, B.12.4
- Duration: One class period (40 – 45 minutes)
- Materials/Supplies: -A photograph or model of a prehistoric stone knife
-Photos of various items found with the knife
-(Optional) A map showing the location of the knife as found in a site
- Vocabulary: Drill – a shaped rock used to pierce hide, wood, or other objects
- Background: Amateur archaeologists and treasure hunters often do irreparable harm to the historical record. In the case of the amateur archaeologist, the harm is at least most likely unintentional. Whether students realize it or not, context clues provide valuable interpretive information about many of the events that happen in our lives. When was the last time you saw an acquaintance in an unfamiliar setting and were hard pressed to recall the individual's name? Successful members of society take advantage of the meanings provided by context all the time. They know how to understand comments based on who is saying them and where they are. When

archaeological items are removed from their original settings without careful records being kept, a great deal of information about the meaning of those items is lost.

- Setting the Stage: Ask students to think about the first time they saw a teacher outside of school. What did it feel like to see them in a different place? Did they think about the teacher any differently because they could now imagine her/him outside of school?
- Procedure:
1. Show the students the illustration or model of the knife. Explain to them that you know that the knife is very old, but you are not sure how old. Have the students brainstorm all of the possible uses this knife may have had.
 2. By illustration or explanation, tell the students that the knife was actually found near some deer bones with knife marks. How do they believe the knife was used now?
 3. How does their interpretation change if the knife had been found with a drill instead?
 4. How does the interpretation change if the knife is found with the remains of a cooking pot near a hearth?
- Closure: As a group, discuss how the various context clues changed the meaning of the knife. If a student finds an artifact and moves it, what has s/he done to the meaning of the artifact? Have students explain how this information should influence their behavior if they should ever come across an artifact. Brainstorm with students about resources in their area for help with reporting any sites they may come across.
- Evaluation: The students will write a short essay explaining how the context affected their understanding of the knife. They should also write a brief statement explaining what they should do if they happen to find an artifact.
- Links/Extension: [Intrigue of the Past: A Teacher's Activity Guide for Fourth through Seventh Grades - Lesson 4: "Context"](#)
- References: To use additional illustrations from Wisconsin history, access the Mississippi Valley Archaeology website:
<http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/PreEuropeanPeople/EarlyCultures/index.html>

Contextual Clues Student Worksheet

1. What kinds of uses might a knife have?

2. How do you think the knife was used with the deer bones?

3. How do you think the knife was used with the drill?

4. How do you think the knife was used with the cooking pot?

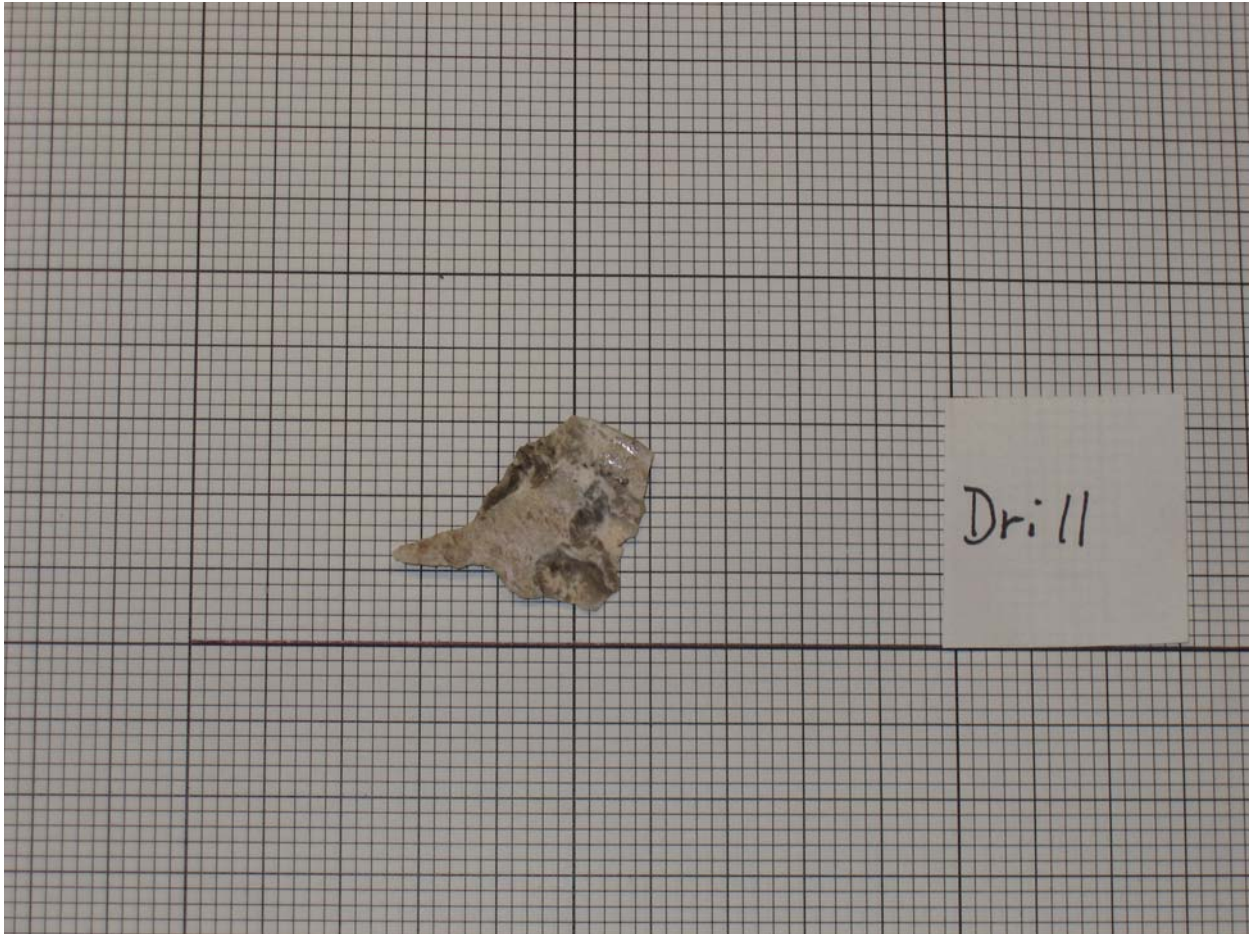
5. Explain how what the knife was found with changed your understanding of what it was used for?

6. What should you do if you find an artifact?

Knife



Drill



Sherd from a Cooking Pot



Deer Bones

