



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: Layers of The Past

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Grade Level: 6th

Subjects: Science, Social Studies, Language Arts

Objectives

1. To identify methods archaeologists use to relatively date soil layers
2. To interpret soil profiles

WI Standards: Science C.

Duration: 46 minutes – 1 class period

Materials/Supplies: Five textbooks, one notebook, paper labels, adhesive tape, pens, pencils, and markers, one coin

Vocabulary: Archeology, artifacts

Background: Discuss the study of soil at a dig site help archaeologists learn about the past. Discuss texture and color of soil.

Setting the Stage: The students will be learning some of the basic rules archaeologists use to interpret the soil at a site.

Procedure:

1. A student will write the current date on a piece of paper, large enough for the class to see. The student will then tape the piece of paper to one of the textbooks.
2. Four other volunteers will do the same. The textbooks will be stacked on each other as the pieces of paper are taped to them.
3. Discuss which textbook was laid down first and which was laid down last. The students should realize that the first textbook is on the bottom of the stack and the last textbook is on the top. Tell students they just learned one of the most important rules of an archaeological excavation:

The first layer of soil laid down is usually the last one to come out.

4. Tell students they will be learning about how archaeologists can date soil layers using artifacts and features they find. Have student unstack textbooks and remove slips of paper. Then have another student stack two books on top of each other. Take a coin, noting that it has just been minted. Have a student place the coin between the pages of a textbook and stack the last three on the pile. Discuss the position of the coin and the date of the layers from the position of the coin.

5. Have a student remove the top two textbooks from the stack and place a notebook on top of the three remaining books. Have a student write the time on a slip of paper and attach it or insert it in the notebook. Ask the class to relatively date the layers of the books below the notebook.

Closure: Discuss the importance of archaeologists being able to relatively date soil layers.

Evaluation: Through observation, information on the worksheets

Links: This is a lesson plan that can be used to help introduce the Scientific Method. It could also be used in Social Studies.