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The following lessons were created by **Tristan McKittrick**, a teacher participating in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers entitled Touch the Past: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Region.

How do we know what happened in the past? ***Ancient and Modern People of Wisconsin***

Summary

This lesson is designed to serve as an introductory activity for 10th grade World History, which is the first history class my students take in high school. However, an educator could adapt the fundamentals of this lesson to middle school or later high school. One question that my students sometimes ask is, “How do we really know that happened?” I believe this question comes out of teenagers’ natural inclination to distrust authority, but also from the fact that students’ exposure to history so often happens at a distance. Most of their encounters with the past come from secondary sources that seem to have little connection to the events themselves.

Archaeology is one concrete example of how people can more directly discover the past. The following lesson and activities provide an opportunity for students to learn about how the story of the past is created. They will look at evidence left by the Woodland people of prehistoric Wisconsin, as well as the evidence left by their own daily lives.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe characteristics of native Wisconsin people, especially during the Woodland Era
- Identify techniques used by archaeologists and historians to understand the past
- Analyze and interpret evidence to construct a story of past events

WI Social Studies History Standards:

B.12.2 Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion

B.12.3 Recall, select, and analyze significant historical periods and the relationships among them

B.12.13 Analyze examples of ongoing change within and across cultures, such as the development of ancient civilizations; the rise of nation-states; and social, economic, and political revolutions

Time:

Approximately two 90 minute blocks

Materials/Supplies

- *Twelve Millenia* by James L. Theler and Robert F. Boszhardt (p. 127-128)
- *Digging and Discovery*, By Diane Holliday and Bobbie Malone (page 38-44)

Vocabulary

History	Prehistory	Archaeology	Site
Artifacts	Context	Dating: Absolute/Relative	Woodland

Background and Setting the Stage

This lesson uses early Wisconsin people to show the ways archaeologists and historians construct the story of the past, (although any prehistoric people from any region could be inserted to give students an example that is relevant to their own area).

This lesson is designed to set the stage for a broad history course, as an introduction to how we go about learning history. The first step is to ask students how they know what has happened in the past.

Procedure

Day 1:

Begin by asking students the following questions:

How do we know what happened in the past?

How do we learn about events if we weren't there?

First individually, then in groups of three, students should write down ideas before sending one student from each group to record their ideas on the board.

Allow time for brief discussion, then ask students to identify how many of these techniques could be used to understand people who had no written language (this will eliminate books, websites, TV, etc...)

Introduce vocabulary (explain and use examples):

History: The written record of past events

Prehistory: The period of time before written records

Archaeology: The study of past people from the materials they left behind

Archaeological example to show how we build a story of the past, and how that story changes:

Interactive slide show/PowerPoint: Mound builders of Wisconsin: Who were they?

Photo of mounds: What are they? Who made them? How could we find out?

First Euro settlers' ideas: Giants, lost race, unrelated to contemporary Native Americans...

Archaeological techniques/Vocabulary: Site, Artifacts, Dating

Photos of archaeological dig: landscape/context, excavation, artifact analysis

What have archaeologists concluded from this evidence?

Woodland people: Background

What is still unknown?

HW for Day 2:

Over the next 24 hours, what evidence will you leave behind?

Examine the garbage in your family's house: What evidence is left behind? If someone wanted to find out about your family from your garbage, what would they learn?

If everyone abandoned Evansville this week, what would archaeologists in 1000 years have to say about this town? What evidence would there be? What would they learn?

Day 2:

Begin with journaling and general discussion:

What did you find in your garbage?

What does it say about your family?

What are the most interesting and/or revealing artifacts?

What are the challenges of this kind of work?

Overview/Review of techniques archaeologists use to construct the past:

Context

Stratigraphy

Absolute and Relative Dating

Analogy

How might these concepts apply to history?

Review of evidence and techniques that help to form the story of Wisconsin's Late Woodland Effigy Mound Builders:

Read section from Digging and Discovery

Closure:

What are YOUR questions about the past?

Provide an overview of the units that we will be studying this term

What do you know?

What are the biggest questions you have?

Evaluation/Assessment

The culmination of this unit will ask students to explain some of the ways we construct the past, using various historical events we have studied as their examples.

Links/Extension

This is a general introduction to the idea of history and could be used in a variety of history classes, and adjusted for various levels. In addition, the content could be tuned toward science to understand the scientific techniques and scientific method inherent in the field of archaeology.

Resources

- *Digging and Discovery*, By Diane Holliday and Bobbie Malone
- *Twelve Millenia* by James L. Theler and Robert F. Boszhardt
- Slide Show/PowerPoint: Mr. McKittrick's pictures of Driftless Area archaeology (examples of context, techniques, historical background, etc.)