



Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center
1725 State Street
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601
Phone: 608-785-6473
Web site: <http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/>



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

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YOU Are an Amateur Archaeologist

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the principles of archaeology
2. Connect principles of Geography and History with those of Archaeology
3. Use prior knowledge for problem-solving
4. Understand the development of common human items (artifacts) over a span of time
5. Understand that our current “artifacts” are based on the type of society we live in today
6. List and explain the six Components of Human Culture
7. Define the following terms: history, geography, culture, archaeology, relative and absolute location, and relative and absolute dating, artifact

Introduction

This lesson is a hands-on activity designed to teach general concepts of archaeology to history and geography students, grades 6-9. With some changes, this lesson may be used in other grade levels as well.

The Lesson Sequence:

- A) Opening Questions
- B) Entire-class activity (warm-up)
- C) Definitions and worksheet
- D) Group Activity
- E) Closure with written activity

Total Time for Lesson: about 2-3 class periods

Opening Questions

1. What makes something old?
2. How can we tell if one object (desk, chair, table, car, etc.) is older than another?
3. Is there a reliable way to tell the age of a tree?
4. How could you tell if one building is older than another?

5. What method would you use to put these in order, from oldest to most recent? Stone axe, steel axe, chain saw (in correct order).

Definitions

- History the record of past events and times, especially in connection with humans
- Geography the study of the natural features of the earth's surface, including topography, climate, soil, vegetation, etc, and man's relationship to them
- Archaeology interpreting the past through the study of artifacts by using the scientific method
- Artifact an item made or modified by humans
- Culture learned guidelines for human behavior
- Relative Location a point or place in relation to another point or place
- Absolute Location the precise location of an object
- Relative Dating the arrangement of artifacts or events in a sequence relative to one another
- Absolute Dating the determination of the age of an object with reference to a specific time scale, such as a fixed calendar or in years before present (B.P.)

Opening Activity

Explain relative dating again, mentioning that most artifacts are found in layers, from oldest to newest.

Present to the entire class the following items:

- Cassette tape (4)
- Cell phone (8)
- Old 45 record (2)
- CD (6)
- Flash drive (9)
- 8-track tape [if you can find one!] (5)
- DVD (7)
- LP [long-playing album] (3)
- Rotary telephone (1)

Ask students which is the oldest item, and then the next and the next. Ask them how they determined their answers. This is a lead-in to the class activity below.

Class Activity

1. Divide students into groups of four or five
2. Have bins with artifacts (see below) placed in stations in the classroom
3. Tell students you want each group to carefully examine and discuss each item in their box/bin. Then place each item in order from the oldest to the most recent.
4. After everyone in each group agrees to the correct order, the students will write down the items in order on their worksheet.

5. Give students about 5-7 minutes for each station, then rotate.

The Items

Suggestions, with approximate date of first appearance.

Bin # 1 Board Games

1. Monopoly 1934
2. Ouija 1901
3. Chutes and Ladders 1943
4. Checkers 1600 B.C.
5. Chess 15th century A.D.
6. Candy Land 1949
7. Battleship 1967
8. Clue 1949

Bin # 2 Kitchen Implements

1. Spoon 300 B.C.
2. Fork 700-800 A.D.
3. Knife (butter knife) 2.5 million B.P.
4. Flour sifter
5. Egg beater
6. Can opener
7. Molcajete (pumice grinding stone)
8. Sieve

Other Suggestions:

Food

1. Corn
2. Sugar
3. Salt
4. Bread
5. Boxed cereal
6. Tangelo (or other hybrid)
7. Cherry tomato
8. Box of Macaroni & Cheese

Movies

1. Your choice
2. Use older color movies, and newer black & white, just for fun
3. Vary the genres

Toys

1. Plastic dinosaur
2. Top
3. Frisbee
4. Marble
5. Doll
6. YoYo
7. Soccer ball
8. Teddy bear

Tools

1. Hammer
2. Screwdriver
3. Level
4. Hacksaw (blade only will work)
5. Pliers
6. Garden trowel
7. Crescent wrench
8. Scissors

Books

1. The Bible
2. History of Ancient Greece
3. The Odyssey
4. Lord of the Rings
5. The Prince by Machiavelli
6. Legends of the Middle Ages
7. Current book of Archaeology
8. Something by an Ancient Roman (Juvenal, Tacitus, Herodotus)

Before moving to the next set of items, Have each group write the **order** of each bin of items, from **oldest to most recent**.

Closure

After completing the artifact bins:

While students are still in their groups, have them

- Discuss with each other how these artifacts have changed over time, and then write their findings down in a paragraph.
- Answer this question in another paragraph: What arguments and evidence did your group use to reach your conclusions.

Discuss as a class the relative dating of each group of artifacts. Questions for students:

- How did each group of artifacts change over time?
- How are the first and last items in each group different?
- Name an item you think came **before** the earliest item.

- Name an item you think might come **after** the most recent item.

Using class suggestions, write a single statement with the students about how everyday objects have changed throughout time.

YOU Are an Amateur Archaeologist

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class Period: _____

DEFINITIONS

1. History
2. Geography
3. Archaeology
4. Artifact
5. Culture
6. Relative Location
7. Absolute Location
8. Relative Dating
9. Absolute Dating
10. Seriation