



“How to Think Like an Archaeologist”

Suggested Pre-visit activity for Historic Jamestowne

Subject Area: History, Math/3-5th grades

Skills: Observation, deductive and analytical reasoning, estimating

Strategies: Cooperative learning, hands-on, classifying

Time: approx. 1 hour, suitable for team work

SOLs: Virginia Studies

VS.1 The student will develop skills for historical and geographical analysis including the ability to

- a) identify and interpret artifacts and primary and secondary source documents to understand events in history;
- b) determine cause and effect relationships;
- c) compare and contrast historical events;
- d) draw conclusions and make generalizations;
- e) make connections between past and present;
- g) interpret ideas and events from different historical perspectives;
- h) evaluate and discuss issues orally and in writing;

Objectives:

Students will

1. Be introduced to the concept of material culture.
2. Use analytical thinking in a collaborative setting.
3. Gain skills used in artifact analysis.
4. Build a foundation for hypothetical deductive reasoning.

Background: The **archaeologists** at **Jamestown Rediscovery** in Jamestown, Virginia have excavated almost half-a-million **artifacts**. Each artifact needs to be **identified**, so that the archaeologists can understand how it would have been used. These artifacts tell archaeologists about the people of Jamestown by giving them **clues** about the different **cultures** of the people in early Virginia. The objects made and used by a culture, or group of people, make up their **material culture**.

Archaeologists are interested in how people in the past thought and acted. Archaeologists **analyze** and study each artifact. Groups of artifacts make up an **assemblage**. The list of each collection of artifacts is called a **finds list**. At Jamestown Rediscovery, the finds list are kept by hand and then copied into a computer **database**.

Archaeologists and Students can learn to **analyze artifacts** by using some of the same questions used by journalists. For each artifact ask:

1. **Who** would have used this (made this)?

2. **What** is this object? What was it meant to be?
3. **When** was this made? When was it left here?
4. **Where** is this artifact from? Where has it been?
5. **Why** was this important? Why was this thrown away?
6. **How** can we understand the people who used this?

Resources and materials:

1. a large collection of grocery store receipts, at least one per person (some schools have large collections on hand from fund-raising programs). **Note to teachers: Teachers or aides should preview the receipts and reject any that list items that would be inappropriate to discuss with young students.**
2. Attached form for analyzing receipts, one for each team secretary.

Procedure:

1. Introduce the lesson by explaining what a finds list is and how archaeologists use artifacts to learn about people and their culture. They use lists and databases to help organize and access their data.
2. Use the following example of a type of artifact that can tell us about actions and ideas. Remember that where something is found can affect the interpretation.

CANDLES: You might bring in some different types of candles to illustrate this example.

Utilitarian—these candles can be used for power outage, camping, bug repellent and food service.

Emotional—Candle lit dinners and décor in your home. These are more likely to be more decorative than the utilitarian ones, and may also be more nicely scented.

Celebrations—Certainly birthday candles, halloween candles are examples of these. Would you find candles on a wedding cake?

Sacred—Candles used for prayer, in churches and associated with different religious ceremonies.

3. Divide students up into collaborative groups. Give each group a pile of receipts and an activity sheet. Have the students decide on the roles each will play: secretary, readers, presenters.
4. Think of the receipts as finds lists. Each one will give a place and time as well as other important information. This data can later be used for creating maps, charts and graphs.

Closure: Discuss with the students how our choices and actions can be reflected in the objects and artifacts that we choose to use. Think of some examples that have not been seen in the grocery store receipts. Which people in our everyday lives can tell a lot about us from our artifacts? Suggestions for discussion include:

- Your letter carriers, who see your letters and bills and magazines
- Grocery clerks, who see the things you buy
- Photo technicians who develop your film
- People who come to your yard sale
- Video store clerks
- Librarians

Think about what is in your desk or back pack right now that might reflect something about you.

On the web: This site highlights the archaeology of modern day trash:

http://info-center.ccit.arizona.edu/~bara/gbg_in~1.htm

Grocery Store “Finds List”

1. When were these groceries bought? You can list the dates or give a range from the earliest date to the latest date.
2. Where were they bought? You can give specific names of stores or addresses or use a common answer for all of them such as the town where they were purchased.
3. Look at your longest receipt. Do you find any items that tell you about the ages of the people in the family? For example, what would diapers tell you? What about senior citizen vitamins?
4. Look for patterns in buying. Is there a lot of healthy food? A lot of frozen convenience items? How much junk food compared to healthy food?
5. Are there non-food purchases? Toys, reading material, clothing?
6. Take out a small receipt, with less than 5 items if possible. Can you decide which item was the reason for going to the store? Which item, if any, was an impulse buy? For example, if you see a receipt with diapers, baby food and a magazine, which would be the item that was most needed?

Discuss among your group any patterns you noticed. Would this look like your grocery store receipt? Write down your observations. Have one student be the spokes person for the group and present some of your observations to the class. See if they came up with similar interpretations.

Be careful about making assumptions. For example, do you say they have a baby girl in the house because there was a doll purchased?