

## TEACHER'S CORNER: ARCHEOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Archeologists often try to interpret the material remains that they find in terms of the activities carried out by ancient people. But not all activities generate material remains, nor are all activities carried out in separate locations. Some spaces may be used for many purposes, while others are reserved for a more limited range of activities. Finally, the debris from activities is not always thrown away on the spot; in fact, we devote a lot of effort to training our children NOT to throw things away on the spot. Trash cans are a monument to something, namely the dump, which could only develop once people lived in one place for a long enough time to be bothered by garbage. Often the most concentrated archeological remains in an area really represent the dump.

The following two exercises are designed to demonstrate what can be learned from material remains at an archeological site.

### COMPARATIVE GARBAGE EXERCISE (grades 4-12)

**Purpose:** To explore the relationship between material remains and activities in different areas.

**Equipment:** One or two days of trash and garbage from at least two wastebaskets located in different areas of a school or home, for example: the student lounge and the teachers' lounge, the lunchroom and the classroom, the living room and the bathroom. Do not tell the class where the bags came from. Also recommended, 3 or more pairs of rubber gloves and one large plastic drop cloth for each trash bag.

**A. Procedure:** Divide into as many groups as there are trash bags. Spread the drop cloths on the floor and dump out the trash. Each group should analyze the trash in the following terms:



1. Number of different kinds of trash; for example, vegetable remains, animal remains, paper food containers, plastic food containers, metal food containers, beverage containers (group or individual sized?) papers with writing, papers with printing, pencils, cardboard tubes, etc.

2. Apparent functional groupings of trash; for example, remains of meals, remains of snacks, remains of drinks, remains of work, remains of games, debris from cosmetic activities, discarded printed matter, etc.

3. Proportional representation of each functional group. Is most of the trash food? Or is most of it reading material?

**B. Analyze the information from each trash bag.**

1. What does it represent in terms of activities? Does it represent more

than one activity? Which activities were most frequently represented? Do you think all the activities were carried out near the trash can or in a different space? If debris from an activity was transported to the trash can, was it all transported or was some left on the activity site or disposed of in another way?

2. Does the trash reflect group activities or individual activities? Was the context of activity the family or the society? If the society, what is the importance of these activities to the society at large?

3. The group could also interview the actual users of the space asking what they did in a particular area to show how physical remains give a different picture from oral history, i.e. What did you do while you were there? What did you eat or drink?

C. Now compare the results of two or more bags.

Where did each bag come from? If the class has problems with this, you could provide a list of choices (i.e. who used the space--teachers, students, 7th graders, children, parents,--how did they use it?).

SANDBOX ACTIVITY: CREATING AND DIGGING  
AN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE (grades K - 8)

Divide a sandbox into four or more squares, each big enough for two or three students to work in. Use string secured by thumbtacks or weights to mark the divisions.

Before the students arrive, bury a few items suggestive of a particular room or area in each square. Examples: bones, fruit pits, measuring spoons, food package wrap, broken china fragments, etc. (kitchen); fragments of toys, Legos, stuffed animal eyes, game pieces (children's play area); pens,

pencils, old T.V. or stereo knobs, picture frames, paper clips, etc. (living room, den or study); toothpaste tube cap, empty shampoo bottle, removable rod from toilet roll holder, soapdish, etc. (bathroom); assorted screws, old screwdriver, hammer head, carpenter's rule, etc. (garage or workbench area); clothespins, measuring cup, miscellaneous buttons (sewing area or laundry); old doorknob, keys, umbrella handle (front hall).

Hand students archeologist's tools (trowel, small shovel, screen) and assign them to squares. Each square team has a plastic bag for "finds."

After about 20 minutes, depending on age of students, each team has to guess which room of the house they have excavated and tell what clues led them to their answer. Older students could be asked to guess how many people lived in the house, the ages of the occupants, and something about the kind of life they led, for example kinds of foods eaten and home entertainment.

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