

TEACHER'S CORNER: ARCHEOLOGY FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Although high school students can take an archeology class; dig in Williamsburg and Alexandria, Virginia, Cahokia Mounds, and Pueblo Indian sites along the Rio Grande; or study paleolithic art and archeology in the Dordogne, the middle school student has often been left out. Project Archeology: Saving Traditions, (P.A.S.T.), an interdisciplinary archeology curriculum for middle school and gifted elementary school students, fills that need. It is a four month curriculum program with three units: The Artifact, The Site, and The Culture.

Each unit contains an introduction, advance preparations, safety guidelines, and at least seven sound and stimulating experiential group activities. For example, in the Artifact unit the student activities show how to make a stone tool; to describe, locate, and name an artifact; to sort projectile points; and to come face-to-face with the question of who owns the artifact. Many activities even take students outside the classroom.

The curriculum emphasizes problem solving approaches and combines science, mathematics, and language arts. It contains tests, student field notebooks, lists of State Historic Preservation Offices, a filmstrip and tape about "The Cutting Edge," and the game "Archeology: Can You Dig It?"

The game simulates a fictional archeological site located on the confluence of a river flowing into Puget Sound. The game board illustrates the topography of the area including a steep hill, a mud slide, and beaches, all important to the development of the site. The game cards represent three different cultural levels laid down over a period of 10,000 years, and fate cards determine how many excavation units an archeological crew can dig. As the creator of P.A.S.T., Nan McNutt explains: "Unlike many simulations, the importance of this game is not just in the decision and actions taken by each team but the actual analysis that must take place in order for a conclusion to be presented."

This curriculum has benefited from the close assistance of archeologists and from testing by teachers and students. The project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The drawbacks of P.A.S.T. are minimal: a few misspellings such as potatoe and ware; a few items difficult for students to bring from home; and a few overly complicated activities such as the mapping game. But, in the main, it is a sound, stimulating, and welcome curriculum. To purchase, write or call: Sopris West, Inc., 1120 Delaware Avenue, Longmont, CO 80501; (303) 651-2829. \$40.

The following activity comes from Project Archeology: Saving Traditions.

DESCRIBE AN ARTIFACT

What's the Point?

The basis of any science is the researcher's ability to describe his/her observations. In archeology, describing and recording is not only necessary for artifacts but also for soil, features, fauna, flora and even the hunches an archeologist has while working with these materials. Quite often, an artifact is given a name based on its



description, because its use is unknown. In this activity, students will learn description skills and will develop an understanding for the need to precisely describe artifacts.

Time Required: Two to three class periods.

Materials Required:

An "unknown" artifact--some old object that the students may have never seen, e.g. apple peeler

Objects from a junk store or basement (approximately 30)

6 cardboard boxes
Paper and Pencil
Masking tape
40 index cards (3x5 inches)
metric rulers
string that is pre-measured into 3 meter lengths.

Preparation:

Place 5 dissimilar objects and 5 index cards (numbers 1-30) into each box.

ACTIVITY I: THE METRIC ME

Divide the class into groups of four to six. Assign each group a table with a box of five artifacts and ask the group to describe each artifact on individual index cards. The descriptions should include size, shape, color, etc. Measurements of the artifacts should be part of the description. The description should not include a drawing and the actual name or use (e.g. pencil, used for writing) should not be given. Each group should record their artifacts on a page of a notebook.

After each artifact has been "named" and recorded on index cards, have students put the artifacts and cards into the boxes but keep their notebook page. The groups should then exchange boxes and cards with each other.

After the exchange, each group of students should tape the index card to the specimen they think it describes, name each artifact using a "description" (e.g. bifacially flaked tool) and then return the box of artifacts to the original group. The original

group should then check their match with the original list, and compare "description names" to choose the best name for the artifact. The "description names" can be shared orally or displayed with the artifact. Perhaps the students will invent even better names for the objects.

Discussion

Why is it so important for archeologists to use descriptions? What would happen if archeologists did not use descriptive names?

ACTIVITY II: THE UNKNOWN ARTIFACT

Present your "unknown" artifact. Ask students who know the name not to tell anyone. Using the chalkboard, have the class create an "index card" for this object. The index card should include the descriptors, a descriptive name and the possible uses of the object. When suggestions are exhausted, discuss with the class the reasons that archeologists describe artifacts in detail.

Have any students that know the name of the artifact tell its name. If no one knows the artifact, tell the students its name and what it was (is) used for. Have the students explore the ways in which they may have learned about the artifact.

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