

Dead Men's Tales

Activity 3: Grades 5-8 Undisturbed Find

It is critical for archeologists to record the exact placement of any artifacts uncovered at a dig site. Only after a location has been recorded can the finds be removed, catalogued, and further examined. By maintaining this accurate log, archeologists have a permanent record that can later be analyzed with regard to the precise placement of artifacts and remains within the dig site.



Classroom Impressions

In this activity, you'll create a delicate archeological find that will be uncovered by a classmate. In order to preserve the elements of this find, the "unearthing" procedure must be precise, deliberate, and methodical. The exact location and position of every dig artifact must be recorded to maintain the coherency of the find.

OBJECTIVE

This activity page will offer:

- An introduction to difficulties in archeological excavation
- "Unearthing" challenge

MATERIALS

- Toothpicks
- Colored markers
- Bowl
- Clean sand
- Spoon
- Paint brush
- Paper

PROCEDURE

Part 1 - Creating the Site

1. Use markers to color about one dozen wooden toothpicks. Each toothpick should have distinct markings.
2. Place a layer of sand in the bottom of a bowl.
3. Position one of the toothpicks anywhere on the sand surface. Record its placement on a paper sketch of the site.
4. Use a spoon to carefully add additional sand so that the object becomes buried.
5. Position a second toothpick so that it overlaps the first artifact. Again record the exact position of this toothpick on your sketch. Use a spoon to cover it with sand.
6. Continue adding sand and toothpicks until all the artifacts have been placed and buried.
7. Add an additional layer of sand so that the placement of the artifacts cannot be inferred by the surface appearance of the sand.

Part 2 - Uncovering the Find

1. Exchange the "archeological site" you created with a site created by another student.
2. On your new site, use your spoon and paintbrush to carefully uncover the buried artifacts.
3. Record the exact location of each object as it is unearthed.
4. Try not to disturb the sand or any of the hidden objects as you excavate these finds. Continue removing the artifacts until the site has been fully excavated.
5. When you are finished, compare your drawing of the unearthed site with the drawing of the site owner.

QUESTIONS

1. Did you uncover the find exactly the way it was originally laid down? Explain.
2. What factors affected the success of your archeological dig?
3. How might the type of soil affect your success in uncovering the artifacts?

EXTENSIONS

Movement in Archeology

Choreograph a movement piece that communicates the history of an ancient artifact. The piece should begin with the artifact's manufacture and include the burial, discovery and unearthing of the find. Include movements that suggest the work of the team of archeologist who find, document, and remove the artifacts.

Superposition

The principle of superposition involves the relative positions of objects as they relate to the sequence of their burial. Objects that were buried first occupy a position at the bottom of the stack. Objects that were buried more recently are found at the top of the stack. Use this principle to create a top -to-bottom stack that illustrates the most likely sequence of the following objects, if they were uncovered in the same column of sediment:

- Model T Ford
- first living cell
- trilobite
- T-Rex
- Volkswagen
- woolly mammoth

Uncovering Natural Mummies

Not all mummification is the result of human burial practices. There are many natural ways that a body may become mummified. In the segment "[Time Travelers](#)" the Chinese mummies were preserved due to the dry, salty climate, and also because of a type of embalming process used on the bodies after death. Use the web to uncover more information about natural mummies such as those found in bogs or in deserts. Compare and contrast the different types of mummies. In our society, embalming is a way to preserve the physical appearance of the dead. How is this common Western practice similar to mummification? How is it different?

WEB CONNECTION

[The Archaeology of a Prehistoric Coastal Hamlet](http://www.co.pinellas.fl.us/BCC/yatki/yat.htm)

<http://www.co.pinellas.fl.us/BCC/yatki/yat.htm>

Uncovering a prehistoric settlement in Florida - including archeological techniques

[World Wide Web Archaeology on the Internet](http://www.usd.edu/anth/midarch/midarch.htm)

<http://www.usd.edu/anth/midarch/midarch.htm>

A complete middle school web unit on archeology and its methodology

[Forensic Archeology: A Humanistic Science](http://165.83.212.198/issue.cfm?volume=19&number=10)

<http://165.83.212.198/issue.cfm?volume=19&number=10>

An online journal that includes over a dozen articles on forensic archeology

The activities in this guide were contributed by Michael DiSpezio, a Massachusetts-based science writer and author of "Critical Thinking Puzzles" and "Awesome Experiments in Light & Sound" (Sterling Publishing Co., NY).

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ANSWERS

QUESTIONS

1. Did you uncover the find exactly the way it was originally laid down? Explain.
(The movement of the sand shifted some of the artifact positions)
2. What factors affected the success of your archeological dig?
(The amount that the sand moved, the steadiness of the brush, etc.)
3. How might the type of soil affect your success in uncovering the artifacts?
(Soil that doesn't shift keeps the artifacts in place)

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(Answer: Volkswagen, Model T Ford, woolly mammoth, T-Rex, trilobite, first living cell)