

Archaeologists as Detectives

Background

Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of artifacts at the Middle Village site that reveal clues about many facets of Chinook life. By studying clues, in a way similar to the way a detective studies clues and looks for evidence at a crime scene, archaeologists have learned that Middle Village was an important site for trade among Indian tribes long before EuroAmericans arrived. Evidence reveals that Chinooks lived at Middle Village from 1790 to 1820. Weapons, pottery, beads, bracelets, buttons and remains of plankhouses are some of the artifacts recovered from sites where the Chinook once lived.

All cultures, historic and contemporary, leave evidence behind of their daily life. All people need to eat, for example. By studying artifacts, archaeologists can learn about foods that people ate hundreds or even thousands of years ago and how they ate them. Today people visit antique shops and attics searching for objects that reveal stories of family history, and other times and places that represent our society's collective memories.

"Who owns history?" is an important question to ask. Does any one person or culture own the stories that objects tell us? *Can what we believe to be true about history change* depending on the perspective of the teller and the listener?

This lesson consists of three parts. When presented as a unit during a site visit, students have the opportunity to develop their knowledge of archaeology while learning to apply standard practices.

Goal

Understand the role of an archaeologist, the use of tools, standard practices and what can be learned from the evidence discovered at Middle Village.

Objectives

1. Understand that stories about historical events, and the people who lived through them, are largely based on the interpretation of those who tell the stories.
2. Map the Middle Village site and learn about and how to use some of the commonly used tools of an archaeologist
3. Use both oral history and a series of questions to analyze cultural artifacts.

Key Terms

archaeology, artisan, aerial, artifact, chamber, cultural resource, descendant, excavation, features, field record, intact, natural resource, preserve, primary, protect, recover, remains, ruin, replica, site, stratified, terrain, trowel.

Time: up to 60 minutes

Procedures

“Who owns history?”

1. Advise students that people from different backgrounds and areas of expertise bring different and new perspectives that change the way “facts,” events and ideas are interpreted.
2. Discuss the role of an archaeologist in interpreting history.
 - ✓ How can archaeologists tell so much from so little?
 - ✓ What can archaeology tell us that written history cannot?
 - ✓ How can you see a house that is no longer there?
 - ✓ What does Chinook oral history tell us about the object’s story
3. Engage students in a thoughtful discussion about what is “fact” and what is actually “interpreted” by asking the question, *who owns history?*
4. Ask for opinions and ideas regarding student beliefs about history. Is history a fluid concept that continues to change with time? Or is history more like a mirror that reflects back different pictures depending on the angle of our perspective and in response to our own time and culture. Or a blend of both?

Procedures

Investigate the Middle Village Site: Learn research and recovery practices

1. Describe to students that they will be learning about the Middle Village site by mapping its resources and features.
2. Explain that different perspectives can present different interpretations of the same object or data. Given that understanding, students assume a similar role to an archaeologist.
3. Pass out the *“Think like an archaeologist”* handout (currently p. 15 and 16) for students to complete during the program or after the visit, based on what they learned.
4. Show a sample site map of Middle Village as drawn by an archaeologist and describe the map’s purpose.
5. Distribute a blank site map of Middle Village Station Camp for students to fill in – a map that does not display any of its characteristic features.
6. While students stand in the overlook, ask them to identify and mark on their map the features as they were (or could have been) during the time when Chinook lived here.

Procedures

“Clue Finders”

Use artifacts as a primary resource and a series of questions to analyze artifacts.

Discussion:

Explain that archaeologists keep different types of field records that contain identifying information about the artifact they find. Field records include information such as the artifact length and width, where it was found, a brief description, the material the artifact is made from (e.g. bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, glass, cotton, leather), special qualities of the artifact (e.g. shape, color, any moving parts) and questions about its possible uses.

Location, contextual and soil data are also very important to record in field notes. Another important discussion is that archaeology is inherently destructive as a result of the search and recovery process involved.

1. Display a sample of 6-8 or more artifacts and/or replicas on a table that students can touch, hold and examine.
2. Distribute *Field Record* forms for students to complete. Review each entry on the form by demonstrating with one of the artifacts.
3. Ask students to silently select one or two artifacts to focus on and complete their own field records.
4. When students have completed their field records, review each artifact and ask students to share what they wrote on their form. This allows students to check their work for accuracy.
5. Engage students a step further by asking them one question at a time about the object(s) they selected. Instruct them to respond in writing on their field record. Give them ample time to write a response to each question before proceeding to the next one.
 - ✓ What might the item have been used for?
 - ✓ Who might have used it?
 - ✓ Where might it have been used?
 - ✓ When might it have been used?
 - ✓ How can we tell the age of this object?
 - ✓ What can we learn from this artifact about the technology at the time it was made?
 - ✓ What stories does it tell about the life and times of the people who made it and used it?
 - ✓ Can you name a similar item in use today?
7. Conclude this lesson with a brief explanation of how to assure the safety of these sensitive objects.

“Objects are fragile and pieces can break off easily. Fingerprints contain oils that can lead to degrading the quality of the artifact(s). “

Supplies

- “Think like an archaeologist” handout
- 1-2 sheets of lined paper for each student
- One blank template map per student
- Field Record forms
- Pencils and rulers
- Clipboards or other hard and mobile surface (as needed)

Materials

Artifacts and/or replicas: *Chinese coins, buttons, beads/necklace, cradleboard, copper bracelets or pendant, animal traps, iron nails, pottery, ceramics, fish weight, baskets, fishing or cargo net, spears, arrowhead or rope, pipe, replica projectile point, musket ball, gun flint, bottle, marine animal bone, salmon vertebrae, charred acorn shell, camas or wapato bulb or stone fishing weight.*

Archaeology tools: such as *trowels, shovels, brushes, hand brooms, dustpans, screens, tape measure, levels or dental picks.*

Content Standards

WA: EALR 3, 3.2, 3.2.2: Geography, EALR 5, 5.2, 5.2.1: Social Studies Skills

OR: Historical Thinking 7.7, Historical Knowledge, 6.1

Common Core Standards

Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, 2

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects 6-12

Research to Build and Present Knowledge, 7; Key Ideas and Details 3

Artifact Field Record

Date _____

Location of site (Name)

Length _____

Width _____

Type of artifact: Describe the material it was made from (*bone, pottery, metal, wood, stone, leather, glass, paper, cotton, other*)

Draw object in this box

Special qualities: Describe how artifact looks and feels (shape, color, texture, size, weight, moveable parts, printing/stamps or writing on the surface)

Full description

Other Comments

Think like an Archaeologist

Fill in the blanks with a word from the box. Use all the words. All words are used only once.

aerial	field record	intact	ruins
archaeologists	recovered	terrain	trowel
artifacts	protect	replicas	feature
descendants	stratified	cultural resources	preserve
evidence	excavated	site	

- Looking at a **(site)**_____ from the air is called an **(aerial)**_____ view.
- The people who engage in scientific studies of historic or prehistoric people and cultures by analyzing **(artifacts)**_____ are called **(archaeologists)**_____.
- Archaeologists often find **(evidence)** _____ of past lives when they excavate a site in vertical layers.
- Once an artifact is found, it is considered to be **(recovered)**_____.
- Many times archaeologists find broken pieces of artifacts and other times they find items **(intact)** _____.
- When a building or even in a town is destroyed, in archaeological terms, this can be referred to as **(ruins)**_____.
- The Chinooks still have **(descendants)**_____ living in areas along the Columbia River.
- Some sites need to be **(excavated)**_____ before archaeologists can find any evidence. Some artifacts are found on the surface of the (ground/soil) _____.
- The designation of a specific landform, such as hilly, dry, flat or grassy is usually called **(terrain)** _____.
- One of the most common tools used by an archaeologist is called a **(trowel)**_____.
- We **(preserve/protect)**_____ a river, a landscape or even a house or piece of furniture so it is neither harmed nor destroyed.
- (Replicas)**_____ are often used when using or showing the real thing is not possible.
- When an area of land has a distinguishing characteristic that is a permanent part of the landscape, such as a fire-pit, this is called a **(feature)**_____.
- The Middle Village site is an excellent place to study about **(cultural resources)**_____ because it contains such plentiful historic information about people, activities and buildings.

15. When an archaeologist wants to document information about what is found at a specific site, he or she uses a (**field record**)_____.
16. Sometimes archaeologists need to dig through several (**stratified**)_____ layers of rock and soil to find artifacts.

Think like an Archaeologist

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