



Activity 3

Investigating our Past through Artifacts

Overview: Students will Observe, Analyze and Reflect on a collection of reproduction artifacts similar to what would have been used on real homesteads between the 1860s-1910s. Students will use discovery to guide their understanding of how technology evolved over time.

Outcome

Students will plan and conduct inquiry-based investigation of artifacts. Students will communicate investigations and construct reasonable explanations (spoken or written) as to how the artifacts were used by homesteaders.

Standards

1st – History – Identify similarities and differences between themselves and others

2nd – History – Identify history as the story of the past preserved in various sources

2nd – History – Compare and contrast past and present situations, people, and events in neighborhoods, communities, and the nation

3rd – History – Use a variety of historical sources including artifacts, pictures and documents to help

Procedure

Activity Three

Materials: video on about trash archaeology, trashcan archaeology worksheet or chart paper if you are bringing in your own “trash” materials, artifacts, observation and analysis tool,

Introduce students to the term Archaeology

Archaeology is the study of the past by looking for the remains and artifacts (historical things) left by the people who lived long ago. These remains can include things like old coins, tools, buildings, and garbage. Archaeologists, the people who study archaeology, use these remains to understand how people lived.

The photographs and objects we have looked at so far are like the artifacts or clues archaeologists use to solve mysteries about how people lived.

1. Tell students that they will be solving a mystery like an archaeologist today
2. Hand out the trash can inferring worksheet to students – or chart student answers as whole class

Setting the Stage

Show students the following video about visiting cultural sites with respect and how archaeologists define “trash” differently than we do: <https://vimeo.com/159289899>

When archaeologists find a historic or prehistoric trash pile, they call it a midden. A midden is just that – a pile of trash. Middens tell archaeologists a lot about what people were doing when they made that trash heap, and what was important to them. Use the **trash can archaeology hand-out** to scaffold student understanding of how archaeologists use artifacts as clues to better understand what happened in a particular place.

If you have the time and materials – you can build your own bag of mysterious clues about yourself or a fictitious person. Your students can work together to solve the mystery by identifying and inferring what each item could mean about the person to whom the objects belong. Tips on how to present the information:

- You can show students what sort of items you usually carry, and have them make inferences about how why you have that object (sunscreen=active, fruit=healthy, reusable water bottle=care about the environment etc.)
- Another option is to fill a wastebasket or trash bag with clean throwaway objects that “tell a story”. A waste basket is great, because most artifacts that archaeologists find are trash left behind by people of the past.
- As you pull items out of bin or bag have student make observations about what they see and what they think those clues mean. Chart their responses as a whole class

Explain to students that archaeologists use these same skills when they are in the field observing clues, and trying to figure out what happened in a certain place. They also use stories that are passed down, photographs, maps, and reports documented around or near the same time as when these places were occupied in order to better understand all the context clues.

Students receive an artifact representative of homestead life. These artifacts introduce Homestead life to the class and continue the inquiry process.. The artifacts are related to homestead work or the people who occupied homesteads. The artifacts give students a chance to think about what their objects are, what they were used for, and who might have used them.

The artifacts help the students develop investigative skills they will transfer to understanding the work that Archaeologists and Museum curators do. They are introduced to the ways people in historic preservation think about objects. They see the relationship between the artifacts and the value in the stories these objects tell about the places where they can be found. They begin to see how artifacts guide their understanding of historic sites, public lands and their value to our collective heritage.

Teacher explains the artifact activity. In small groups, students will examine their artifact and discuss and record the following:

1. What is my object?
2. Three words that describe my object are:
3. How do I think this object was used on a homestead?

4. Who would use my object on a homestead?
5. What can my object tell me about homesteading and the people who live on homesteads?
6. What else do I want to know about my object?

The teacher will facilitate a class discussion based on student/group responses. Then, post additional questions:

1. What have you learned about homesteading life after seeing all the objects?
2. What questions do you have about homestead life?



PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS TOOL



OBSERVE

REFLECT

QUESTION

FURTHER INVESTIGATION