

What Happened Here?

Language arts, social studies, science

SKILLS.....Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation
STRATEGIES.....Discussion, categorizing, decision making, writing, problem solving,
values clarification
DURATION.....2 class periods
CLASS SIZE.....Any

OBJECTIVES

In their study of archeological sites, students will use the trunk of replica artifacts to:

1. Categorize artifacts according to their use.
2. Hypothesize activity areas by placing artifacts within an imaginary site.
3. Assess the impacts of vandalism to the site.

MATERIALS

- Trunk of replica artifacts from Aztec Ruins National Monument
Optional:
- Graph paper
- String for making a grid
- Measuring tapes

VOCABULARY

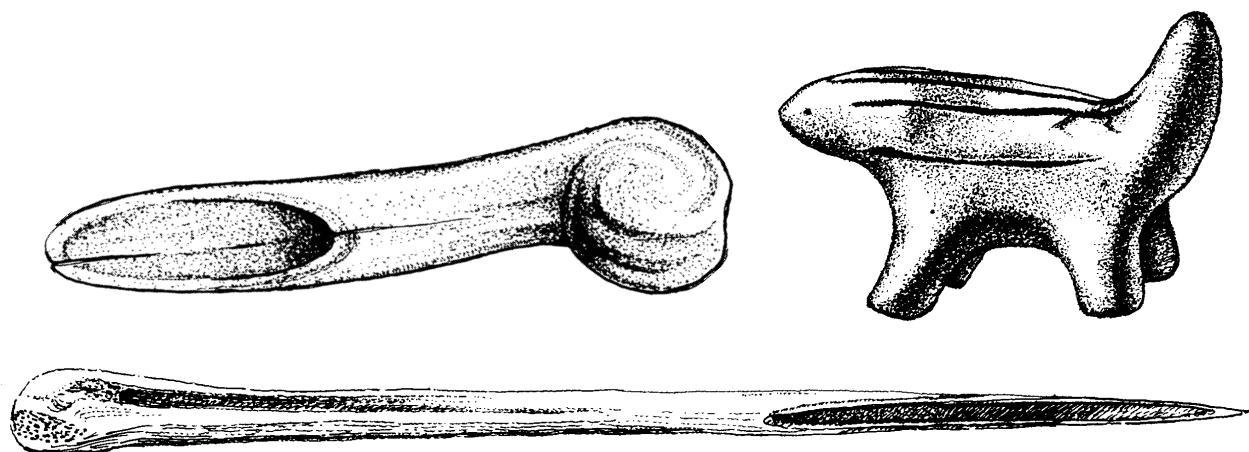
archeology: a method for studying past human cultures and analyzing material evidence (artifacts and sites).

archeological site: a place where human activity occurred and material remains were left.

artifact: any object made or used by humans.

context: the relationship artifacts have to each other and the situation in which they are found.

vandalism: willfully or maliciously defacing or destroying public or private property.



BACKGROUND

Teacher and students should have a firm understanding of the fundamental concepts of archeology before using this lesson. Basic concepts and lessons 1-8 presented in Intrigue of the Past form the foundation of this lesson.

Archeologists rely on surviving material remains from people of the past to answer questions about their behavior. The *artifacts* encountered and their *context*, or placement in relationship to everything else, can yield valuable clues for archeologists' interpretations of what activities occurred. Archeologists are careful to consider all artifacts and information when making inferences, rather than focusing on one or two artifacts to the exclusion of others. An artifact and its context may seem insignificant to an archeologist one day, yet could prove to be a crucial piece of information for another archeologist later.

It is important for archeologists to accurately and thoroughly describe their observations for the benefit of other archeologists. Archeological sites are frequently investigated many times by one or more archeologists.

Aztec Ruins has been repeatedly examined through the years. Archeologist Earl Morris, who headed the first excavations in the 1910s, made many inferences regarding the people who used the site based on the recovery of thousands of artifacts. However, because the science of archeology and its techniques were still in their infancy, Morris did not keep thorough records of the contexts of artifacts. He concentrated on recovering and describing artifacts that were beautiful and/or unusual, rather than noting contexts or describing common artifacts such as pottery sherds, discarded animal bones, and building materials.

His excavations have consequences for archeologists today, who attempt to answer questions about the people of Aztec Ruins based on his excavations. Incomplete or inaccurate records prevent them from reconstructing a full story of what happened at Aztec Ruins.

There were also instances of vandalism and theft, commonly known today as "pothunting," at Aztec Ruins. Early local people made their way into rooms, removing artifacts, altering walls, and thereby permanently changing the information available to us today. Sherman Howe, a local person who participated in one of these events as a schoolboy, later lamented the destruction of information that resulted from his group carrying away pottery, baskets, jewelry, sandals, mats, human remains, and other items. The treasure seekers dispersed the objects throughout the community, where they ended up in shoeboxes or on mantels, their stories lost, and their significance reduced to mere curiosities.

In recent years, Congress has passed stronger laws to protect archeological sites on federal lands. Most states have also passed laws protecting burials on both private and state lands. Penalties and fines for disturbing or removing items from these sites can be severe. Despite these laws, however, looting and vandalism remain a problem, especially in the Southwest where numerous sites are relatively well preserved, widely dispersed, and inadequately patrolled.

The descendants of the people who lived in this area – the modern day Pueblo peoples – also mourn the destruction of these sites, but for different reasons. Many express sadness, and even outrage, about their ancestors being disturbed. Many believe that when a person's burial is displaced, his or her spirit journey is interrupted. It is important to them that such remains, with accompanying funerary offerings, return to the earth at the site where they were buried so that their ancestors may continue their journey.

SETTING THE STAGE

Ask students to think about the different rooms in their home and the different activities that happen there, the kitchen and bedroom for instance. Name and compare some of those activities. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine that they are standing in an archeological site. How big is the site? What are the people doing?

PROCEDURE

1. Open the artifact trunk and arrange the artifacts on a table so that they are visible to the class.
2. Identify and categorize the artifacts according to their uses. Group the different categories on the table. (To save time, the teacher may want to "pre-categorize" artifacts for the discussion.)
3. Clear an area in the classroom and circle the students around you, thereby delineating the "boundaries" of the site.

4. Pose the questions:

What activities may have taken place here in this site?

What area(s) of the site would be used for each activity?

Students place the artifacts within the site where they would logically belong. They do not have to use all the artifacts in the trunk.

5. Students close their eyes while the teacher moves one or two artifacts to different, inappropriate locations within the site. Students then re-evaluate the site for illogical placement of artifacts. What might account for such placement? Examples: animal activity; vandalism and looting; construction activities. How might the misplaced artifacts affect an archeologist's interpretation of what happened there?
6. Students close their eyes while the teacher removes several artifacts. Ask students to identify which artifacts are missing (some may not be able to.) How would they know if artifacts were missing from an actual archeological site? How might missing items influence the interpretation of the site? Share the background information regarding Earl Morris' work and Sherman Howe's activities at Aztec Ruins.
7. Share BACKGROUND information on Pueblo peoples' feelings about the disturbance of their ancestral sites. Students write a short paper discussing the impacts of vandalism, both to the archeologist and to Pueblo peoples.

CLOSURE

Share the reports with the entire class. Review the basic concepts of archeology and how they were applied in this lesson.

EVALUATION

Evaluate students' papers and participation in discussions.

EXTENSIONS

1. The teacher may want to treat this lesson as two lessons. Concentrating on categorization of artifacts and their logical placement in a site could be the first lesson, and the importance of context and the impacts of vandalism could be the second.
2. Have students lay out a grid on the site, and draw the site on graph paper, carefully noting the placement of each object in relationship to others.
3. In teams, or individually, students write a report of their findings at the site, concentrating on how artifacts help archeologists decipher the behavior of those who lived there.

4. Students evaluate the thoroughness of another group's report of the site. Determine whether another archeologist has a complete picture of the site in order to make his/her own inferences.

5. Have the students write short stories from the point of view of an artifact that is vandalized or removed by looters from a site. In expressing the artifact's view, encourage students to incorporate aspects of how modern day descendants might feel, and to describe what might happen to the vandals and the stolen item when captured.

REFERENCES

Howe, Sherman, *My Story of the Aztec Ruins*, Times Hustler Press, Farmington, NM, 1947.

Lister, Robert H. and Florence C., *Aztec Ruins on the Animas Excavated, Preserved, and Interpreted*, Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, Tucson, 1987, second edition.

Aztec Ruins National Monument, Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, Tucson, 1992.

