

# Ancient Cultures

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**Purpose:** Students will develop some archeological skills in order to understand how scientists determine what ancient cultures were like; and, therefore, students will develop analyzing skills and will develop an appreciation of the work that is involved in finding out about our past.

**Teaching Level:** Grades 2,3,4,5,6 with adaptation possible for the other grades.

## Geography Standards:

- #1 - How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process and report information from a spatial perspective.
- #4 - The physical and human characteristics of places.
- #6 - How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions.
- #9 - The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.
- #12 - The processes, patterns and functions of human settlement.
- #14 - How human actions modify the physical environment.
- #15 - How physical systems affect human systems.
- #16 - The changes that occur in the meaning, use, distribution and importance of resources.
- #17 - How to apply geography to interpret the past.

**Objectives:** Upon completion of the following activities, students will

- a. observe the types of material that is thrown away,
- b. make inferences about the types of people who throw certain materials away,
- c. compare their "dig" to an actual archeological dig, and
- d. deduce how the people in their dig lived and what they and their lives were like.

## Materials Required:

- heavy plastic gloves for each student
- collected sacks of "clean garbage" from several
- large tweezers for each student sources (elderly individual, family with young children, single person, office,...)
- antibacterial soap
- newspaper to place archeological materials upon

## Procedure:

1. Discuss with the students that archeologists tell us about prehistoric cultures from the items which they've left behind; discuss that often no legible information is available from a long-ago time and place. Ask the students "how are archeologists and scientists able to determine what life was like for prehistoric peoples?". After a short discussion, students will, hopefully, conclude that what we now know about a prior culture comes from the items which they left behind. Read a story with the students about archeology or ancient cultures; bring in a guest speaker to talk with the students about archeology, ancient civilizations, artifacts,...
2. Divide the class into small groups of 3-4; tell them that today they will be archeologists. Distribute one bag of garbage per group; explain to the students that the bag of materials will be

their "dig". They should go through the material very carefully using gloves, tweezers, and the newspaper appropriately. As a group, they will identify each item that they located; they will write a paragraph, which will be shared with their colleagues, summarizing their findings.

**3.** From the items found as noted on the group list, each group will answer questions such as: what were the people like who discarded the materials?, from where did the people come?, how many people were living in the group?, what can be determined about the lifestyle of the group from the material found?, from where did this particular groups' ancestors come?, how and why did the people choose to arrive in this particular location? From where did the garbage come? Allow about twenty minutes for this group work. Chart all groups findings on a large poster board.

**4.** Have the groups share their conclusions with their colleagues (be sure to tell them if their results are accurate).

**5.** Conclude with a discussion about how their experience is similar to that of an actual archeologist. How was it different?

**Evaluation:** The teacher will observe student ability to work in a cooperative group, to participate in class discussion, and to write a summation paragraph.

**Extension:** The garbage could be saved and used as a science lesson; discuss recyclable waste and what happens to garbage; visit a waste treatment facility; visit a "dig" site in a sandbox or in a shoebox; develop a three-dimensional grid system to identify location of an artifact within a "dig" site; have students collect trash items typical of a particular job, and, then, have other students identify the user/job.