

Classroom Archaeological Survey

*Adapted from lesson plan from *Intrigue of the Past: Investigating Archaeology, A Teacher's Activity Guide for Seventh through Twelfth Grades*, submitted to Society of American Archaeology Education Station.*

<http://www.saa.org/publicftp/public/educators/documents/vol4no3-article7.pdf>

Time: 60 minutes (?)

South Carolina Education Standards

- Mathematics – 2.MDA.1; 5.G.1, 5.G.2; 6.NS.6, 6.DS.5
- Science – 1.S.1A; 2.S.1A; 3.S.1A; 4.S.1A; 5.S.1A; 6.S.1A; 7.S.1A, 8.S.1A

Materials Needed:

- Pencil
- Graph Paper
- Notebook Paper
- Survey activity sheet
- Final Report activity sheet
- Tape measure
- Ruler

In this lesson students will simulate an archaeological survey to recognize and use basic archaeological procedures. Students will determine how sites and artifacts relate information about human behavior. They will also analyze survey data and make inferences about human behavior and compare their research to the study of archaeology.

Introduction:

An archaeological survey is a systematic examination of the surface of the land for the purpose of locating and interpreting sites (places where people lived). As archaeologists survey the land, they are looking for anything that is not natural to the area: a row of rocks (possibly the remnants of a wall), depressions or mounds (buried structures), chips of stone (debris from stone tool manufacture), dark soil (possible middens, hearths, or burned structures), and pottery sherds.

When a site is found, the boundaries are defined and mapped. All artifacts within the boundaries are mapped and recorded, but they are collected only if the site will be disturbed due to a development project or if permission has been granted by the land owner. Maps, site forms, and any collected artifacts are returned to the laboratory, where they are analyzed. Archaeologists study sites in relation to each other and make inferences about past lifeways based on these analyses. A report is written and made available to other researchers.

By conducting a survey, archaeologists can learn where people settled and how they used the land. For example, nomadic hunter-gatherers typically move within an area on a seasonal basis and often perform particular tasks such as root gathering or hunting in a specific place each year. Archaeological survey data can be used to reconstruct annual movements of prehistoric groups based on what was left at each locality, such as digging implements or projectile points. In short, archaeologists study the human behavior that created sites.

Ask the students: If an archaeologist walked into your bedroom, what would be known about you from the objects there? Would one object taken from the room tell as much about you as all of the objects considered together?

Tell the students: Just as your personal possessions show something about you, ancient artifacts provide information about the people who made and used them. An archaeologist learns about people who lived in the past by studying the things they left behind. A wealth of information can be found on the ground surface, and systematic study can reveal much about the past lifeways without excavation. This form of archaeological research is known as “survey”. Students will simulate an archaeological survey of their classroom.

Activity Steps:

1. Just as archaeological sites and the materials they contain can be studied to learn about ancient human behavior, the classroom can be studied to learn about recent human behavior. Within the classroom there are numerous areas such as the blackboard, cubby areas, teacher’s desk, and student’s desks where specific activities occur on a regular basis. Artifacts that represent an activity, such as chalk, erasers, bookbags & lunchbags, staplers, pencils, and books remain in that area and may indicate what people did there. These areas can be considered to be “sites” for this project.
2. Using the introduction information, explain how and why archaeologists conduct surveys and record sites.
3. To model an archaeological survey, have students study the survey activity sheet, which represents a typical classroom “site”. Based on the objects present at the site and their relationship to each other (their “context”), what inferences might an archaeologist make about the activities that occurred?
4. Student survey projects. Imagine that the school has been abandoned and will soon be bulldozed to construct a freeway entrance. The class is a team of archaeologists who have been employed to study the behavior of students who used their classroom. Students will work in groups of three or four and choose a site. Using the survey activity sheet below, each group will:
 - a. Make a map of the site using graph paper
 - b. Describe features of the site such as the size, shape, objects present, and colors present.
 - c. Assign each observed artifact a unique number and record it; record the artifact location, description, and possible use on notebook paper
 - d. Mark the location of each artifact on the site map using its number designation.
5. Have students read the Final Report activity sheet. Each group will then write a final report that includes:
 - a. A description of methods used (i.e. observation & measurement)
 - b. A summary of the data collected (i.e. artifact record & map)
 - c. Inferences about how the site was used based on the artifacts present, their relationship to each other, and the where they were found.
 - d. A list of additional sources of evidence, such as direct observation of connections that might confirm their inferences (i.e. chalk + eraser = blackboard)

Conclusion

Ask the students: How is the classroom similar to an ancient Roman town or a Catawba Indian waddle and daub house? How is it different? Did survey of one portion of the room tell the whole story of the classroom? Would the same be true of an ancient site? Why or why not?

Many prehistoric and historic archaeological sites have been vandalized by people in search of artifacts to sell for personal profit. As a class discuss how the results of their research would change if the artifacts they studied had been removed. How would the results of an archaeological survey on a historic or prehistoric site change if numerous artifacts were stolen by collectors?

Survey Report Activity Sheet

Site Description

Site Map

Artifact Record

Number	Location	Description	Use

Final Report Activity Sheet

Introduction

Methods

Results

Inferences

Conclusion
