

**READING ARTIFACTS, READING CULTURE:  
THE GARBOLGY OF OUR HOMES**

**A LESSON PLAN**

Inspired from Project Archaeology's *Intrigue of the Past*

# READING ARTIFACTS, READING CULTURE:

## THE GARBOLGY OF OUR HOMES

(Inspired by Project Archaeology's *Intrigue of the Past*)

### *Lesson Understanding*

Using the tools of observation and inference, archaeologists study how people lived in the past through the objects they left behind.

### *Essential Question*

How do archaeologists study how people lived in the past?

### *What Students Will Learn*

- Archaeologists study everyday objects to learn how people lived in the past and how culture influenced their lives.
- How to apply observation, inference, evidence, and context to the study of everyday objects.

### *What Students Will Do*

Analyze modern trash to learn how archaeologists study the past.

### *Assessment*

Students will conduct an archaeological investigation of modern trash from different "sites" to understand how other people live their lives.

### *Target Age of Audience*

As written, this lesson plan is appropriate for 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grades. See suggestions for different age ranges in the lesson plan.

### *Lesson Duration*

45-50 minutes

### *Lesson Group Size*

20 to 30 students

## **Lesson Overview**

### *Lesson Understanding*

Using the tools of observation and inference, archaeologists study how people lived in the past through the objects they left behind.

### *Essential Question*

How do archaeologists study how people lived in the past?

### *What Students Will Learn*

- Archaeologists study everyday objects to learn how people lived in the past and how culture influenced their lives.
- How to apply observation, inference, evidence, and context to the study of everyday objects.

### *What Students Will Do*

Analyze modern trash to learn how archaeologists study the past.

### *Assessment*

Students will conduct an archaeological investigation of modern trash from different “sites” to understand how other people live their lives.

### *Materials Needed to Teach*

For each group of students, prepare the following:

- One set of trash in a trash can or paper bag.
- One copy of the “Archaeological Site Form” (page 5) and “Archaeological Site Report” (page 6) per group.

For the instructor only, prepare the following:

- One set of trash to analyze as a demonstration.

### **Lesson Vocabulary**

*Archaeology*: the study of a culture’s heritage through objects used by people, places they lived, and community knowledge (i.e., oral histories, historic documents, historic maps, historic photographs)

*Archaeological Site*: a place where people lived and (or) worked in the past

*Artifact*: an object that belonged or belongs to a person or a group of people that can tell us something about their culture

*Culture*: a set of shared beliefs and practices of a group of people

*Excavate*: scientific removal of objects from their original context for the purpose of archaeological analysis

### **Preparing to Teach**

1. Collect trash from different rooms or areas in your home over the course of 2-3 days. If you select trash relating to food, make sure it is clean trash (e.g., just wrappers that have been cleaned; no food products!). You will need one set of trash for every group of students (roughly 4 or 5) as well as a sample trash set you can analyze as a demonstration.
2. Make copies of the “Archaeological Site Form” (page 5) and “Archaeological Site Report” (page 6) for each group.

### **Lesson Warm-Up**

1. Ask the students: What do you think archaeology is? What do archaeologists do? (Answers may vary, but emphasis that it is the study of the human past – not dinosaurs!) What sort of tools could an archaeologist use to learn about the past? Digging tools? Lab tools?
  - a. Optional: Use *Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter* (2009) Warm-Up Lesson to guide this discussion.

2. Ask the students: What do you think an archaeological site looks like? What does an artifact look like? (Answers will vary.) Define artifact and archaeological site together. Tell them: Archaeology exists all around us – in the objects we use every day. Even the room we are in right now could be an archaeological site one day. The only difference between an artifact and an object is time.

## Lesson Plan

**How do archaeologists study how people lived in the past?** Inform students that this question will guide their learning.

1. Tell students: A famous anthropologist, Franz Boas, reportedly said, "... man never lies to his garbage heap." What do you think that means?
2. Ask students: Think for a minute about your family's trash. What could I know about you and your family if I were to examine that trash? Ask for examples.
  - a. Size of your family? Ages of family members?
  - b. Pets?
  - c. Family income?
  - d. Food preference?
  - e. Activities?
3. Briefly summarize the discussion.
4. Explain how archaeologists can learn about modern people – and ancient people! – by studying their garbage.
  - a. We always get rid of our trash in certain places in our homes. (Would you throw a banana peel on the floor? You'd put it in the trash!)
  - b. Archaeological sites that contain trash are called "middens" and can tell us a lot about the people who lived in that place. (Remember, you can't lie to your trash!) For example, we can learn:
    - i. The activities they were doing at the site (making tools, cooking, etc.).
    - ii. What kinds of people were at a site (e.g., girls, boys, little kids or adults, rich people or poor people).
  - c. One important question archaeologists always ask is how does culture play a role in a person's daily life.
    - i. Optional for 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade students: If needed for your class, ask students what they think culture is; then define the term collectively as a class.
    - ii. Culture can influence a lot in a person's life, including:
      1. What they were eat and how they eat it.
      2. What language they speak.
      3. Who they live with.
      4. What they do for work and for fun.
      5. Any so much more!
5. Tell the students: Now, we'll analyze a modern trash and see what we can learn about the people who throw these artifacts away.
6. Demonstrate an example for the students. With your sample kit, explain to students:
  - a. Archaeology is inherently destructive; once we take something out of the ground, it can lose its context – or information an artifact provides because of its association with other objects and places. As a result, it is important to document each step of the excavation process.
    - i. Show an example of the Site Form. Explain to students that they will record their observations and

- b. First, it's important to excavate (or pull out materials) in the order that you find them, like this [demonstrate].
  - c. Now that the artifacts are excavated, what do you notice about them? Can you infer anything about them?
  - d. What evidence supports your interpretations?
  - e. Archaeologists often organize or classify the artifacts into different categories to help them better understand the site. How would you classify some of these artifacts? By function? Color? Material?
  - f. Is there a way to find out when the first thing was thrown out? Last thing?
7. Tell the students: You will now be archaeologists, studying the trash of modern cultures!

### **Assessment**

1. Divide the students into groups of three to five students and give each group one trash kit and the copies of the "Site Form" and the "Site Report."
2. Students analyze the trash and complete their data collection sheets in a group.
3. Each group tells their interpretation of the site to the rest of the group.
  - a. For 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and up, discuss the economy represented by the site, how this might tie in to current events, or other ways to tie-in to social studies state standards.

### **Reflect on Lesson**

Ask students: If we consider each site together, as a representation of a home, how does that change your interpretation? Who lives in this home? When did they live in this home? What sort of objects are here – and what sort of objects are missing? Why do you think that is? What sort of questions do you have about the people who live here? How could you answer those questions?

Archaeological Site Form

Site Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Excavated: \_\_\_\_\_

Excavated by: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the site form below for EACH artifact you excavate! Give each artifact a number, list the object, and tell what you observe and infer.

Artifact #	Artifact Name	Artifact Function and Interpretation
	q	

## Archaeological Site Report

**Site Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Excavated:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Excavated by:** \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have made your observations on the site form, answer the following questions to complete your site report!

1. In the space below, describe the room in a home you believe is represented by these artifacts. What sort of activities happen here? Give specific examples to support your evidence.
2. Who do you think lived at this site? How many people do you think lived at this site? Think about ages, genders, and the social class of who this person could be.
3. How old do you think this site is? How much time do these artifacts represent?
4. Which artifact(s) helped you the most with your interpretation of this site? How would your interpretation change if that artifact(s) was missing?
5. What is one question you have about this site after your analysis? How could you answer your question? What sort of evidence would you need to answer it?