

Think Like an Archaeologist

Artifact Analysis

Archaeology is the study of past people through the things they left behind. Archaeologists study artifacts, or objects made or modified by past humans, to make inferences about the people who left them behind. In this activity, students will watch a video about an artifact found near downtown Mobile and use the Artifact Analysis worksheet to guide their observations about the artifact.

Time Frame: 30 minutes

Objectives:

- Students will learn archaeology is the study of past people through the things they left behind.
- Students will employ archaeological methods to study the past, understanding the same process is used whether examining artifacts from 50 years ago or 1000 years.

Relevant Standards:

3rd Grade: 7 – Compare and contrast the roles of anthropologists, archaeologists, and paleontologists

7th Grade: 4 – Explain how artifacts and other archaeological findings provide evidence of the nature and movement of prehistoric groups of people.

Key Terms:

- Archaeology: The study of past human life through things people left behind
- Artifact: Something portable that was made or modified by humans
- Analysis: Detailed examination of the elements or structure of something

Lesson Procedures:

1. Explain that archaeology is the study of past human life through the things people left behind, such as artifacts. One way archaeologists study the past is through analyzing, or studying, artifacts, which are objects that were made or modified by past humans. Each artifact is a clue that helps us better understand what life was like in the past.

Resource: [What is Archaeology?](#) YouTube Video

Note: This video is part of our series “Ask an Archaeologist,” which includes other short videos about key archaeological concepts



2. Ask each student to choose an artifact from the [Artifact Stories playlist](#). These artifacts were all excavated near downtown Mobile during the [I-10 Mobile River Bridge Archaeology Project](#).



Scan QR code for Artifact Stories playlist or visit our YouTube Channel at @USAarchaeology and select the playlist "Artifact Stories."

3. Give each student an Artifact Analysis worksheet. Ask them to watch the video on their chosen artifact and then fill out the worksheet.
4. Think, Pair, Share:
 - a. Think: Ask students to reflect on the artifact they chose. When was it made? Who used it? What was it used for? Encourage them to use their imagination to interpret the artifacts.
 - b. Pair: Ask students to share their observations with their neighbor and compare their artifacts. How are they similar? How are they different?
 - c. Share: Allow students to share their thoughts with the class, such as:
 - How old are the artifacts?
 - What were they used for?
 - Are the artifacts similar to any objects they use?
 - What do the artifacts tell us about the people who used them?
5. Optional: In class or as a take-home assignment, ask students to write a story about the history of their artifact using their observations from the artifact analysis worksheet. This could be a fictional imagining of how the artifact was used and how it was discarded or lost through time or a scientific report on their findings from the worksheet.

Got any questions? Have feedback on the lesson? Want to find more opportunities in archaeology? Get in touch with us at cas@southalabama.edu or visit our [website](#).

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Artifact Analysis

An artifact is an object that was made or modified by past people. Every artifact is a clue, and together, they help us understand what life was like in the past. Analyze an artifact that was found in Mobile by completing this worksheet.

Description

Color(s):

Material:

(Check all that apply)

☐

Pottery

☐

Bone

☐

Fabric

☐

Glass

☐

Wood

☐

Plastic

☐

Metal

☐

Stone

☐

Other:

Description: *(Consider the object's shape, texture, size, weight, and if there is any writing on it.)*

Condition:

(Circle one)

Poor

Fair

Good

Excellent

Function

When do you think this artifact was used?

What was it was used for?

Where was it made and how did it get to Mobile?

Who used it?

Historical Significance

What does this artifact tell you about the people who used it?

Is there a similar item we use for this function today? How has it changed?