

Think Like an Archaeologist

Historic Ceramics

Archaeology is the study of past people through the things they left behind. In this lesson, students will learn how archaeologists learn more about past people through pottery, or ceramics. Ceramic technology differed across the world and changed through time. Pottery can tell us about the time period of an archaeological site and show how the people who lived there were connected to others through trade networks. Students will learn about different ceramic decorations from different countries and time periods and color their own “ceramic.”

Time Frame: 30-60 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.
- Students will identify artifacts made in different countries and consider how they traveled to Alabama

Relevant Standards:

- 2nd Grade: 8 – Differentiate between the features of a physical map and a political map, and explain how these features contribute to the map’s purpose.
10a – Utilize gridlines to find locations on a map
- 3rd Grade: 1 – Locate map features, using geographic terminology to describe them.
7 – Compare and contrast the roles of anthropologists, archaeologists, and paleontologists
- 4th Grade: 4 – Describe how the contributions of various groups living in colonial North America helped colonies develop, including artisans, farmers, large landowners, tradespeople, women, children, Indigenous peoples, enslaved people, and indentured servants.

Supplies:

1. Worksheet (one per student)
2. Historic Ceramic Identification Chart (students can share)

Key Terms:

- Archaeology: The study of past human life through things people left behind
- Artifact: Something portable that was made or modified by humans
- Ceramic: Something that is made of clay and hardened by heat (pottery)
- Import: Goods brought from another country for sale (many ceramics were imported to the US)

- Export: Goods sent to another country for sale

Lesson Procedures:

1. Explain that archaeology is the study of past human life through the things people left behind, such as artifacts. Ceramics, or pottery, are one type of artifact that can teach us a lot about past life. The way ceramics are made varies by location and through time. When we find ceramics at a site, we can learn more about how old the site is and how connected the people who lived at the site were to others, including understanding their trade networks.

Resource:

[What are Artifacts and Features?](#) YouTube Video



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

2. Pass out Historic Ceramic identification charts. You may also want to share it on the board. Explain that the photos show ceramic types that were found right here in Mobile. Help them engage with the chart with questions such as:
 - a. Where were the ceramics made?
 - b. What is the oldest ceramic type shown?
 - c. What is the most recent ceramic type shown?
 - d. How do they think these ceramics traveled to Alabama?
3. Pass out one worksheet to every student. Students will choose one of the ceramic designs and decorate a “plate,” and then answer the questions on the back of the worksheet.
4. Discuss worksheets as a class by asking them about their answers from the worksheet. A few things to consider in your discussion:
 - a. When archaeologists find a ceramic (or another artifact that is *diagnostic*, or has a specific date range associated with it), the site isn’t any older than that artifact.
 - b. The dates indicate when the pottery was made, but they don’t necessarily indicate when it was put in the ground. It may have been used or passed down for generations.
 - c. Ceramics can also tell us what designs were popular at the time, what foods people were eating (based on what types of foods the vessels could hold), and the social class of the person who owned them (based on how expensive they would have been, especially if they traveled a long distance.)

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](#).

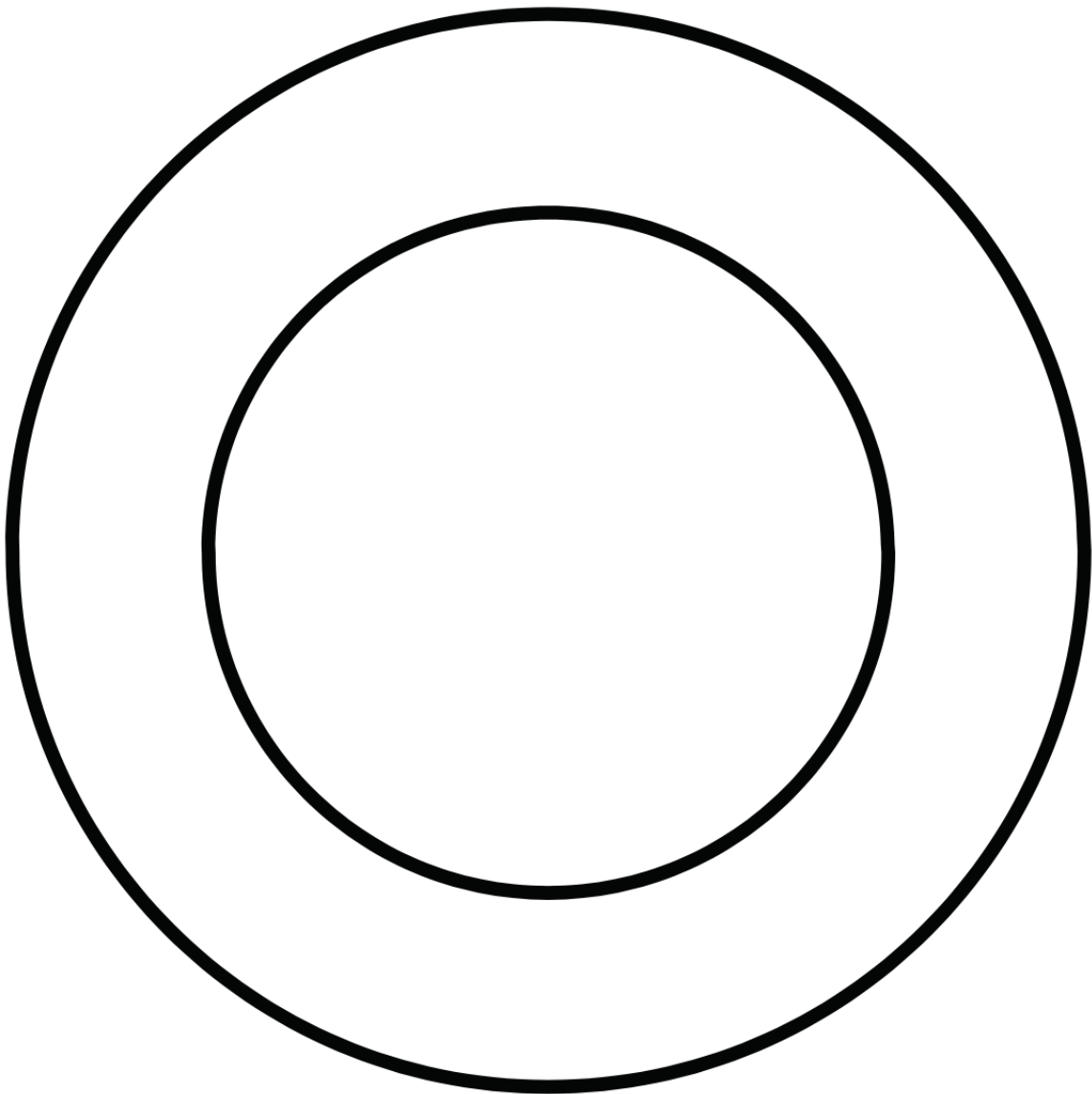
Name: _____

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Historic Ceramics

Archaeologists determine the age of a site by analyzing artifacts, like historic ceramics. Ceramic fragments from broken plates, bowls, and jugs can tell us the age of a site. Ceramics made in different parts of the world were brought to Alabama through exploration and trade.

Choose a historic ceramic type and decorate the plate below in that style.



1. What type of ceramic did you draw? _____
2. How old is that type of ceramic? _____
3. Where was the ceramic manufactured? _____
4. Circle the country where your ceramic type was manufactured and draw a path from that country to the United States.



5. How do you think these ceramics traveled to Alabama?

Historic Ceramic Types

Porcelain



Origin: China
Date: 1660-Present

Faience



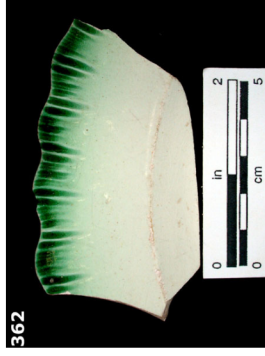
Origin: France
Date: 1650-1800

Majolica



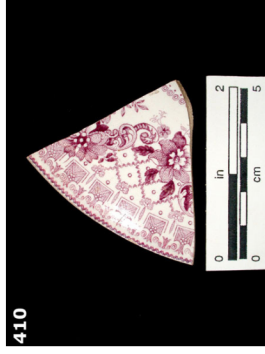
Origin: Mexico
Date: 1492-1850

Shell-edged
Pearlware



Origin: England
Date: 1780-1830

Transfer Print
Whiteware



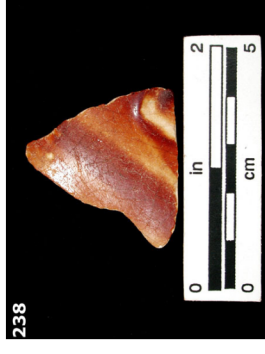
Origin: England
Date: 1820-Present

Annularware



Origin: England
Date: 1820-Present

Rockingham



Origin: United States
Date: 1830-1890

Historic Ceramic Origins

