



Archaeology 101

What is archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of past human cultures based on material evidence that others have left behind. The clues to the past can range from building foundations and postholes to buttons, spear points, and food remains. Archaeologists do search for the clues through controlled, scientific excavations. But archaeology is much more than digging. Artifacts are cleaned, cataloged, conserved and studied. As archaeologists gather information, they interpret the artifacts to determine what happened at a particular place or during a particular time. Archaeology often provides information about people who did not leave written historical records. Archaeological clues can also support written history or challenge current historical interpretations.

Is it archaeology or archeology?

Both spellings are correct. This kit uses archaeology unless referencing a source with the alternate spelling, like the DK Eyewitness Book *Archeology*.

How is archaeology different from paleontology?

Paleontology is the science that interprets evidence about past geological periods by studying fossil remains. Dinosaurs, not people, are in the realm of paleontologists.

Why teach archaeology?

Archaeology is a wonderful framework that can be used to teach history, science, math, English and art. Using clues from the past, students can build their own interpretations of history. Students can make grids to plot relative locations of artifacts, and graphs to analyze types and numbers of artifacts. Teaching with artifacts reinforces observation and critical thinking skills. You can incorporate archaeology in your classroom as individual lessons or as a whole unit. This kit contains lesson plans and artifacts to help you teach Vermont history through archaeology.



What is an artifact?

An artifact is anything made or used by people. Spoons and broken pieces of ceramics are artifacts, as are nails and stone axes. Even your coffee cup from the Mobil station is an artifact. Archaeologists also study features to learn about how people shaped their environment. Features can range from stonewalls and abandoned roads to fire pits and postholes. Artifacts and features are important clues for learning about the past.

What is the difference between prehistoric and historic artifacts?

Prehistoric artifacts come from the time before history was recorded *in writing*. Historic artifacts come from the period of history recorded in writing. In Vermont, the prehistoric period encompasses the approximately 12,000 years of history prior to the visit of Samuel de Champlain in 1609. He recorded his observations and experiences which became part of the written history of the region. Inhabitants during the prehistoric period passed on their history through oral traditions but did not leave a written record.

Are there archaeological sites in Vermont?

Yes! Archaeologists have studied many prehistoric and historic sites in Vermont. Many prehistoric sites are located along rivers and lakes - or where rivers and lakes used to be. The book *History Under Their Feet* (included in the kit) describes a Native American site in Williston. Archaeologists have also investigated numerous historic sites in Vermont. Excavations at Mount Independence in Orwell help to explain what life was like on Lake Champlain during the Revolutionary War. Archaeological evidence is located all over the state where people lived, hunted, farmed or just visited.

Why are archaeological sites important?

Prehistoric archaeological sites are the main source of information about the people who lived in Vermont for thousands of years. Historic archaeological sites are also important sources of supplemental information to recorded history. There are many holes in written history where people and places have been forgotten and records have been destroyed. Archaeological sites help tell the whole story.



Why should archaeological sites be preserved?

Archaeological sites are important educational resources. However, excavating a site destroys the evidence for future study. Therefore, archaeologists do not dig just for the sake of digging. Some excavations take place because the sites are in danger of being disturbed by construction. Other excavations attempt to find answers about specific questions. Sometimes artifacts are better protected when left underground where they are not exposed to air and light. As scientists develop new ways to examine artifacts and features, archaeologists may be able to learn even more about the past than is now possible.

What should I do if I find an artifact in a field or along a stream bank on private property?

Carefully record where you found the artifact so you can identify the exact spot. If you have permission from the landowner, take the artifact home and trace it. Copy the information of where it was located including the name of the town and any extra details. Put your name, address and phone number on the page and send it to the State Archaeologist. An archaeologist will not take the artifact away but may ask you to provide a photograph of it or show where it was located. Remember not to dig the soil around the artifact or the clues will be lost forever. Do not remove artifacts from state parks or historic sites. It is illegal to remove artifacts from public lands without permits.

How can I contact an archaeologist?

The State Archaeologist can help or can provide contact information for other archaeologists in Vermont.

State Archaeologist
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation
National Life Building
Drawer 20
Montpelier, VT 05620-0501
(802) 828-3050
www.historicvermont.org



Should I involve my students in a dig?

Some projects, like the one described in *History Under Their Feet*, are exciting opportunities for student archaeologists. However, a student dig is a huge undertaking that requires the assistance of a professional archaeologist. Excavating just for the experience is not responsible archaeology. Even though archaeologists carefully document their work, digs destroy evidence for future study. A poorly documented excavation can make it difficult to interpret the artifacts and the site. Nevertheless, there are many ways to teach archaeology without a full-scale excavation. This kit offers activities to teach the principles of archaeology like stratigraphy and artifact interpretation. The culminating activity involves a simulated dig where the students get to experience a dig on paper. If you think your students will benefit from a simulated dig in a sandbox, use reproduction artifacts to create a story so real artifacts and sites are not disturbed.

How can I teach archaeology responsibly?

When you teach about archaeology as a source for information about past cultures, also teach about the importance of stewardship of archaeological resources. Teach students that they should not remove artifacts from the ground unless the artifacts are in danger of being disturbed or destroyed. If it is necessary to remove an artifact, carefully record the location. Emphasize that archaeologists are looking for clues about the past; they are not searching for treasures. Encourage students to visit archaeology museums so they can see the clues that help tell the story of our past.

Where can I find more information about archaeology in Vermont?

The Vermont Archaeological Society is a good place to start. They can provide information about current excavations, lectures and archaeology publications in Vermont. In the summer, watch for news stories about archaeological digs. Often visitors, or even volunteers, are welcome at the excavations, especially at field schools run by local colleges or universities.

Vermont Archaeological Society
P.O. Box 663
Burlington, VT 05402
www.vtarchaeology.org



Responsible Archaeology

**Archaeology is a great hook for many kids.
They love the idea of finding clues about the past.**

But remember:

- Archaeological digs are destructive. Removing artifacts destroys that site for future study.
- Any digs on real archaeological sites must be done under the guidance of a professional archaeologist.
- Many archaeological sites are protected by law.

When you teach about archaeology:

- Stress the scientific process used by archaeologists to dig and record a site.
- Emphasize that archaeologists study history and culture. They do not hunt for treasures.
- Discourage students from digging for artifacts outside.
- Teach stewardship of archaeological resources.
- Encourage students to report sites to the State Archaeologist.

Kit Inventory

Use the laminated copy of this sheet to check off all items

Left side top:

____ 25 copies of
History Under Their Feet

Center

____ Excavating Vermont Box B
____ 20 overhead markers

____ Archaeology bingo
(green folder)
____ 6 bingo cards
____ 49 coordinate cards

Left side middle:

____ Excavating Vermont Box A
____ 28 artifact bags
(use chart in box to check bag
contents)

Left side bottom:

____ What is a Tool? box
____ 1. Doorknob
____ 2. Scraper
____ 3. Stove lid grasper
____ 4. Grapefruit spoon
____ 5. Gouge
____ 6. Hammer stone
____ 7. Darning Egg
____ 8. Drill point
____ 9. Drill bit
____ 10. Nail set
____ 11. Tuna drainer
____ 12. Water pipe sherd
____ 13. Projectile point
____ 14. Projectile point
____ 15. Bottle