

Becoming a Louisiana archaeologist

Materials

For each student:

- hand-out of pot sherds
- scissors
- construction paper
- glue
- colors

Grade level

K- 4th

National Standards

A: Science as Inquiry

E: Science and Technology

Extension

Many archaeological artifacts are found incomplete. Why might this be so? What kind of artifacts do you think archaeologists will find in the future?

References

Louisiana Division of Archaeology-
www.crt.state.la.us/archaeology/homepage



In this activity students get an understanding of what it is like to be an archaeologist and how to piece together archaeological artifacts.

Background

Did you know that a piece of broken glass is called a shard and a piece of broken pottery is called a sherd? Archaeologists find and study pot sherds, along with many other artifacts. An artifact is anything made or used by people. Archaeologists can learn a lot of information from pottery fragments found in an archaeological site. By looking at these sherds, they hope to find answers to questions: What is it made of? How was it made? How was it fired (heated)?

Pottery in Louisiana is made of clay with other things such as crushed shell, bone, sand, or even grass mixed in. Several construction methods are used to make pottery vessels. Archaeologists can identify how a vessel was made by looking at cross-sections of the broken pieces. They can also determine how a vessel was fired by looking at the hardness of the clay. For instance, glassy surfaces suggest high temperature firing, while dull surfaces are the result of lower temperatures. With the vessel reconstructed, the archaeologist can begin to determine other attributes of the vessel such as its size, shape, function or decoration. These attributes can be used to address questions about the vessel's purpose, age, or its significance.

Procedure

Now your class can do what Archaeologists do!

1. Pass out to each student a copied sheet of paper with the pot sherds on it, a pair of scissors, piece of construction paper, colors, and glue.
2. Tell them to carefully cut out the pieces of pot sherds.
3. Reconstruct the artifact and glue it onto the construction paper.
4. They may color the pot after the glue has dried.

Post-activity questions

1. What is the artifact?
2. What do you think it was used for?

