

Grade 4-6 Lesson: Awesome Ancestors (Part 1)

Knowledge: Awareness of History, Vocabulary, Self-Awareness, Respect for Other Cultures

Skills: Listening, Comparison, Research/Presentation, Inductive Reasoning

1. Introduce the concept of *culture*.

All groups of people have distinct ways of living. Their clothing, houses, food, manners, languages, beliefs, art, music, and families are special to their own group. In today's world, people from all over the world can communicate with each other. In some ways people have become more alike in recent times, but most people still hold on to their own ways of living. Because Americans come from every part of the world, we have an American culture that lets people be Americans while keeping some of the customs from the part of the world they or their ancestors came from.

2. Ask children to share their experiences visiting other parts of America, other countries, or ethnic festivals. What did they notice about the clothing, music, manners, language, etc. that was different from what they are used to at home?

3. For homework, ask children to research one or more aspects of their own ancestors' culture. They can look in books, surf the Internet, or interview an older person. They should be prepared to share what they learned with the rest of the class. This can be in the form of a drawing, photographic essay, song, poem, dance, clothing, writing and speaking a few phrases in another language, preparing a special dish, or bringing an elder for "show and tell."

4. Introduce the words *anthropologist*, *anthropology*, *archaeology*, *archaeologist*, *artifact*, *feature*, and *fossil*.

Anthropologists are people who study other cultures in their own country or in other parts of the world. Anthropology is the study of cultures.

Archaeology is the study of past cultures. Archaeologists are people who study past cultures. Because most people in history did not leave books or other written records, archaeologists study the things ancient people left. Archaeologists have learned to figure out many clues from the things people accidentally left behind.

Archaeologists study artifacts. An artifact is anything made, changed, used, or moved by people. People from long ago may have left artifacts like pieces of pottery, stone tools, and bones and seeds from the foods they ate. Archaeologists cannot get a complete picture of past cultures because not everything lasts. Many things, such as clothing, food, and houses rot away until nothing is left of them! Also, people create many things, such as poetry, stories, songs, and manners that do not leave anything behind.

Archaeologists also study features. A feature is something made, used, or changed by people that cannot be removed from where it is found. For example, a house made of posts and bark probably will have rotted away except for some dark circles in the soil where the posts once stood. These post-holes are features. Archaeologists can map them and make drawings and photographs of them, but they cannot take them back to a laboratory. A city is another kind of feature. It will contain artifacts that could be taken away, but the city itself cannot be collected.

Fossils are things left behind by living things, like leaf imprints, tracks, petrified wood, or petrified bones. Archaeologists do not study fossils, unless the fossils were changed or used by people. Those fossils would then be artifacts! People who study dinosaurs and other fossils are called paleontologists. Although both paleontologists and archaeologists sometimes dig to find things to study, they are not the same.

5. Read a book about an archaeological dig.

6. Do the “Wastebasket Dig” activity.

Resources:

Going on a Dig, by Velma Ford Morrison, Dodd, Meade & Co., New York, 1981. A bit dated, but it chronicles the adventures of actual middle-school students at an archaeological dig.

Digging to the Past: Excavations in Ancient Lands, by W. John Hackwell, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1986. An attractively illustrated book on a “typical” archaeological dig in the Middle East. Includes information on local cultures.

Intrigue of the Past: A Teacher’s Activity Guide for Fourth through Seventh Grades, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. A set of excellent lesson plans that will fit into math, English, history, science, U.S. government, and art curricula, as well as self-awareness, community service, and ethics. Despite the title, some of the activities are suitable for high school, particularly the ethics lessons at the back of the book. To obtain a copy, visit www.projectarchaeology.org.

Classroom Archaeology. Another excellent source of lessons plans. These are designed for middle and high school. Free from www.crt.state.la.us/archaeology/homepage/activity_booklets.shtml.

Teachers’ Resource Packet: Anthropology. The Smithsonian Institution’s compilation of resources, activities, and other materials appropriate for middle and high school classes. Free from <http://educate.si.edu/intro.html>.

The Wastebasket Dig

Have one classroom or team create a wastebasket “dig” for another class or team. Put items in a clean container as the class goes through a typical day. These items should be clues to what the class was doing. For example, students first come in and hang up their coats. You might put some leaves or a broken toy in to show that some of the class had played outside before coming in. You might put in a mitten if the day was cold or a water bottle if the day was hot. Then cover this with a layer of shredded paper. Then add some things from the next part of the day: a worksheet, a gym shoe, a paint brush, etc. After each class period or activity add another layer of shredded paper.

Exchange wastebaskets and see what you can find out about the other “culture.” Make a list of what you observed and what you inferred (guessed) from it.

Where is the oldest (morning) material? Why? Where is the most recent (afternoon) material? Why? It is the same with a real archaeological site that has been buried in the dirt. Why?

What would happen if someone took away some of the items? What would happen if someone stirred up the wastebaskets by digging down to get something at the bottom? Would you still be able to tell as much about the other class or team? This is why it is important not to take anything from an archaeological site or to dig where there might be artifacts. You might destroy important information about our awesome ancestors.

Grade 4-6 Lesson: Awesome Ancestors (Part 2)

7. Have several books on hand that have pictures of rock paintings or petroglyphs. (Collectively, those are called rock art or rock images.) Ask students to choose one rock image and make a drawing of it. They should write a sentence or paragraph to describe this rock painting and another to say what else the rock painting might tell us about a past culture.

For example, if the picture is a deer, it would tell us that people in the past were interested in deer. Maybe they hunted deer for food, or maybe they admired the way deer can run fast and jump high. Maybe they lived in a place that had many deer. If the picture is a person with a bow and arrow it would tell us that these people had invented or learned about bows and arrows.

Discuss the difference between observing and making an educated guess (inference). For example, one can observe that a rock painting was made with three colors of paint. One can observe that the form of the painting is like a warrior's shield. One can infer that a warrior drew his shield on the rock to warn enemies to stay away. An *educated* guess means that what you say could have been true. If the rock painting was made long ago, it would not make sense to think it is a picture of a CD, because CDs were not invented yet. If the rock painting is from ancient China, it would not make sense to think it is a picture of an American bison, because those animals were not known in China in ancient times. It *never* makes sense to think that space aliens made the rock paintings!!!

8. Make your own petroglyph.

Prepare flat slabs or tablets of terra-cotta (flowerpot) colored clay or DAX. Paint each on one flat side with white tempura paint. When the paint is dry, use a straightened paper clip or other sharp object to scrape through the paint to expose the clay below. Make a design to represent something very important to you. Remember, you can use a picture to symbolize an idea: for example, a head with lines going out from it to show thoughts; a heart with lines to show love or feelings; a hand to show helping. You can make your design look like an old rock painting or petroglyph or like a modern design. It is *your* petroglyph!

9. Have students share their completed petroglyphs and talk about the ideas they represent.

Remind the students that real rock paintings and petroglyphs were important to the people who made them. They are important today as reminders of those people and everyone's awesome ancestors. If you visit a place that has rock paintings or petroglyphs, treat them like you would something important from your own culture. Remember not to touch or walk on them. If you see someone damaging them, report it to whoever owns or is in charge of the place.