

Grades 7-9 Lesson: History Outside the Book (Part 1)

Knowledge: Importance of History; Vocabulary; Other Cultures

Skills: Research; Brainstorming; Writing/Speech; Creativity

1. Discuss the importance of learning about the past.

Is the past important? Why or why not? (Make a list on the board of student's responses, pro and con. Don't try to lead the discussion or censor negative answers.)

2. Have students brainstorm ways to learn about the past. Make a list.

Examples: books, interviews with older people, old photographs, museums, old documents and records

3. Most people for most of human history have not had systems of writing. How can we learn about their history?

4. Review these terms: culture, anthropologist, anthropology, archaeologist, archaeology.

All groups of people have distinct ways of living, called *cultures*. 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. Even people who live close together can have different cultures. For example, some people think that high-schools sometimes have an athletics culture, a music culture, a nerd culture, etc. Do you think your school has different cultures? Is that good or bad?

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.

5. Choose a culture from history or from another part of the US or world. This can be a culture or historical period you have learned about in school, for example the Civil War, or a culture from a place you have visited or where your ancestors came from or just one that you are interested in learning more about.

Use books and the internet to discover what archaeologists have discovered about the culture you selected. For example, if you are interested in Native Americans from the Great Lakes region, find a book about the archaeology of Native American sites in that region. If you are interested in the Civil War, use the Internet to search “Civil War” and “archaeology.” If you want to find out how ancient Incas communicated, hit the library! Archaeologists have even studied modern garbage, so don’t limit your choices.

Write a short report or prepare a presentation to show what you learned. Did archaeologists find out things about the culture you studied that would not have been known from things like books and documents? Be sure to include that in your report conclusion.

Grades 7-9 Lesson: History Outside the Book (Part 2)

6. People from many cultures, past and present, have made rock paintings or petroglyphs (rock carvings) that have survived to the present day. What kinds of things do you think archaeologists might learn from rock paintings?

Examples: what people ate, what kinds of tools or weapons did they have, what places were special to them. Did they believe in supernatural beings? What things in their environment were important to them?

7. Rock paintings and rock carvings or petroglyphs are sometimes called *rock art*, but they were not works of art like we have in our modern culture. Rock drawings were made for many reasons, including:

Story telling, especially remembering and telling religious stories

As part of religious activities

To record important events

To mark important passages in a person's life, such as birth, death, and puberty

Rock paintings and petroglyphs are not writing that can be read like a book, but they still communicate information about past cultures. Sometimes archaeologists can use Native American oral histories to figure out what rock paintings mean, but sometimes they are so ancient we cannot know exactly what they meant to the people who made them. To many Native American people today, places with rock paintings are special. They believe that the pictures change--or the way that a person sees them changes--so that the person can get messages from them that will help them in their own lives.

8. Using books and the Internet, find a rock painting or petroglyph that you think had an important meaning to people in the past. Make a sketch or photocopy of it. Using your sketch or photocopy, think of way to create a three-dimensional work of art, or a poem, story, or song that will both describe the rock painting and communicate something about its meaning. If the meaning is mysterious, then communicate that in your creative work.

9. Should we treat ancient rock paintings and petroglyphs with respect? What does that mean in practical terms?

Examples: do not touch it, don't put chalk on it, don't write your name or other things on the rocks. If you see someone damaging a rock painting, report it right away to the person who owns the land or is in charge of taking care of it.

10. Some rock paintings that have lasted for thousands of years have recently been damaged by people spray painting over them, trying to remove them, or tracing them with chalk. What do you think this says about our own culture?

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. Too young for 8th and 9th grades.

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>.