

Archaeology in the Schools: **Visiting Archaeologist's Manual**

Program Title: Archaeology in the Schools

Program Description: Students discover what information is contained in an archaeological site by investigating the remains of a modern picnic site. Parallels are drawn between the picnic and artifacts from an archaeological site. Students discuss the meaning of “artifact” and the importance of context while interpreting their own “finds.” Emphasis is placed on the fragility of archaeological sites and the need to conserve these places.

Time: 1.5 hours

Grade Level: 3 - 4 (or modified for 2 - 5)

Materials

Modern Picnic Site

The Archeology Branch supporting webpage includes four drawings of the remains of a picnic showing change over time.

Modern Picnic Remains

You will have to supply picnic artifacts for the students to interpret. There should about 30 items to ensure one per student. The artifacts must be easy to interpret and most should be complete. Artifacts should represent identifiable categories such as gender, age, and activities. And, of course, everything should be clean! Many items can be gathered around the house, and the local thrift stores are always a good bet.

One of the easiest groups to represent and interpret is a family unit consisting of Mom, Dad, boy, girl, and baby. Include bits of gender and age specific clothing such as a shoe, scarf, etc., evidence of food eaten (chip bags are easier to interpret than fish bones), and various parts of toys, books, sports equipment, and/or games. Other themes can be added, such as seasonality (sunscreen bottle), curation (piece of clothing), dating (an item with expiry date), and trade (“Made in Japan”). Above all, make the initial identification of almost all artifacts easy for the kids!

Ancient Village Site

On the Archaeology Branch website are three photographs of Skedans: Skedans (1878) George Dawson – village still occupied.

Skedans (1911) Frank Cyril Swannell – approximately 30 years post-abandonment.

Skedans (1953) Wilson Duff – approximately 70 years post-abandonment.

These photos show the rapid decay of the site after abandonment.

Ancient Village Remains

You will have to supply the artifacts, preferably replicas. Try to use artifacts that are equivalent to those found in the modern picnic remains.

Site Conservation Message

The Archaeology Branch supporting webpage includes photographs that you can use in your presentation, or you may wish to use your own photographs.

Goals and Objectives

Students will understand:

- What is archaeology and what do archaeologists do?
- What is an artifact?
- How the use, placement and arrangement of a natural object can make it an artifact.
- How archaeologists decipher the garbage people leave behind.
- The range and extent (and the limitations) of information that can be derived from garbage.
- What an archaeological site in B.C. might look like or contain.
- The importance of archaeological site conservation.

Program Outline

Part 1: Introduction

Time: 15 minutes

- What is archaeology, and what does an archaeologist do?
 - Quick description of activities, and how archaeologists study to become experts in certain geographical areas or time periods. Emphasize that archaeology is the study of human behavior.
- What is an artifact?
 - Show examples of artifact and non-artifact. Have students decide which is which and why. Start with obvious examples, then move to the concept of culturally modified natural objects (e.g. trees, house pits, etc.), then to the idea that something moved or collected for a particular reason is also an artifact and can tell us about the people.

Example discussion questions:

- What is an artifact?
 - How can we tell if something is an artifact?
 - Was this made by someone?
 - Do you think someone changed this?
- Summary:
 - Artifacts and non-artifacts are clues to how people lived, but they cannot tell the whole story.
 - Explain to students that just as archaeologists become experts in certain areas or time periods, the students themselves are specialists in their own culture—get them excited about being “experts” too! Have them pretend they are archaeologists and see what they can discover from a pile of garbage left over from a modern-day picnic.

Part 2: Modern-Day Picnic Analysis

Time: 30 minutes

- Tell the class to imagine a family at a picnic, and demonstrate site taphonomy by showing them the pictures of the picnic area illustrating change over time.
- Bring out the garbage can full of picnic garbage, and ask each student to choose a piece.
- Analysis: Get the students to talk one at a time to talk about their piece of garbage and what it might tell us about who was using it or what it was used for.
e.g., would an adult use it? Or a baby? A boy or girl? What were they doing with it? What things do we know about the object?
- Discussion: After all of the objects have been examined, have the students think about what it means to have found this garbage all in one spot.

Example discussion questions:

- What makes these things artifacts?
- How can the objects be grouped together, and why?
- Who do you think left this garbage? Why?
- Where do you think they were and what were they doing?
- Why were these things there to be found?
e.g., worn out, broken, no longer needed, could easily get more, too large to move.
- What would be left of this garbage if you came back in 100 years or 1000 years? Why?
- What things decay and what do not, and under what conditions?
e.g., stone, bone, shell, wood, metal, plastic, textiles.

Part 3: Pictures and Artifacts of an Archaeological Site

Time: 30 minutes

- Show photographs of Skedans, a Haida village in Haida Gwaii, from (a) when the village was occupied, (b) 20 years after the village was abandoned, and (c) 70 years after the village was abandoned. Explain to the students where the village is located and who lived there—show them a map if available. Point out some of the features seen in the earliest photograph and what they tell us about life in the village. Then point out the changes seen over time in the later photographs, compared to what they saw in the picnic photographs.
- Show photos of some archaeological excavations to illustrate how archaeologists recover information from sites.
- Bring out the artifacts from an archaeological site and discuss their meaning with the students. Try to compare them with some of the objects used in the picnic activity.

Discussion concepts:

- What are they? (Use appropriate photos to help identify objects).
 - Which are artifacts and which are non-artifacts?
 - Ways of grouping the objects together and why.
 - Who do you think left this behind? Why?
 - Where do you think they were and what were they doing? Why?
- Repeat some of the key messages and emphasize archaeology as the study of human behaviour.

Part 4: Conservation Message

Time: 15 minutes

- Show a few pictures of different archaeological sites and explain what might be found there, the importance of context, the limitations of the information.
- Explain the importance of archaeological site conservation:
 - Sites are fragile and easily disturbed.
 - If a site is damaged, the information it contains could be lost forever.
 - Sites are protected—it is against the law to dig into an archaeological site or to take artifacts. If you find a site or artifacts, you should leave it alone and tell an archaeologist or the museum.
 - If you wish to see artifacts from local archaeological sites, you can visit the museum.
- Questions?