

# Archaeology

## Carry out your own archaeological dig

The objective of this lesson is to encourage pupils to apply what they have learnt about undertaking an archaeological excavation to carry out their own 'dig'. The task will test their ability to sort and record the artefacts they retrieve in a scientific way. They will also be required to comply with best practice, ensuring they handle the items they find with utmost care and 'making good' the site after completing the dig.

The exercise will be supported by a factsheet explaining why they are undertaking the dig, and pupils will be asked to consider the significance of their findings within the context of the archaeological site.

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO PREPARE YOUR TEST PIT

- A large box or deep tray for burying your objects
- Soil for burying your objects. Ideally the soil will have a different texture for each layer. You should aim to have more compacted soil at the bottom of your test pit. Add sand, bird seed, coffee and herbs to differentiate layers, texture and smell.
- Containers for excavated earth.
- A selection of artefacts. We recommend:
  - Some modern 'rubbish' i.e. baby wipes and plastic wrappers
  - A few pieces of broken pottery (ensure there are no sharp edges which could cause injury during the dig)
  - Some vintage looking beads (ceramic not plastic)
  - Items which may be older than a century e.g. silverware, leather soles...
  - Roman coins (can be purchased relatively inexpensively on ebay)

Human bones made with air dry clay and wire. See this video on YouTube on how to make a thigh bone using stone coloured clay - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSjsUT9-dBw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSjsUT9-dBw)

For ease of preparation we have also prepared some images of the artefacts which you could print, cut out and laminate before burying under the soil, although these are likely to be less engaging than physical objects.

Handout 1 (Arch\_L4HO1) - Images of 'finds' for your archaeological dig.

- Spatulas or spoons for digging
- Small sieves
- Brushes
- Rubber gloves for pupils to wear
- Plastic bags for storing items
- Labels and waterproof black markers to label the bags
- Clip boards
- Record sheets
- Pencils
- Top plans (graph paper).

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### HOW TO CREATE YOUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

Create your site like a 'layer cake' to reinforce the fact that the deeper objects are buried, the older they are. You should therefore bury your human remains right at the bottom of your 'test pit' and some modern detritus should be visible at the surface.

Compact the soil down at the bottom of your pit to simulate an authentic test pit.

The pieces of broken pottery should be clustered together in one area of the test pit to show how careful horizontal digging and brushing of an area can reveal connected finds. This layer should also contain the scattered beads.

If your test pit is deep enough you could bury items which might survive for over a century in the deeply compacted earth – such as a metal/silver spoon or a leather sole (not branded).

### CLIP OF CHANNEL 4'S TIME TEAM

Before undertaking the archaeologist dig you might like to excite your pupils by watching a clip of Time Team ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3MbyQ9DwXO](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3MbyQ9DwXO)), the long running Channel 4 series about the work of archaeologists.

In this episode the focus is on a site in Manchester where numerous prehistoric, medieval and Roman artefacts have been found.

You can just watch the first seven minutes to see another skeleton being detected.

### PROVIDE A BACK STORY

Provide pupils with a back story to give them a sense of purpose for their dig. Here are a few suggestions:

- Your school secretary (give their name to make it believable) has discovered a book about the history of your school in which it says there used to be a pottery factory on what is now your playground. The elaborately decorated china would now be a collectors item. We would like you to carry out an archaeological investigation to see whether there is any truth in what is written in the book.
- Before factories came along, many people in the Mansfield area made a living by spinning cotton in their homes or knitting socks in workshops on big frames. Can you find any evidence of Sutton's textiles heritage or other traditional crafts?
- The local heritage group has been looking at records held in the archives in Nottingham – known as the Heritage Environment Record. They see that some Roman coins were found on the edge of the school grounds some 50 years ago by a former school warden. They have asked for help with a dig to see if there is any other evidence of a Roman settlement beneath the playing field.
- A local story which has been passed down through generations describes an ancient burial ground located near to the school grounds. We don't know if this is a local myth or not, but it is known that 5000 years ago people were buried directly in the earth in what was known as a 'long barrow'. Most people who die today are cremated or their bodies interred in coffins. There is a possibility we might find evidence of this theory if we dig deep enough below the ground.

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TEACHER'S NOTES

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Practical activity (Handout 1): Archaeological dig Factsheet

**Give pupils sufficient time to read the factsheet and ask any questions.**

Your test pit should ideally be square in shape. To create your 'top plan' draw horizontal and vertical lines at 5cm intervals on a piece of tracing paper. You can also put strings across the top of your box, or container, at 5cm or 10cm intervals to help children accurately record the context of each find.

Ensure children have rulers to measure the depth of each layer as they dig.

Rather than gather a class of 30+ children around one 'test pit' you could prepare two or more test pits (perhaps each with a different surprising find buried within) and enlist some help to supervise each group.

Alternatively, you could create one bigger test pit and select children to come up in turns to conduct the dig and then take an item back to their table for cleaning and analysis. This approach will work better for younger children who will require help with recording the context (depth and location on the top plan).

Supervise pupils to complete the archaeological investigation record sheet. They could also take photos of your finds to accompany this report.

## ANALYSIS OF EXCAVATION

Once the pupils have completed the dig and filled in the Excavation Record Sheet you should discuss the artefacts and remains that they have found.

They should be able to hypothesise:

- what each find is - they should be labelled before going to be analysed.
- what its purpose is and whether that item is still in use today.
- how manufacturing and cultures have changed over the years
- how valuable the artefact is in terms of history and the archaeology of the site
- do the finds provide evidence to back up the back story, or is there insufficient evidence to tell whether the story is true or false?
- what the artefact tells us about the people who lived or worked in the area many years ago
- what don't we know about the items we've unearthed and what further investigations could we do to find out the answers? (Such as laboratory testing, x-rays, ask a specialist to look at an artefact...)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There is lots of interesting background about archaeological finds on the Portable Antiquities Scheme Website: [finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk)

With thanks to Emily Gillott at the Nottinghamshire Heritage Team, Nottinghamshire County Council.