

WRITTEN CLUES ABOUT THE PAST

Analyze sites using primary written sources and identify artifacts and ecofacts

OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify items within written text that fit classifications of artifact and/or ecofact
- Analyze and classify artifacts and ecofacts according to use
- Compose a diary entry describing the probable daily use and purpose of a select list of artifacts and ecofacts
- Form and share oral hypotheses

VOCABULARY

Artifact: any portable object made, modified, or used by humans. “The town museum has a collection of local artifacts on display.”

Ecofact: a natural object, such as animal bone or plants, used or modified by humans.

Culture: a set of learned beliefs, values, and behaviors (the way of life) shared by members of a society. “Many people think that placing a high value on independence is an important part of American culture.”

Geographic area: a physical location/place with a particular set of environmental features in which people of similar cultures might live and interact.

Hohokam: a group of ancestral people who lived in what is now southern Arizona.

Snaketown: a Hohokam village inhabited from about AD 300-1200.

Primary source: “first hand” information. This would be a record of evidence that happens almost immediately from witnesses who were there. Primary sources might include: interviews, personal and legal writings, as well as photographs.

MATERIALS

- “Artifacts and Ecofacts” presentation slides
- Copies of Rick Bowen’s 1845 diary entry
- Copies of “Rick’s Backyard” worksheets
- Copies of the “Snaketown Site Finds” worksheets
- Copies of “Life at Snaketown Site” sheets or writing paper
- Pencils

GRADE: 3-5

Subjects: Science, Social Studies, Language Arts

Standards:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.3-5.4.A](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.3](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.4](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-5.1.A](#)

Skills: analysis, reasoning, hypothesizing, interpretation, communication, classification, inference

Duration: Three 45-minute lessons

Class size: Up to 25

BACKGROUND

Archaeologists study material culture, which is anything made, modified, or used by humans. Artifacts are portable objects that have been made or modified by humans, and ecofacts are organic or environmental remains used by humans. Writing is also a kind of material culture. Historical archaeologists use both the archaeological remains and written records to understand what happened in the past. Primary sources such as diaries can help archaeologists identify the objects they find while excavating and understand how they were used by people in that culture from their own perspective.

Not all ecofacts preserve well in the ground. Hard materials like stone, clay, and bone are often found by archaeologists, but plants, paper, wood, and cloth are less frequently found in good condition. That can affect the information we can get about particular types of objects and activities in the past.

PROCEDURES

Day 1:

Lead a group discussion asking the following questions:

- How do we make things now?
- What tools do we use in our everyday life?
- What tools did people use in the past?
- How did people make things in the past?

1. Using the “Artifact and Ecofacts” presentation slides, introduce the definitions and examples of these two types of materials studied by archaeologists
2. Define culture and geographic area
3. Read Rick’s 1845 diary entry together or individually
4. Hand out copies of “Rick’s Backyard” worksheets and have students complete the chart
5. Review charts together

Day 2:

1. Introduce Hohokam and Snaketown. Discuss the different geographic areas, time periods, and cultures compared to the Bowen site
2. Hand out copies of the “Snaketown Site Finds” worksheets and have students complete the chart
3. Students should then write their “Life at the Snaketown Site” diary entry and prepare to read out loud to the group

Day 3:

1. Oral presentations of diary entries

ASSESSMENT

Students will hand in their “Rick’s Backyard” and “Snaketown Site” charts. Check answer key against student’s “Snaketown Site” chart. There may be differences in classification, if the student can provide an explanation for their choice.

For the diary entry presentation, you can use the following scale to assess their work:

Excellent: This response fully describes how people lived on the Snaketown site. It includes information about food, clothing, shelter, weapons, tools, and animals.

Good: This response adequately describes how people lived on the Snaketown site. It includes some of the information from the functional categories.

Needs work: This response gives little information about the groups' daily lives and includes almost no information from the functional categories.

WRAPPING UP

After oral presentations, discuss if there were differences in how students interpreted the uses of different artifacts or ecofacts.

RESOURCES

- Artifacts and Ecofacts presentation slides: https://documents.saa.org/container/docs/default-source/doc-teachingarchaeology/artifacts_ecofacts.pptx
- *Archaeology Southwest*, Volume 21, Number 4 (articles about the Hohokam and Snaketown): https://documents.saa.org/container/docs/default-source/doc-teachingarchaeology/hohokam_snaketown.pdf



SOCIETY FOR AMERICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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RICK BOWEN'S DIARY

October 25, 1845

Today was my ninth birthday. I woke up early even before the rooster began crowing outside the chicken coop in the backyard. It was an exciting day. Cousin Fred and his mom and dad visited from Philadelphia. My dad had to leave early with the wagon to pick them up at the stage station in Catonsville.

As usual I brushed my teeth and washed my face with cold water from the well out back. I took Fred's bag of marbles out of the metal storage box. We always shoot marbles in the backyard when Fred visits. Mother called me for breakfast. She was upset because she had knocked her mixing bowl and glass off the kitchen table. They were in a hundred pieces on the floor. I helped clean up the pieces and threw them out the back door into the yard. Mom made me sweep the broken pieces off the brick walkway. After breakfast, I went into the yard to catch chickens for dinner. Some of the chickens were chased under the smokehouse by Rex, dad's best hunting dog. I also had to weed and water the vegetable garden near the barn. Some of the stones were missing from the garden wall and had to be replaced. Fred and his family arrived late in the afternoon. Fred and I started shooting marbles in the yard. During our games, I lost two of my favorite marbles and Fred lost one of his.

For dinner we had chicken, pork chops, oysters, and vegetables from our garden. After dinner, we cleaned up. All the bones from the dinner were thrown in the abandoned well in the yard, and the oyster shells were thrown in the pathway leading to the garden.

Several oil lamps were filled with oil from a can on the porch and then lighted. My Aunt Betsy read us a mystery story in the dim light. We went to bed early because Fred and I are going to help my dad and Uncle Tony build a new wooden fence around the barn in the morning.

RICK'S BACKYARD

NAME _____

Based on the diary entry, use the chart below to list objects that an archaeologist might find when excavating the Bowen's home. Identify whether each item you listed is an artifact or an ecofact by marking the correct column

OBJECT	ARTIFACT	ECOFACT
Oyster shells		X

SNAKETOWN SITE FINDS ANSWER KEY

OBJECT	ARTIFACT	ECOFACT	FOOD	TOOL	CLOTHING	WEAPON	SHELTER	OTHER
Needle made of bone		X		X				
Nutshells		X	X					
Tortoise-shell bowl		X						X
Silver bracelet	X				X			
Fish scales		X	X					
Dried beans		X	X					
Sheep horn whistle		X						X
Snakeskin		X						X
Charcoal		X						X
Stone spear point	X					X		

SNAKETOWN SITE FINDS ANSWER KEY

OBJECT	ARTIFACT	ECOFACT	FOOD	TOOL	CLOTHING	WEAPON	SHELTER	OTHER
Leather made from deer skin		X			X			
Corn cobs		X	X					
Adobe (clay) brick fragments	X						X	
Clay pot with a scorpion design	X							X
Woven sandals		X			X			
Tree bark		X						X
Fragment of rock art drawing	X							X
Pottery fragment with a cactus design	X							X
Burned animal bone		X	X					
Wooden roof beam		X					X	
Deer antler		X	X					

LIFE AT THE SNAKETOWN SITE

Use the list of artifacts and ecofacts from the Snaketown site to write your own diary entry from the perspective of someone living there. Describe how people at the site used the objects in their daily lives. Be sure your diary entry includes details like what they ate, what they wore, tools, weapons, shelter, and animals.