



Stone Objects Game

Subjects Social Studies, Art

Grades 4-7

Brief Description

Students learn to think like an archaeologist by looking at a mystery object which is also a real artifact.

Scholars have found small engraved stone oblongs in archaeological sites in two locales in Ecuador, but, although we have several ideas, no one knows the function of these objects. Were they navigational aids, seals, gaming pieces or something else? Students will make some of these mystery objects, ponder their possible uses, then invent a game or activity that might have been played with them.

Background information

Chorrera stone objects
2006-003-195 to 2006-003-202

These stone objects are carved from a greyish-white stone called volcanic tuff. They have been found at a small number of archaeological sites in Ecuador. Most examples are from sites on the Island of La Plata, located 30 km off the south-central Ecuadorian coast, and a few examples have also been recovered from the site of Salango on the mainland.

These mysterious objects can be square, rectangular or circular in shape. Some are decorated with incised lines and circles, while others are undecorated. The eight examples in the SFU collection are all rectangular and are perforated lengthwise so that they could have been strung. Six of the objects in the SFU collection are decorated on all four sides with three circular incisions around a small incised dot. The seventh example is undecorated and the eighth example is decorated with a different number (7, 10, 12 and 14) of incised circles around a dot on each side.

Archaeologists do not know the function of these objects. In the past researchers have suggested that they may have functioned as gaming pieces or navigational aids. A clue to their function may be hinted at by the archaeological context in which they were found. Archaeologists believe that the Salango site and sites on the island of La Plata were ceremonial places, based on the many human burials, figurines, and spondylus shells found there. The presence of the stone objects at these sites might indicate that they had a ceremonial or ritual function. But perhaps that is what archaeologists often say when they are unable to explain a particular kind of artifact!

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Practice critical thinking
- Practice creative problem solving
- Practice fine hand/eye co-ordination

Keywords

Ecuador, archaeology, games, mystery objects

Materials Needed

- access to the ¡Hola Canada! *The Latin-American Collections at the Simon Fraser University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology* web site
- plastic straws less than 7 mm in diameter
- plasticine or modeling clay
- desk ruler
- protractor
- construction paper
- pencils
- scissors
- wash up facilities if using clay
- optional - paper-saving strategy: printed out copies of the museum photos of the objects for student reference while modeling clay.

Lesson

Have the students look up the mystery objects in the Museum database, finding all of them. Print them out, or refer to pre-printed copies.

Object 2006.003.198 is the one we will use as a model. The object is 6 cm long and 2 cm in depth and width. Have the children roll a clay or plasticine 'snake' of approximately 2 cm in diameter around the plastic straw. Then have the students pat it flat with a ruler, making a square tube measuring 2 cm on each side and at least 6 cm in length. Try to keep the straw in the center of the 2 cm square.

Trim one end flat, cutting through the straw with scissors.

Repair any deformation that occurred during cutting.

Measure 6 cm from the trimmed end and cut.

Let them dry a little if damp.

Use a protractor to make 3 circle-and-dot designs on each face. The circles have a diameter of 1.3 cm.

The objects are now finished. Have the students work in pairs or small groups, brainstorming possible functions for these objects. Bring the class together to share all their ideas, writing the possible uses on the board or a flip chart.

If one of the students comes up with a reasonably viable game, try playing it and writing out the rules of the game.

After the exercise is finished, the students may want to paint their object. Some may wish to string it and use it as a necklace, making a piece of jewellery patterned after an ancient Ecuadorian artifact.

Evaluation

Observe how students work together and stay on task.

Students are graded on the inventiveness of their suggestions of object function. The functions should be realistic within an ancient culture.

Students are graded on the neatness and aesthetics of their made object.