



Pottery Reconstruction

Subjects Social Studies, Art

Grades 4-7

Brief Description

This hands-on activity introduces students to critical thinking and to one of the job skills required of an archaeologist. This lesson helps students understand what archaeologists find, why they search for artifacts, and how they reconstruct them. The lesson fits well into curricula relating to art, ancient cultures and local history and should be taught after the students have had an introduction to several different cultural groups.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about the problem solving skills required to reconstruct an artifact
- Reflect on the skills of an archaeologist
- Categorize and sort objects to facilitate pottery reconstruction as a sequential process
- Practice fine hand/eye co-ordination

Keywords

History, ancient, art, archaeology, artifact, geography, prehistoric, pottery, ceramics

Materials Needed

- small or medium sized round clay pots, one pot per student or pair of students
- small brown paper bags
- clean sand
- masking tape
- scissors
- non-toxic glue
- small shallow box or tray filled with clean sand

Lesson

Before students arrive, break each clay pot into large and small pieces and place the broken pieces in a small brown bag. Vary the difficulty of this lesson by breaking the pots into large pieces (easy) or smaller pieces (more difficult). You could hold back some of the pieces of the pots to make it even more difficult, as archaeologists frequently recover incomplete pots. Add sand to the bag and shake, so the pieces are well mixed with the sand.

At the start of class, give each student or pair of students a bag and ask them to reconstruct the pot. Have them sort the sherds into body forms: pieces from the base, body, or rim. They can fit the pieces together temporarily using small pieces of masking tape. Archaeologists use small pieces of masking tape, usually cut into strips about 3 mm in length and the width of a tape roll, to temporarily mend pottery or bone. Archaeologists start at the base of the pot and add pieces in sequence from the base to the rim. This order creates less opportunity for distortion error. Once the pots have been correctly reconstructed with tape, have the students glue the parts back together. They may wish to use a sand box to help them support the pieces. If they do so, they should be careful not to get sand particles in the glue. If you have held back some of the pieces, they may infill using plaster or plasticine. Infills should be painted a slightly different colour to show it is a new repair. Re-gluing a pot is a slow process that might take two days or longer, so be certain to budget for a long class period to allow

them to complete the task. After putting their pots back together, students will complete the Ceramic Catalogue Form below. They will also write a short a report describing their reflections on the work of archaeologists.

Evaluation

Observe how students work together and stay on task.

Students are graded on the neatness and accuracy of their reconstruction and the quality of the written report of findings.

