



# Archaeology and Ancient Civilizations

## Lesson Guide

**Grade Level:**

4th-8th

**Subject Area:**

Social Studies  
Language Arts

**WI Model Academic Standards:**

Social Studies:

A.4.4; B.4.1; E.4.8;  
A.8.8

Language Arts:

C.4.2, C.4.3; C.8.2,  
C.8.3

**Overview:**

The program takes place within the cultural galleries of the museum. Students will use objects in our exhibit collections as they work through the methods used by archaeologists to learn about ancient civilizations.

**Background:**

Archaeology is a way of learning about ancient peoples: what they looked like, where they lived, what they ate, what they did and how they did it, what they believed in, and what their customs were. Archaeologists are detectives who attempt to reconstruct past human activities from physical remains, for the most part buried in the earth.

The word archaeology comes from the Greek *archaiologia*, meaning “the study of ancient things.” Archaeologists study all information that can be obtained about the human past from material remains – pottery, bones, tools, weapons, implements, artwork, etc. (By contrast, someone who studies ancient animals and plants through fossils is a paleontologist.)

At one time, archaeologists primarily excavated objects so that they could be displayed in museums or private homes. Statues, ceramics, and jewelry from countries such as Egypt, Iraq (formerly known as Mesopotamia), China, Iran (formerly known as Persia), and Mexico, for example, can be found in museums throughout the world. Today, it is not only the objects that are of interest; the location, or context, in which they are found is often just as important and can tell us a great deal.

Present-day archaeologists are also interested in the way ancient people lived in, and adapted to, the surrounding environment. Just as important is the effect the environment had on their lives. Archaeology’s aim today is to discover as complete a picture as possible of past life.

**Student Objectives:**

1. Define and give examples of archaeological artifacts.
2. Make cultural observations based on artifacts.

**Assessments:**

1. Students differentiate between artifacts and specimens.
2. Students investigate common categories of artifacts archaeologists utilize (tools and weapons, clothing, food vessels, and shelter).
3. Students learn to “read” artifacts in order to determine characteristics of ancient civilizations (community needs, social class structure, etc.)

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### **Program Vocabulary:**

Archaeology: Someone who studies past human cultures and prehistoric peoples, as well as those of the recent past, through artifacts, structures, writings, etc., that they leave behind.

Artifact : Any object manufactured, used, or modified by humans. Common examples include tools, weapons, utensils, art, food remains, and other products of human activity.

Civilization: A society at a particular time and place, especially one in an advanced state of social development with complex legal, political, and religious organizations.

Codex (Plural: Codices): An early type of bound manuscript whose sheets of paper or parchment are fastened together in book form rather than a scroll. The Aztecs and Mixtecs of ancient Mexico recorded their histories pictorially in codices with images painted on hide, paper, and cloth.

Provenience: The exact “find-spot” of an artifact and the conditions pertaining to the finding: who found it, what was found with it, where it was found, when it was found, and how it was found.

Quipu: From roughly 600-1,000 CE (known as Middle Horizon time) onward, Andean people have kept records on devices of knotted cords called quipus. It consists of a main cord from which pendant cords are hung. Knots tied in the pendant cords and other modifications to the pendant are the most common data-bearing features. Inca functionaries used quipus for censuses, inventories, tribute records, and transactions.

### **Enrichment Vocabulary:**

Ancient Civilizations	Artifact	Culture	Pre-Columbian
Anthropologist	Ceramic	Columbian Exchange	Common Feature
Describe	Conclusions	Examples	Historical Documents
Inference	Investigation	Information	Interpretation
Making Inferences	Natural Resources	Nomadic	Observation
Oral Language	Pre-history	Present	Research Findings

### **Teacher Preparation:**

Meet your Museum educator in front of the elevator on the third floor five minutes before your scheduled program start time.