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Discovering Archaeology with the NRCS

Activity Booklet: Ages 6-12
What is Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of the past through what people leave behind, such as stone tools, buildings, and pottery. Archaeologists can study many types of things, from the Pyramids at Giza in Egypt to the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado!

Connect the dots to find out what archaeologists DO NOT study . . .

Archaeologists study past peoples, not dinosaurs. Paleontologists study dinosaurs.
Tin Can—An artifact made of metal that used to hold food, such as meat, vegetables, or evaporated milk. The shape, size, and design of a tin can tell archaeologists what kind of food was in the can and the age of the can.

Tipi—A type of house that is shaped like a cone with wooden poles. Hides or canvas would be placed around the poles and rocks would be placed to hold the canvas or hides down around the base of the tipi.

Tipi Ring—A circular pattern of stones left where a tipi once was placed.

Wiki Up—A small type of house that was made from poles covered with brush, grass, or mats.

Windmill—A type of machine that uses blades that spin around when the wind blows on the blades. When spinning, the windmill can be used to power something. Historically, windmills were used to pump water up from under the ground.

Answer Key

Artifact Word Scramble
Bottle, Arrowhead, Tin Can, Metate, Pottery

Word Find

Archaeologists look at artifacts from archaeological sites to learn more about the past. Artifacts are things made by human hands, such as baskets or pottery. There many kinds of prehistoric and historic artifacts, features, and buildings that archaeologists can study. Features are things people make that cannot be moved, like a campfire. Remember to leave artifacts where you find them. If you take an artifact from a site or damage a building, no one else can enjoy seeing or studying them in the future.
Connect the dots to see what kinds of artifacts archaeologists can find at archaeological sites . . .

Flint Knapping—The process of making stone tools, such as arrowheads, by knocking a large rock or antler against another rock to create flakes.

Headgate—A type of gate that controls the flow of water from ditches.

History—The study of the past, which can help people make sense of humankind and past activities.

Lithic—This term means ‘stone.’ For archaeologists, studying lithics usually means studying stone tools and how stone tools are made.

Looting—Destroying archaeological sites by removing artifacts by non-professional archaeologists.

Mano—A stone tool used with a metate to grind seeds and corn into flour. This tool is held and ground against a metate.

Metate—A large stone on which seeds and corn are placed and then ground into flour with a mano.

NRCS—The Natural Resources Conservation Service

Paleontology—The study of fossilized plants and animals, such as dinosaurs.

Pit House—A type of house that was half above ground and half below ground. This type of house was typically built before ancient people began building pueblos.

Pottery—Objects made from clay that are then fired in a kiln or bonfire. Pottery includes jars and bowls. Pottery can be decorated or plain.

Projectile Point—The scientific name for arrowheads and spearheads.

Pueblo—A group of houses made of stones or adobe that have flat roofs.

Soil—A mixture of minerals, rocks, water, and organic matter that covers the earth’s surface.

Sherd—A small piece of pottery.

Survey—The process of walking across the landscape to find and record archaeological sites.
**Glossary**

**Archaeology**—The study of the human past through what people leave behind, such as arrowheads, tin cans, and buildings.

**Archaeological Site**—A place where there are artifacts and potentially buildings.

**Archaeologist**—A person who studies the human past through what prehistoric and historic people left behind.

**Artifact**—An object made by human hands that’s at least 50 years old.

**Arrowhead**—A stone tool used for hunting. The scientific name for an arrowhead is ‘projectile point.’

**Bottle**—Glass bottles can tell archaeologists a lot about who was at an archaeological site, based on the size, shape, and color of the bottle.

**Cabin**—A type of house that many historic people lived in.

**Cliff Dwelling**—A group of houses, typically pueblos, located in a large rock shelter. Cliff dwellings can be visited at Mesa Verde National Park.

**Context**—Everything found at an archaeological site goes together and helps archaeologists tell the story of that site. All of the artifacts and buildings create the meaning, or context, for the site.

**Culture**—The beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of people. Art, clothing, tools, music, and religion form a culture.

**Ditch**—A long narrow hole that is dug into the ground to help move water from one area to another. Without ditches, many areas of Colorado would not have been able to farm.

**Excavation**—The scientific process of digging into an archaeological site to better understand what is there.

**Flake**—A small piece of rock that is knocked off a bigger piece of rock while flint knapping. Flakes can then be shaped into stone tools, such as knives and arrowheads.
Artifact Word Scramble
The first letter of each word is underlined. Look in the rest of the booklet for clues!

This type of artifact was made of glass and would hold medicine and other liquids: olettb = _________

Made of different kinds of stone, these artifacts were used for hunting: woarrdaeh = _________

These artifacts came in different types and styles, such as hole-in-top and sanitary. They would hold food: int ang = _________

This kind of artifact was used with a mano to grind seeds and corn into flour: eatemt = _________

Made of clay, painted, and then fired in a kiln or bonfire, this kind of artifact was used to cook, store, and serve food: yerttpo = _________

What should you do if you find artifacts or an archaeological site?
You can always take a photograph, but remember, a lot of archaeological sites and artifacts are fragile. It’s important to not damage or destroy old buildings and structures or to try dig up artifacts. You can look at and study artifacts but always put those artifacts back where you found them. Think of archaeological sites like big outdoor museums. If you were at a museum, would you take artifacts from the cases? Or touch the statues there? No! It’s the same at archaeological sites. We want to persevere these places for more people to enjoy in the future!
Past and Present

Life was very different for prehistoric and historic people in Colorado! Match the object from the past to what we use now by drawing a line between the two pictures. For example, in the past people used the sun to keep time, while we now have phones, computers, and watches to know what time it is.

Storytelling Through Artifacts

Archaeologists use the artifacts and buildings they find to help figure out who lived there and what their life would have been like. That’s why it’s important to leave artifacts where you find them. If an artifact is taken away, then the archaeologist would not be able to know the whole story, or context, of who lived at the site. Let’s look at some objects you might find around your house. If an archaeologist found these artifacts 100 years in the future, they would try to figure out the story of who lived at this site. Pretend you are the archaeologist and answer the questions below!

- What do you think happened at this site? Who lived here? What were the artifacts used for?

- If you took away one of the artifacts, how will the story of the site change?
The NRCS and Archaeology

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was created after the Dust Bowl. During the 1930s, huge storms created clouds of dust that blew through farms, taking away important topsoil. Food could not be grown without that topsoil and many farmers and their families had to leave their farms. Something needed to be done to protect the soil from future dust bowls or other natural disasters.

Now, NRCS helps farmers and ranchers conserve, or protect, their soil, water, crops, and grass for grazing. NRCS conservationists and NRCS archaeologists work together to promote good land use while also protecting archaeological sites.

What do NRCS Archaeologists do?

Archaeologists look for artifacts and areas where people once lived, otherwise known as sites. NRCS archaeologists look for sites before a project starts. They look for areas that might have artifacts, log cabins, tipi rings, or rock art. Some projects, such as creating an irrigation ditch, could damage a site. Archaeologists will walk around where the project is going to happen, known as surveying, to see if there are any archaeological sites. This ensures that the NRCS does not damage any important historic or prehistoric sites.

Most of the artifacts archaeologists find are broken. They have to figure out how people lived through these little pieces of the past! In the photograph, there are pieces of historic glass, pottery (cups and plates) and tin cans.
Historic Colorado: Irrigation Ditches

Farming and ranching would not have been possible in Colorado without a huge number of ditches and canals. A ditch is a long narrow channel dug into the ground to divert water from a river, creek, or reservoir to another place. A canal is like a really big ditch. Farmers needed water to grow crops and ranchers need water to grow grass and hay for cattle. They used ditches to get water to areas that might not have enough water otherwise. Headgates, a small gate used to open or close off a ditch to water, were used to control the amount of water going into ditches. Many of these ditches and canals are still used today.

Help the NRCS Archaeologist figure out what’s at this archaeological site! What do you see? Are there buildings? Are there artifacts?

Headgates come in different shapes and sizes, but they all are used to help manage the amount of water going to farms, ranches, and entire towns.

There are a lot of different kinds of sites for archaeologists to find in Colorado. Turn the page to learn more about Colorado’s prehistory and history . . .
Prehistoric Colorado

Hunter-gatherers might have crossed over the mountains into Colorado as early as 10,000 B.C.! How people lived on the landscape depended on their environment. The Ancestral Puebloans, and Fremont cultures grew corn, beans, and squash, and constructed large pueblos and cliff dwellings. Other cultures lived in tipis and wikiups, homes that could easily be put up and taken down, moving across Colorado instead of staying in one place. There were many cultures practicing different kinds of lifeways throughout Colorado. The Ute lived in the mountains, the Cheyenne and Arapahoe lived on the plains between the Arkansas and Platte rivers, and the Kiowas and Comanches lived south of the Arkansas River. The descendants of these groups consider parts of Colorado as their ancestral homeland.

Archaeologists look for traces of these cultures through the remains of buildings, tools, clothing, pottery, and art. Lithics, or stone tools, can be arrowheads or other tools like knives or scrapers. Groundstone, such as manos and metates were used to grind seeds and corn. Rock art can be found on boulders and cliffs.

Tipi rings are large circles of stones where a tipi once stood on the landscape.

Across
1. A building that was used to store hay and house animals.
2. Porcelain, plates, and tea cups are a kind of . . .
3. This was is used to help pump water to the surface.
4. Hole-in-cap, Hole-in-top, and sanitary are a type of this container.
5. This kind of artifact held medicine or other liquids.

Down
1. This helps farmers and ranchers get water from rivers and reservoirs to farms.
2. A building made of stacked logs.
3. An artifact used to help put buildings together, like cabins and barns.
Historic Colorado

The Spanish arrived in Colorado during the 1541 AD Coronado Expedition, when explorers crossed the southeastern corner of the state. The Spanish traded with Native Americans. Later fur-traders and adventurers explored Colorado and helped create forts, like Fort Bent and Fort Pueblo. Interest in the area peaked with the discovery of gold and the construction of the railroad. Colorado became a state in 1876 AD. Mining, ranching, and farming increased throughout Colorado after the forced removal of the Ute.

People built mining, ranching, and farming communities. Many of the farming towns were created to help support mining communities. Some people lived on homesteads, with log cabins and barns, while others lived on large ranches. People also built houses from local stone and from mud bricks. They used rivers, creeks, ditches, wells, and windmills to get water.

Pottery is made from clay that was fired to make it harder to break. Pottery was used to cook and serve food. Many different kinds of pottery was made, such as bowls and jars, some with painted images, while others have carved patterns on the clay.

Draw the jar using the grid!
People lived in many different kinds of homes. Match the descriptions of each house on the left to a picture of that house on the right by drawing a line from the picture to the description.

This type of house, a tipi, was made with wooden poles with animal skins or canvas placed around the poles. All that’s usually left are a ring of rocks that held down the canvas or hides.

This group of houses that form a village, called a pueblo, was made of stone or adobe bricks. You can see these houses at Mesa Verde National Park.

This type of house, a pit house, was made to be half underground and half above ground. A pit house would be cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

Can you find the words:
1. Archaeology
2. Artifact
3. Tipi
4. Sherd
5. Mano
6. Soil
7. Survey
8. Pottery
9. Site
10. Lithic
11. Pueblo
12. Metate
13. Arrowhead