
Lesson 2.3

ARTIFACT CLASSIFICATION

Subjects: science, language arts.

Skills: application, analysis, evaluation.

Strategies: scientific inquiry, research skills, classification, role play.

Duration: 30 to 45 minutes.

Class Size: any; groups of 4 to 5.



Ceramic urn from
Richmond County, North
Carolina, ca. AD 1400

Objectives

In their study of artifact classification, students will use pictures of artifacts or objects from a teaching kit to classify artifacts and answer questions about the lifeways of a group of historic Native Americans.

Materials

“Classification” and “Pee Dee Culture Artifacts” activity sheets for each group. Optional: an archaeology teaching kit, if available.

Vocabulary

Artifact: any object made, modified, or used by humans; usually this term refers to a portable item.

Awl: a sharp pointed tool used to punch holes in skins and other materials.

Lifeway: how a group of people live.

Pendant: an ornament hung on a cord around the neck and worn as a necklace.

Style: the combination of shape and decoration distinguishing a group of artifacts, such as pottery, found in specific geographic areas and dated to certain times; a particular way of doing something that is associated with a specific culture or cultural tradition.

Background

The purpose of archaeological research is to learn about the *lifeways* of past peoples. The research design developed for each archaeological project usually consists of a series of specific questions and a description of the methods by which the questions will be answered using the archaeological data.

The *artifacts* from the site form an important part of the data base. Artifacts are classified so that they can be used to form or test hypotheses that answer the research questions.

Procedure

1. Tell students to imagine they are a team of archaeologists. The team has completed excavations of village sites along the Little River in Montgomery County. A few hundred years before Europeans arrived, tribes influenced by an art style archaeologists call the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex lived in these villages. Prior research shows many of the artifacts these

people left are different from those of other tribes living in the area. Those influenced by the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex made, for example, conch shell *pendants* (called gorgets) carved with representations of crosses or serpent symbols. To keep the two kinds of cultures distinct, archaeologists named the one influenced by the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex “Pee Dee.”

With the excavation finished, team members must now analyze the artifacts brought back to the laboratory to find out more about the lifeways of the people belonging to the Pee Dee culture. They will use a series of questions to structure their inquiry.

- What was the diet of the sites’ Pee Dee culture residents?
- What did they use for personal adornment?
- Could any artifacts have been used for ceremonial or leisure purposes?
- How many different ways did Pee Dee culture people decorate their pottery?
- How many different kinds of raw materials did they use to make their tools?

2. Distribute the “Pee Dee Culture Artifacts” and “Classification” activity sheets. Working individually or in small groups, the students cut out the artifacts on the “Pee Dee Culture Artifacts” activity sheet. They group the artifacts so they can answer the questions on the “Classification” activity sheet. Have students answer the research questions and tell how they classified the artifacts to do that.

As the students work, they will find that objects move from one category to another depending on the question they ask. For example, the pieces of shell could be used to answer questions about both diet and adornment. Thus, shell could be classified as food remains and as jewelry.

3. Have students form one or more questions of their own. How might they classify their objects to answer their questions?

Closure

Summarize what students have learned about classification and answering archaeological research questions.

Evaluation

Students hand in the “Classification” activity sheet for evaluation.

Extension

Like ancient tools, pennies are artifacts. Have students graph pennies by year and frequency. What is the oldest and youngest penny in the collection? What year or years are the most common? Archaeologists make inferences about the artifacts they recover from a site. To help students understand this process, lead them to make the following inferences about the origin of their penny collection:

- We can be reasonably sure that no penny was deposited at the site prior to the year stamped on the coin.
- The frequency of dates is likely to be greater near the date the pennies were deposited.

Links

Lesson 1.6: “Classification and Attributes.”

Lesson 1.7: “Scientific Inquiry.”

Lesson 4.6: “Language Families.”

Sources

Coe, Joffre Lanning. 1995. *Town Creek Indian Mound: A Native American Legacy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Smith, Shelley J., Jeanne M. Moe, Kelly A. Letts, and Danielle M. Paterson. 1993. *Intrigue of the Past: A Teacher's Activity Guide for Fourth through Seventh Grades*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior. [This lesson is adapted from "Artifact Classification" on pp. 53–55, courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.]

Ward, H. Trawick, and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. 1999. *Time Before History: The Archaeology of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [The image in this lesson's main heading is taken from Figure 4.23.]

"Classification" Activity Sheet Answers:

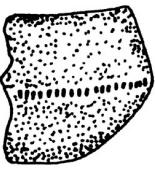


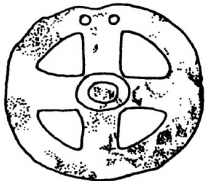
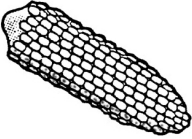






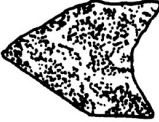
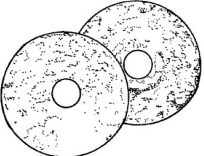






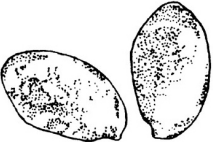

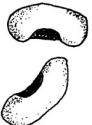


1. Corn, beans, meat, fruit, acorn and hickory nuts, fish, and shellfish.
2. Shell pendant and shell earrings.
3. Pipe and gaming disc.
4. Curved and straight lines, dots, shapes, and plain.
5. Bone, stone, and clay.

Classification

Name:

1. What was the diet of the sites' Pee Dee culture residents?
2. What did they use for personal adornment?
3. Could any artifacts have been used for ceremonial or leisure purposes?
4. How many different ways did the Pee Dee culture people decorate their pottery?
5. How many different kinds of raw materials did they use to make their tools?

Pee Dee Culture Artifacts

 <p>Pottery</p>	 <p>Bone fish hooks</p>	 <p>Clay dipper</p>	 <p>Shell pendant</p>
 <p>Corn</p>	 <p>Bone awl</p>	 <p>Pottery</p>	 <p>Cane matting</p>
 <p>Acorns</p>	 <p>Pottery</p>	 <p>Pottery</p>	 <p>Stone projectile points</p>
 <p>Copper Covered wooden ear spools</p>	 <p>Mussel shells</p>	 <p>Stone hoe</p>	 <p>Clay pipe</p>
 <p>Clay game disc</p>	 <p>Hickory nut</p>	 <p>Deer bone</p>	 <p>Persimmon seed</p>
 <p>Grinding stone</p>	 <p>Beans</p>	 <p>Pottery</p>	 <p>Pottery</p>