



# Be an Archaeologist

## Investigate Activity

*Archaeologists are people who reconstruct previous human activity by looking for and studying things that were left behind by people who lived in the past. These human-made historical objects can be all sorts of things - old buildings, coins, tools, and even garbage. We call these items artifacts. It is very important for archaeologists to know the exact location where an artifact was found to accurately interpret the past. As archaeologists study an artifact, they try to understand who the object belonged to and what the object tells us about that person's life. With this activity, your child will be studying artifacts from your home to determine where they are from and what those "artifacts" tell them about their owner.*

### What you need:

- 3 bags or boxes to hold small "artifacts" from 1 (of 3) rooms in your home
- 3 to 4 "artifacts" from your child's room (i.e. - Lego pieces, crayons, small toys)
- 3 to 4 "artifacts" from your kitchen (i.e. small dish or bowl, eating utensil, clean food container with label)
- 3 to 4 "artifacts" from your home office/school supplies (i.e. stapler, pencil/pen, ruler)

OBSERVE



### What you'll do:

Place artifacts collected from each room into your bags or boxes. Have your child choose a bag to begin investigating. As they begin to study the artifacts from one room, ask your child questions to guide them. You could start by asking questions that get them to make observations (gathering information through their five senses). Ask questions like: How big is the dish? What color is it? What material is it made of?

After they have made some observations, ask them to use those observations to make inferences (conclusions based on the observations/evidence they collected). Ask questions like: What could this artifact be used for? Who would use this artifact? What does this artifact tell you about the person or people who used it?

When your child has had a chance to observe all the artifacts from one room, ask them to make additional inferences about the artifacts as a group. Ask questions like: In what room in the house would these artifacts be used? Do you think they would all be used at the same time, by the same person?

For older children, you might also discuss their assumptions (things that they accept as true) at this point. What assumptions are we making about the rooms we find in a house based on what we know about our own society? Ask them to consider the age or gender of people who might use the objects and think about assumptions. For example, we may think of make-up as something more often used by women than men, but that is not the case in all cultures or households. This is something that archaeologists try to keep in mind - considering their own biases as they look at artifacts.



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Continue investigating the artifacts from the other two rooms using the same process. As your child concludes their investigation of the artifacts, have a discussion with them about what the entire group of artifacts might tell others about you/your family. You might begin this discussion by asking them something like: What if these artifacts had been discovered by our neighbors? What would these artifacts tell them about us?

To take the activity further, you could also ask: What is missing from the sets of artifacts? Can we identify things that existed in the past, even if they are not physically represented in our artifacts? For example, we have the food container, but we do not have the food. Having the container alone still tells us information about diet. Not everything will preserve in the archaeological record, but archaeologists can still learn a lot from the pieces that are left behind!

### Extension:

As an extension of this activity you might consider making a time capsule. This would be a collection of “artifacts” that are typical for the present time. You could bury (hide) it in a closet or storage area for your children to discover in the future.

### Did you know?

The Anthropology Division curates worldwide ethnological and archaeological collections. The collection includes over 40,000 objects, with regional strength in Asia, Africa, Native North America, Oceania, and the upper Amazon, and notable holdings worldwide in textiles, basketry, and pottery. The archaeology collection focuses on Nebraska archaeology with particular strength in Paleoindian materials, but also includes material from across the globe. Our collections are built from the generous donations of collectors and the hard work of archaeologists at the University of Nebraska.

INVESTIGATE

