

Each
worksheet



Activity 2

Create an excavation

BBC

HANDS ON
HISTORY
DIG!

Teacher's information

Archaeologists find out about the past by DISCOVERING artefacts left behind by our ancestors, EXAMINING what they have found and then RECORDING their discoveries for the future.

Support your class to try out these skills by recreating an archaeological excavation in the classroom. These instructions will help the class to bury a selection of organic and non-organic items and excavate them at a later date like a real archaeologist.

To make the most of your dig, it should be left for eight weeks to ensure decomposition, so you may want to run the first part of the activity (Worksheet 1 – Prepare your pit) at the beginning of the term, and complete the further sections at the end of term when you return to the pit.

To run this activity you can create one large dig as a class and ask smaller groups to choose and add an artefact each. Alternatively divide the class into small groups of around four to create their own digs. You can either hand out photocopies of worksheets 1, 2, 3 and 4 if your class are confident working alone, or use the worksheets as prompts yourself to support the class with verbal instructions.

Print out enough copies of the artefact recording sheets to ensure each group can record all their items. Also included is a 'Rot or Not' sheet with further information which will be useful for the class when they come to dig up their artefacts.



bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory

Worksheet 1 – Prepare your pit

You will need

- Medium to large size plastic container e.g. a plastic storage box/small dustbin (minimum size 40cm x 40cm x 40cm)
- Enough soil to fill the container
- Select four artefacts from the list below. Choose two organic (things that were once living) and two inorganic (things that were never living) materials:

Organic

- Apple core
- Leaves
- Empty shell e.g. garden snail or sea shell
- Piece of paper with writing on e.g. item of packaging or letter

Inorganic

- Piece of metal e.g. a coin
 - Stone/flint
 - Piece of pottery (e.g. an old mug or a fragment from a broken garden pot)
 - Piece of plastic (if you choose plastic remember to put it in the top layer of your dig as this is the most modern material on the list)
- 4 x Artefact Recording Sheets (Worksheet 4)
 - Pencil and ruler (or cut out the ruler from Worksheet 3)
 - An outdoor space or a watering can



Burying your artefacts

Carefully examine all of your artefacts and complete the Pre Burial section of the Artefact Recording Sheets, including making a small sketch of each artefact. This is important for comparing the artefacts when you excavate them later.

Place about 10cm of soil into the plastic container and bury two artefacts in the layer.

Add another 10cm of soil and bury one more artefact in that layer.

Add a final layer of soil and bury your remaining artefact ensuring it is fully covered.

To make it more realistic you could use different soil types for each layer (soil with pebbles, soil with sand and plain soil) just like on a real excavation.

Once all your artefacts are buried, place the container outside and open to the elements, or leave indoors and water once a week.

You need to keep the soil moist but not waterlogged.

For the best results aim to leave your container for eight weeks when the artefacts are sure to have changed.



Worksheet 2 – Get digging!

Complete this up to eight weeks later



You will need

- Your prepared excavation pit
- 4 x Artefact Recording Sheets (partly completed when preparing the pit)
- Plastic sheeting/newspaper
- Finds Tray – to put the excavated artefacts in (a plastic seed tray works well)
- Container to put the excavated soil in
- Small trowel or other digging tool
- Sieve with 1cm mesh to sieve the soil for any small bits of artefact (optional)
- Old toothbrush to clean pottery or stones
- Pencil and ruler (or cut out the ruler from this pack)
- Apron and gloves (optional)

Digging up your artefacts

Place your pit on the plastic sheeting or newspaper.

Set out your Finds Tray on another piece of plastic sheeting or newspaper.

Excavate your container by removing 5cm deep layers of soil at a time working across the pit.

You should excavate in layers rather than dig holes as this is how a real archaeologist works, carefully removing soil layer by layer.

If you have a sieve, use it to filter all the soil you remove in case there are finds that you have missed.

When you discover an artefact, carefully clear the soil from around the edges avoiding damaging the surface of the artefact itself.

Carefully lift it out and place it in the Finds Tray.

Pottery, shells and stones can be carefully cleaned using a toothbrush and water but artefacts made from wood, metal and food remains should not be washed or cleaned in water.

Record your discovery using the Artefact Recording Sheet.

Keep excavating in layers and recording each artefact you find until you reach the bottom of your container.

Once you have completed your dig, take a look at your Recording Sheets and compare the details of each artefact from before it was buried and now that you have excavated it – how have the artefacts changed?



Worksheet 3 – Display your finds

You will need

- Your four artefacts
- Paper and pens
- Suitable dry and cool display area



Displaying your artefacts

As an archaeologist, you have now **discovered** your artefacts, **examined** them to see how they have changed and **recorded** what you have learnt about them.

All important archaeological discoveries are carefully preserved for future study and will often be displayed in museums.

You can create a display of your artefacts with labels next to each item to let people know the most important details about each one. Remember your organic remains may continue to rot so they will need to be displayed in a container.

Draw your labels on paper using the headings below and put them next to your artefacts.

Artefact:

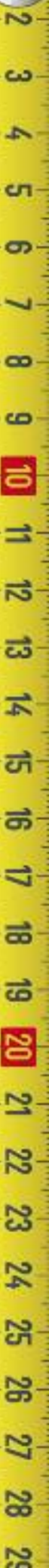
Date discovered:

Size:

Background Information:



Cut out Eric's tape measure to help record the size of your find!



Worksheet 4 – Excavation

Artefact Recording Sheet

Archaeologist's name: _____

The Artefact: _____

	Pre Burial: Your artefact before burial	Post Burial: Your artefact after excavation
Date	Of burial:	Of discovery:
What is your artefact made from?		
What colour is your artefact?		
Is your artefact in one piece?		
How long is your artefact?		
How wide is your artefact?		
How tall is your artefact?		
Describe how your artefact feels in your hands		
What do you think your artefact is/was used for?		
Do you think your artefact will survive being buried for 8 weeks? Why?		
Draw your artefact before and after your excavation.		
Label the differences between the Pre and Post Burial images to see if your artefact has changed.		



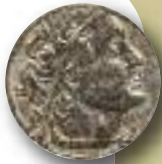
Rot or not?

Organic materials

You've probably found that your organic artefacts will have broken down and begun to rot. Organic items will rot if buried unless you take away all oxygen and bacteria and stop all chemical reactions.

If an organic artefact was left in a very dry, cold or wet environment it will be preserved the best. So if an organic artefact is found in a dry desert, in liquid, or encased in ice it will often be found preserved, for example the 'Lindow Man', whose body was preserved in a peat bog in Cheshire for over 2,000 years. The body is held at the British Museum.

How have your organic materials survived?



Inorganic materials

Inorganic materials won't rot, but may suffer from issues such as rusting or cracking. These sorts of items can offer archaeologists a lot of information about the past as they survive well over time.

For example ancient tools made out of flint stone have been found from over 5,000 years ago in many locations across the UK helping us understand how our ancient ancestors hunted and cooked.

How have your inorganic materials survived?



How long does it take for something to rot away completely?

Banana peel - **3-4 weeks**
Paper bag - **1 month**
Newspaper - **6 weeks**
Apple core - **2 months**
Orange peel - **6 months**
Wool sock - **1-5 years**
Cigarette butt - **10-12 years**
Leather shoe - **25-40 years**

Tinned steel can - **50 years**
Foamed plastic cup - **50 years**
Aluminium can - **200-500 years**
Plastic bottle - **450 years**
Disposable nappy - **550 years**
Plastic bag - **20-1,000 years**
Glass bottle - **1-2 million years**



Find out more

Download more history activities to try out at home, watch Eric in his time travelling animations and find archaeology events and activities taking place near you on the website: bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory