

Dig! – Taking it further extension activities

The discussion points and further activity ideas below will help you and your class explore archaeology a little deeper and extend each of the core Dig! activities.

These activities support a range of subjects, including History, Art, English, Geography and Communication. They work most effectively as introductory or plenary additions to Dig! Activities 1-5 that are also available to download.

Extend activity 1 - Introducing archaeology (Get Colouring)

Discussion – What is archaeology?

Begin by writing the word Archaeology on the IWB. Ask your students to each write down three words to explain what Archaeology means to them. Discuss the words as a class and work together to come up with one final definition. Our own Dig! archaeology definition, written with CBA (Council for British Archaeology), is:

Archaeology is a way of learning about people who lived in the past; where and how they lived, what they believed and the effects they had on the environment.

Taking it further - Eric's archaeology diary

Eric is getting ready to go on his first archaeological dig. What should he pack in his bag and what will he be doing on the day? Ask your class to write his diary entry from the night before he embarks on the dig – how has he prepared, and how does he feel? This works well after completing the colouring-in sheet.

Taking it further – What is an archaeologist?

As a class discuss what an archaeologist does and why the information they discover is so important for finding out about the past. Write a poem called 'The Archaeologist'. Pupils should use as many similes and metaphors as possible to describe what an archaeologist does and why it is important. Our own Dig! archaeologist definition, written with CBA (Council for British Archaeology), is:

Archaeologists learn about the past by studying the physical remains that people have left behind. These can include artefacts (such as pottery or tools), human remains, buildings and changes to the landscape.

Extend activity 2 - Create your own dig!

Discussion – Rot or not?

Using the information from the 'Rot or Not' page included in Activity 2, split the class into groups of four and ask them to discuss why some items might rot quicker than others. They should consider organic/inorganic materials.

Taking it further - Rot speed

Using the list from the 'Rot or Not' page, cut out the item names and their decomposition times individually and mix them up. Split the class into groups of four and ask them to match the objects to the correct rot times. Award points for each pair they match correctly.

Taking it further – History in the future

Ask the class to imagine they are archaeologist from 2111. They have found the site of a house from 2011 which has been left untouched. What might they find at the site? Give the group magazines or other images to create a collage of a 2011 archaeological pit, showing examples of the 'artefacts' an archaeologist might discover. This activity can also be used to explore environmental issues, such as how we deal with modern waste.

Extend activity 3 - Paper excavation (Roman pot)

Discussion – Artefact experts

Find an 'artefact' to bring into class (it doesn't have to be that old – a piece of pottery, jewellery or even a photo). You may want to speak to a local museum about borrowing something for the day – many have handling collections. Hold up the artefact at the front of the class and invite them to ask questions to find out as much as they can about the item (How does it feel? How heavy is it? Where was it found?...). Once everyone has had a chance to ask a question, recap on what you have found out and highlight any questions they could have asked. Discuss why archaeological finds are so important for understanding the past.

Taking it further – Antiques Roadshow

Ask pupils to bring in something that is important to them from home (with permission and avoiding expensive items). Put the class into pairs and ask them to interview each other about their item, asking probing questions to build up a history of the artefact. This is a little like Antiques Roadshow! You could even run this activity in threes with the pupils playing the presenter, guest and expert, swapping roles throughout the lesson. If you would prefer not to have artefacts in the class, this activity can also be run with photos.

Taking it further – Bury your pot

To extend the Roman Pot activity, put the cut-up paper pot in a tray and cover with a layer of play sand (or potting compost, sawdust or shingle). Split the participants into groups of four. Ask each group to divide the tray into eight squares by laying out a grid of string/cotton thread on top of the pit. Give each pupil a medium-sized paint brush. Tell pupils that they have to take turns to brush away the sand in each square to see what they can uncover, carefully removing bits of the pot until they've collected every piece. They then continue the activity as described in the pack.

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Extend activity 4 - Poos from the past (Roman, Viking, Tudor)

Discussion – Food findings

Using the information gathered from dissecting each poo, discuss as a class what the evidence in the poos tells them about the geographical features of the areas in which these people lived. You can discuss the natural resources such as water that are available and how food is gathered/grown/caught.

Taking it further – Land survey collages

To extend the discussion above, split the class into groups of four and assign each group one of the three periods (Romans, Viking, Tudors). Give each group a piece of A3 paper and a number of magazines/printed pictures. Ask them to create a collage land survey of the area the people from their period lived in. Once these are completed each group should move around the class in a carousel looking at the other collages. Ask them to make a list of what they can learn about the people from that period by looking at the images on the collage.

Taking it further – Feasting

Split the class into six groups. Tell each group that they have to produce a plan for a feast that includes the ingredients found in the poo they have dissected from the Tudor, Roman or Viking times. Ask them to prepare a presentation for the class about what modern dishes they would prepare in order to eat ingredients from their era. They can research recipes in the library or on the internet. Each group should then present their choice of menu back to the class explaining their choices in relation to the era they were exploring.

Extend activity 5 - Cress cropmarks

Discussion – Crop growth

Before planting your cress crops ask the class what they think would happen to crops growing either above a wall or above a ditch. Base the discussion around what colour the crops might be, the speed in which they would develop, the height they would grow and how thick the crops would be. You can use the additional information in the cropmarks activity to help your discussion progress.

Taking it further – Archaeology from above

Split the class in to pairs. Ask them to imagine that one of them is an archaeologist who has seen a cropmark in a field that indicates there may be Roman remains under the surface. The other is the farmer who owns the land. Ask the archaeologist to persuade the farmer to let them excavate their land. They must fully explain why they think there are the ruins of buildings on the land and why it is important to uncover them (i.e. to understand more about people from the past in this area). Then ask the pairs to swap roles.

Taking it further – ‘Beneath Brambles’

Ask each pupil to write a poem called ‘Beneath Brambles’. It should explore what from the past may be hiding below the surface of a field. To give the class inspiration you could print out information about some local historic sites/digs (i.e. a Roman bath). It could start ‘Weary weeds cover me now but once I was a shimmering site....’