

Digging up the past

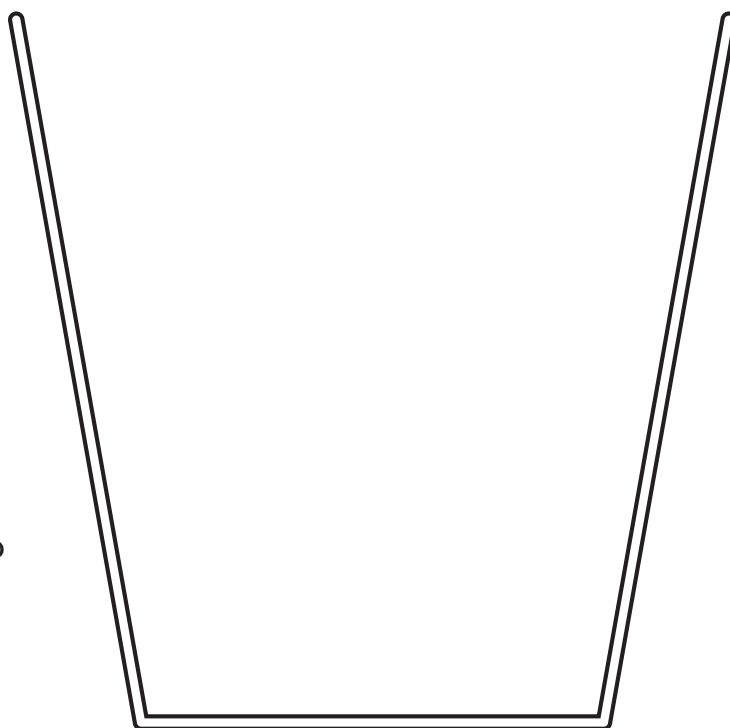
Archaeologists are people who dig up the ground to find out about how people lived in the past. They remove the soil carefully and when they find something such as a piece of pot, iron or a bone they make a note of its position and depth in the ground.

You are given a bucket of sand. This represents soil in the ground.

1. Use a spoon to carefully remove the sand and when you find an object draw its position in the diagram of the bucket opposite.
2. Carefully remove the object, label it and put it on one side.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 until you can find no more objects.

When archaeologists find something, they suggest how it may have come to be there.

4. Suggest how each item may have come to be in the ground.









5. The oldest items are usually found at the deepest level. Which was the oldest item?



Digging up the past

Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Buckets of sand, spoons, trays in which to empty the sand, plastic bags, paper for labels, pens. For younger students each bucket could have four items in it planted at different depths. The items could be anything that will not be damaged by being immersed in dry sand. The items could be a plastic pen top, an old key, a coin, a counter from a game, a bottle top.

For older students two or three items could be placed at the same level with two items at a lower level. Do not use bones or seeds or foods as these are featured in activity **16B**.

Using the worksheet

Ask the children what they know about archaeologists and archaeology. Write some ideas down on the board to help the children focus on the topic. Make the observation that archaeologists do not just investigate Roman remains but human activity from all ages. Tell the students that when a site is being investigated great care is taken in recovering objects from the ground and recording their position. The information can be used with information from elsewhere to build up a picture of life in the past. In some ways it is similar to forensic science where clues are brought together to solve a crime.

Younger students

Tell the students that they have to imagine that their bucket of sand is like a piece of ground and they are to carefully dig out the sand to see if there is anything to be found. Stress the need for care at all stages – digging, drawing, labelling and storing the items.

Encourage them to make up stories about how the items came to be found in the ground. With the more able students ask them to try and link how the different items have come to be on different levels. Tell the children that finds from other places help to support ideas or show them to

be wrong and that in many cases archaeologists cannot be exactly sure what happened at a place from the objects left behind.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Use simple equipment and materials safely and with care.
- Record finds in an orderly way.
- Make suggestions about what has been found.

Older students

Older students like technical words and you may introduce a couple for added interest and to help the students sound like archaeologists when they are reporting. For example, you may like to introduce the word *artefact* to mean any object removed from the ground, which has been made or used by a human. Often when digging, several artefacts may be found at the same level. Each level at which artefacts are found is called a context. In the bucket you prepared there are two contexts. Context 1 has three artefacts in it and context 2 has two artefacts in it.

When the students have removed the items from context 1 ask them to say how they got there and look for answers that link the objects together by human activities. Look for students giving different interpretations and say that this happens in archaeology and leads to archaeologists disagreeing about what has happened on a site. Let the students investigate context 2 and interpret their observations. Let them note that disagreements can still occur.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Use simple equipment and materials safely and carefully.
- Interpret what they find.
- Understand that some archaeological evidence is open to different interpretations and can be unreliable.