

Protecting the Past: Give a Hoot, Don't Loot!

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Grade Level: 4-7

Background: The looting and vandalism of archeological sites and artifacts pose a serious threat to our cultural heritage. An important aspect of archeology education involves the tricky relationship between ethics and science. Even archeologists have been divided over who and what should govern the preservation of history. It has only been in recent years that this discussion in the scientific community has generated some tough laws protecting ancient sites and artifacts. Still, looting and vandalism continue to be an enormous problem in studying and preserving human history. Archeology educators hold an important voice in the community. Through preservation education, teachers and their students empower efforts toward protecting human history.

This comprehensive lesson could be taught over several days if separated in this way:

Day 1: Pre-activity –Students meet in pairs to read the Dr. Dig question and answer worksheet, “Give a Hoot, Don’t Loot.” Teacher reviews terms and concepts from Dr. Dig Q&A. Ancient People should also meet in their group to create rock art or pottery artifacts.

Day 2: Group Activity – Groups meet to discuss their roles in the artifact preservation skit.

Day 3: Class Activity – Groups role-play skit for “audience” followed by class discussion.

Day 4: Conclusion – Students write paragraph on importance of historic preservation.

Day 5: Extension – Students share their paragraphs with class.

Objective:

Students will:

- Work together in groups to discuss ethics of historic preservation
- Role play various (contrasting) community perspectives on historic preservation
- Draw written and oral conclusions about the need for historic preservation laws

Pre-Activity:

Students should have good prior knowledge of archeology terms (site, artifact, archeology, preservation) prior to this activity. The children's book *Digging for Clues* by Patricia Duke is a good resource. To further prepare students, review the following concepts (examples are provided):

Vandalism – intentional damage or destruction of property

- Ask students to think of an example of vandalism they've seen in their city.

Looting – to steal or take something dishonestly

- Tell students that many tombs from ancient Egypt have been found empty because “tomb raiders” got to the site before archeologists and cleared much of the contents.

Rock Art – drawings and paintings on rock or stone done by ancient people; rock art illustrates scenes from the everyday life of people of the past.

- Using a library book, photos from magazines (*National Geographic*), or images from the internet (e.g., www.rockart.org/) show students examples of ancient rock art. Have the students discuss what they see in different examples of rock art. Ask students why ancient people illustrated scenes like herds of bison or of themselves hunting.

Ethics – the study of right and wrong and, in this case, how it applies to preserving the past.

- Ask the class to close their eyes and imagine the Statue of Liberty. Next, tell them to imagine that they are on a field trip there, and that the teacher says it's okay to take a marker and write the name of their school where ever they want. Would that be okay? What would happen if every school visiting the Statue did that? How do we decide how to protect parts of our culture like the Statue of Liberty? What about things that are even older and more fragile?

Process:

Part 1: Students will divide into groups. One group will represent people of the past. They will first meet to create rock art and clay pots (artifacts). Once this step is complete, they will “disappear” into the past (by becoming part of the audience). The artifacts can be made the day before the role-play.

Part 2: The “Vandals” will first meet to discuss types of vandalism and looting. They will then damage or loot the Ancient People’s artifacts while the other students sit in the “audience” and watch.

Part 3: The “Archeologists” will first meet to discuss why vandalism and looting make preserving the past more difficult. They will then study the damaged artifacts and take turns sharing what they think may have happened to them over time, and what might be missing. The rest of the class will watch their role-playing.

Part 4: Finally, all three groups will meet (as a class) to discuss why artifact looting and vandalism is a problem in preserving our history.

This set of four steps will be repeated twice – once with the first “community” of Archeologists, Ancient People (using their rock art) and Vandals – and then again with the second “community” (using clay pots).

Note: Let students take turns playing these different roles so that they can investigate multiple feelings and perspectives – and so that no one ends up being “the good guy” or “the bad guy.”

Materials: A variety of materials could be used to diversify or extend this activity. Rock art is the suggested artifact for the first group of Ancient People and clay pots for the second group.

Rock Art: Students in the Ancient People group draw scenes from their lives on a large sheet of butcher-block paper. This art is then hung prominently in the classroom. “Vandals” should rip pieces from the sheet (to indicate that they are stealing pieces of the rock wall) or mark on it.

Clay Pots: If you have more than 15 students doing this lesson, you will need to have two groups of “Ancient People,” two groups of “Archeologists,” and two groups of “Vandals.” This is further explained below. Your second group of “Ancient People” can use clay pots as artifacts. You or your students can bring pots from home – they can be old, cracked, etc. The second group of Ancient People can decorate these pots with paint, markers, etc. “Vandals” should damage the pots by cracking them or removing pieces of them (you may want to take your students outside if you’re worried about a mess in the classroom). Students may want to wear gloves to avoid sharp edges on pots.

Pre-activity: Have students read through the Q&A section of this lesson [“Ask Dr. Dig”]. They can be partnered with another student with one assuming the “question” role and the other the “answer” role. Students may also want to visit the web sites included with this lesson to further investigate laws on historic preservation.

Note: Before splitting students into groups, meet with the class as a whole and explain the role of each group. Then allow students to break into their smaller groups (Vandals, Ancient People, Archeologists) to discuss what roles they think are expected of them. The Ancient People may need to meet the day before the other groups so that they will have time to create their painting and/or clay pots. They will need to have their supplies ready. If they meet the day before and the painting/pots are complete on the

day of the lesson, the Ancient People can meet to discuss what these objects mean to them in their everyday lives. The Vandals can discuss the ways in which property gets damaged or stolen (and why). The Archeologists can discuss the challenges posed for them by vandalism and theft.

Activity:

Step 1: Split 12 students into three groups of four. This is one community. The subgroups within each community will be as follows: “Vandals,” “Ancient People,” and “Archeologists.” Split a second group of 12 students (depending on the number in your class) in the same way. A large classroom may have three “communities” divided into these three smaller sub-groups.

Step 2: The “Ancient People” are the early inhabitants of the community. They are to create the cave painting/pots. Remember that they will need the most time, so you may want to have this group work a day or so ahead of the actual project while the rest of the students are working on something else.

Step 3: Once the artifact is complete, the “Vandals” should assume various disrespectful behaviors. The rest of the class should act as the audience while each group of “Vandals” role-plays their part. It is important that the students understand that, very often, laws are broken by accident and with no bad intent. For instance, one student may pretend they have found an ancient site and, out of curiosity, dislodge a piece of the site and accidentally break it. Another could pretend that they don’t know the rules about taking a piece of history, and innocently put a part of the artifact in their pocket to take home with them. Other “Vandals” could display the darker side of looting and vandalism, and pretend to take things from the site to sell (knowing it is illegal) or knowingly damage them (writing on the cave painting with a marker). It is very important that the Vandals in each group role-play one-at-a-time for the audience. In this way, the teacher can control the “action” happening. It should take only a few seconds for each Vandal to demonstrate their method of damaging the site. Students will need clear instructions or they make take this opportunity to get too playful.

Step 4: After the Vandals have taken their seats (ask them to give you whatever pieces of the artifact they’ve taken), the Archeologists will begin their role-play. They will study the painting and see if they can still tell what the Ancient People intended to show. They may hypothesize what has happened to the painting over time, and how it has gotten damaged.

Step 5: Classroom Discussion. The community (whole class) will meet back as a group to discuss what they have just witnessed. The Ancient People should be given a chance to say how they felt as their cave paintings were being damaged. The teacher should point out that, in reality, Ancient People have no opportunity to speak up and share how they feel about the destruction of their property. The Vandals should also be given an opportunity to state why they damaged or stole from the site. Finally, the Archeologists should share why this type of damage makes their jobs harder and what they feel may happen to our record of the past if strict laws are not in place. Remind students that the Archeologists had the benefit of seeing what happened to the artifacts and that, in reality, archeologists have to infer what happened.

Closure:

Independently, students should write a paragraph about why (or why not) they think our laws should protect ancient sites and artifacts.

Extension:

Students voluntarily share their paragraphs with the class; a classroom discussion can follow.

Links:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/pubs/INDEX.HTM>

Learn about the Antiquities Act of 1906, the story of the 25-year struggle at the turn of the 20th century to preserve and protect America's archeology.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/vt/vt.htm>

Visit the "Vanishing Treasures Initiative", a grassroots effort to preserve history in the Southwest.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/sitewat.htm>

Sitewatch will share current criminal cases on archeological site vandalism.

Ask Dr. Dirt!

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Q: Hi Dr. Dirt. Dig this: If I'm out riding my bike or walking somewhere, and I find a really cool artifact, can I take it home?

A: You may find an arrowhead, a piece of pottery, or some other artifact that you think is really interesting, but taking it away from *its* home means that you're taking a piece of history. Once that home site is changed, it can't be put back together again. An artifact's position (where it's located) in a site gives important clues about its story. For instance, finding a sandal near some charred stones in a cave might tell you that the owner was preparing or eating dinner when he took his shoes off. If the shoe or stones were moved or stolen, the archeologist documenting the site may miss some important information about that person's life, like whether they had really huge feet!

Q: What if I want to give something I find to a museum?

A: It's better to let professional archeologists do that. A dig may involve both archeologists and trained volunteers working to carefully excavate a site. The whole area is studied, and detailed reports are made about the land and each artifact found. These reports help explain how the artifact was preserved over time, why it was left in that place, and what life was like at that time in that geographic area. Once an artifact is removed, moved or damaged, it can never be studied in the same way again.

Imagine that someone goes into your bedroom and, without asking, takes a few of your toys. Then they move your bed to a different wall, tear some pages from your books, and leave some of *their* belongings on the floor (if you have a little brother or sister, you probably know exactly how this feels). Without being able to ask you, it would be hard to know where things are supposed to go, what is missing, and which items don't belong to you. Unfortunately, when you study people that lived long ago, they are no longer around to help you understand their homes, their belongings, and their lives. Archeologists are trained to help tell the stories of the past. These stories are much harder to tell each time a clue is removed. Besides, everyone knows it's just as rude to steal from dead people as from live ones.

Q: Why should I even care about the past?

A: Because the past helps us know where we came from and what the future will be like. We know some amazing facts about human history from archeological discoveries. For instance, we're sorry to break the news to you, but Michael Jordan did not invent basketball. In fact, the ancient Mayans were playing a somewhat similar ball game complete with rubber ball and stone hoop over a thousand years ago. We know this from discovering their ball courts! Every time you flush the toilet, you should say thank you to the people of the ancient Indus civilization along the Indus River in what is today Pakistan. They created one of the first, almost-modern forms of indoor plumbing over 4,000 years ago! Today farmers in the tropical jungles of Mexico are learning to use ancient farming techniques that are much more productive and better for the environment than so-called “modern” farming practices.

But the biggest reason you should care about the past is because knowing and caring about the human past is one of the unique things that sets us apart from the other living creatures on Earth. Only humans study and preserve part of their past, and this knowledge helps us make better choices about our future. So you see, it's very important to protect the past—not only can we learn to appreciate those that came before us, but we can get a lot of good ideas for tomorrow!

Q: This all seems like pretty major stuff. Are there laws for stealing artifacts or damaging sites?

A: Yes, there are stiff laws against looting (stealing) and vandalism (damaging) artifacts on public property like state and city land, parks, and forests. People who break these laws face big fines—even jail time—when they are caught harming a site. These laws exist to protect important “cultural resources” so that they can be properly studied or just left alone and saved for future generations. Here in Texas, artifacts and sites on private land are not protected by law. Many landowners value knowledge about the past and protect the cultural resources on their property. Others do not and may intentionally destroy or dig up artifacts and sites just to get the “good stuff.” This isn't against the law, but it's not a good idea. Just think, if everyone did that, we would lose many of our best clues to the past. Take the Alamo, for example. About 1900, that famous landmark was about to be destroyed to make way for more buildings in downtown San Antonio. If it wasn't for Clara Driscoll and the

Daughters of the Republic of Texas, who stepped in and bought up the Alamo and surrounding properties, you wouldn't be able to visit it today!