ARTIFACT CLASSIFICATION

SUBJECTS: Science, language arts
SKILLS: Application, analysis, evaluation
STRATEGIES: Scientific inquiry, research skills, classifying, role playing
DURATION: 30 to 45 minutes
CLASS SIZE: Any; work groups of 4 to 5

Objective:
In their study of artifact classification students will use pictures of artifacts or artifacts from a teaching kit to classify artifacts and answer questions about prehistoric lifeways.

Materials:
"Ancient Artifacts" and "Classification" activity sheets for each group; an archaeology teaching kit if available (optional).

Vocabulary:
artifact: any object made or used by humans.
sherd: a broken piece of pottery.

Background:
The purpose of archaeological research is to learn about the lifeways of past peoples. The research design developed for each archaeological project usually consists of a series of questions and how they will be answered using the archaeological data.

The artifacts from the site form an important part of the data base. Artifacts are classified so that they can be used to answer research questions.

Procedure:
1. Tell the students to imagine they are a team of archaeologists. The team has completed excavation of an ancient site in the Southwest. They are now ready to begin analyzing the artifacts brought back to the laboratory to find out about the people who lived at the site. They will use a series of questions to structure their inquiry.

• What was the diet of the site’s residents?
• What did they use for personal adornment?
• How many different ways did they decorate their pottery?
• How many different kinds of raw materials did they use to make their tools?

2. Distribute the "Ancient Artifacts" and "Classification" activity sheets. Working individually or in small groups, the students cut out the artifacts on the "Ancient Artifacts" activity sheet. They group the artifacts so they can answer the questions on the "Classification" activity sheet. Have the students answer the research questions and tell how they classified the artifacts to do that.

As the students work they will find that objects move from one category to another depending on the question asked. For example, the two pieces of shell could be used to answer questions concerning diet and adornment. Thus, they could be classified as food remains and as jewelry.

3. Have students create one or more questions of their own. How might they classify their objects to answer these questions?

Closure:
Summarize what you have learned about classification and answering archaeological research questions.

Evaluation:
The students hand in the "Classification" activity sheet for evaluation.

Links:
Section One, Lesson 6: "Classification and Attributes"
Section One, Lesson 7: "Scientific Inquiry"

Classification Activity Sheet Answers
1. corn, beans, meat, and shellfish
2. turquoise and shell
3. checkerboard, lines, dots, shapes, and plain
4. bone, stone, plant fibers, shell, and clay
Intrigue of the Past

Ancient Artifacts

Pottery
Bone awl
Pottery
Pottery

Pottery
Pottery
Stone
Pottery

Corn
Pottery
Pottery
Bone

Stone
Basketry
Turquoise
Shell

Pottery
Shell & cordage
Bone
Pottery

Beans
Corn
Stone drill
Pottery
Pottery
1. What was the diet of the site's residents?

2. What did they use for personal adornment?

3. Describe the different ways they decorated their pottery.

4. Name the different kinds of raw materials they used to make their tools.