

Classification

Lesson Theme: Artifact Classification and Analysis

Grade: Intermediate Elementary

Duration: 2- 50 minute class periods

Materials: Enough objects for students to classify (notebooks, trade books, writing utensils, canned foods, etc.), computer with Internet access, pens and pencils

Process Skills: Interpretation, Classification, Analysis

Concepts: Characteristics, Assemblage, Group, Context

Enduring Understandings:

1. Archaeologists classify objects into categories based on their attributes, or characteristics.
2. Classifying objects into groups helps guide research toward answering a particular question.
3. Characteristics of a group can help answer research questions about how the object was made or used.
4. Many different interpretations of artifacts are possible, depending on which characteristics are examined.
5. Context is all that surrounds an artifact that gives archaeologists information about the use of the artifact.

Guiding Questions:

1. What is a trait, characteristic or attribute?
2. What are some characteristics that we all have?
3. Why do archaeologists create categories for artifacts?
4. How do you select which attributes you are going to study?
5. Can we learn more about an object by seeing it used?
6. Do you get more information about an object by seeing it in its context?
7. What kinds of characteristics do artifacts made by Nevada Native Americans have?

Critical Content:

Archaeologists group artifacts into categories in order for them to be studied and analyzed. Classifications are based on the attributes, or traits of the artifacts. The same artifact can have many different traits, and therefore, many different interpretations of the same artifact are possible. Context is the situation or surroundings of an artifact at the time of discovery and can be used to learn

about the artifact. Disturbing archaeological sites by picking up, taking or rearranging artifacts can destroy vital information learned from the context.

Skills:

See state standards.

Instructional Activities & Methods:

Day One:

- Gather the objects that the students will classify. These can be anything that is easily located such as pens, soda cans, notebooks, lunch boxes, etc. There should be enough so that they can be divided into four to five equal groups.
- Talk about what an attribute, or a trait, is and brainstorm some examples. For example, you could talk about traits that we all have like hair or eye color. Practice classifying people based on their attributes: divide the class based on hair color or texture (long, short, curly, straight).
- View the Photo Galleries on the [expeditions@fieldmuseum®](http://expeditions@fieldmuseum.org) website ([www.fieldmuseum.org/expeditions@fieldmuseum®/gary4_expeditions@fieldmuseum®/gallery.html](http://www.fieldmuseum.org/expeditions@fieldmuseum.org/gary4_expeditions@fieldmuseum.org/gallery.html)) Discuss the concepts again by listing and brainstorming some of the traits that the artifacts have. See if the class can guess what this trait is and why it might have been chosen for analysis. Would it be easier to know what the artifact was for if you saw how it was found? (context) Play the Video Report on Ceramic Analysis (also on [Feinman's expeditions@fieldmuseum®](http://expeditions@fieldmuseum.org) website) to explain how archaeologists use traits and classification.
- With the entire class, present the object you've decided to study. Next, begin listing some traits of the object you've decided to study.

Culminating Performance Activity

What? Classify a group of objects into smaller groups based on a trait.

Why? To understand that archaeologists classify artifacts based on traits in order to analyze research questions.

How?

1. Divide the class into four groups and give them their classification materials. Each group should decide what trait or traits they are going to study.
2. After selecting a trait, each group should separate and classify the objects by this attribute. For example, if you choose to study notebooks and the attribute is size, the group could classify them by small, medium and large. Or perhaps the group chooses to classify based on number of binder rings. They could group them on 2-ring, 3-ring or paper or metal binder rings. It is best if you choose more than one trait to study, otherwise you could end up with only 2 fairly large groups.

3. Once the group has classified their objects, they should write up a description of their research and describe the objects based on the chosen attributes. (See Writing Assignment guidelines) This builds upon the previously learned concepts of function and use.

Assessment:

Class Participation

Writing Sample

Writing Assignment Guidelines

One of the most important parts of research is writing up your results so that others can learn from your knowledge. Your group must now write up what you've discovered by classifying your artifacts. In your paper, please answer the following questions:

1. What trait or characteristic did you decide to study and why?
2. How many different groups did you decide to classify your objects into?
3. What were the labels that you gave to these groups? (i.e. color= blue, green, orange, etc.)
4. Describe each of your groups:
 - a. How many objects are in the group?
 - b. How is one group different from the others?
 - c. Does this group's trait have any effect on how it is used?
5. Which of your groups tells us the most about this type of object and why?
6. Based on the characteristics that you studied, what could this object be used for?