

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND THE CLASSROOM:

MOLEHILL SURVEYS FOR SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Using archaeological finds is a stimulating way to engage children with the past. Here we explain one way in which schools can carry out their own archaeological fieldwork and generate their own finds.

National Curriculum Links

This activity provides a focus for cross-curricular work on several aspects of the National Curriculum programmes of study. These include.

History

- H4 Historical Enquiry
- H5 Organisation and communication

English

En 1/2 Group discussion and interaction

Work on finds generated by the process could be extended to include art, written work and data handling.

Aims

- To provide children with an opportunity to work with sources of evidence other than books
- To provide a practical way of investigating the history/archaeology of the local community

Equipment

- In the field
 - Plastic bags for collecting finds
- In the classroom
 - Magnifying glasses
 - Pens, paper, pencils

Introduction

Molehill survey is what archaeologists call a non-intrusive method of looking at the past. This means that it is a way of gathering information without having to excavate. Excavation is a destructive activity which should only be undertaken with good reason or professional advice.

Molehill survey is exactly what it says it is - looking at molehills to see what the animals have turned up when cleaning out their tunnels. This could provide a clue to any archaeology which still lies buried under the ground. We cannot guarantee that anything will be found this way, but the children will certainly enjoy looking.

Method

Preparation

- The first thing you will need to do is find a friendly landowner who is willing to let the class onto his/her land. Identify a time and date when it will be mutually convenient for the survey to take place.
- Do your risk assessment. This will obviously vary to some extent depending on your own circumstances. Some suggestions for issues you need to cover when carrying out archaeological fieldwork are given in our accompanying download '*Risk Assessment Action Plan*'.
- Write letters to parents explaining what you are going to do.

In the classroom

- Explain to the children how archaeologists use artefacts to study the past. There are a number of activities which help develop children's descriptive skills in our accompanying download '*A Beginner's Guide to Identifying Your Finds*'.
- Explain that you will be carrying out a molehill survey to make archaeological finds of your own. This will involve:
 - Dressing up warm/wearing sun hats
 - Walking in the country/local park
 - Picking up finds from molehills (No digging!).
 - Putting the finds into boxes/bags.
 - Bringing the finds back to school to discuss.
- Stress that you are only interested in objects which people made and used. You do not want to pick up rocks, sticks and other natural items.

Doing the survey

- Remind the children what the task is which they have to carry out.
- Go over the health and safety issues. For example:
 - Be careful where you walk. Do not run.
 - Take care when picking objects up. Some may have sharp edges.
 - Make sure they wash their hands before eating.
- Some teachers may want to issue children with plastic gloves of the type used in petrol stations to keep customers' hands clean. It does insure that the children's hand stay marginally cleaner but many children find them uncomfortable and this tends to spoil their experience of the activity.
- Give each child/group of children a bag in which to put the finds.
- Assign each child/group of children a molehill.
- Ask them to spread the molehill out with their feet. They should then look carefully at the spread of soil. Pick up any artefacts which they find and put them into their container.
- If time allows repeat the exercise with other molehills.
- Gather the children together and carry out a preliminary discussion of your finds. This is your opportunity to dispose of those items which you do not want to take back to school. No matter how much you have stressed that you don't want to pick up rocks, the collection bags will be full of them. Some possible questions might include:
 - How do we know this is a stone or a piece of pot?
 - Do we think that the objects we found are old?
 - Why might they be in the field?
 - How might people have used them?
 - How have they got in the molehill?

Back in the Classroom

- Clean the mud off the finds so they can be seen properly. Archaeologists use a toothbrush and warm water for this purpose. Metal objects should not be washed, as this will increase the chance of corrosion. They should be left to dry and then gently brushed clean.
- Stress the need to be careful: *We don't want to damage our precious finds.*

- Lay the finds out on a sheet of newspaper in a warm place to dry out.

Your finds should be placed into plastic bags or containers, each of which should have its own label to show where it came from. Archaeologists call this the context. Finds from each context should be kept separate to enable you to make comparisons between different areas.

Working with finds

The finds you have gathered can be used in a variety of ways to develop working in English, Art and Maths as well as History. Some suggestions are given in our accompanying download '*Interpretation and Using Finds in the Classroom*'.

Differentiation

Older children could carry out a fieldwalking survey. The principle is similar to surveying molehills but on a larger scale. In fieldwalking pupils walk across a ploughed field picking up any material which they find.

An alternative for those working with urban schools

Molehill survey and fieldwalking may be difficult to arrange for teachers working with urban schools. An alternative activity would be to organise a garden survey. The principle is similar to molehill survey and fieldwalking but children are asked to gather material which they find on the surface of their own gardens.