West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS AND THE CLASSROOM:

USING FINDS IN THE CLASSROOM

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Introduction

Finds can be generated in a number of ways. You could do a field walking exercise or carry out a garden survey, for instance. If you are lucky you might even get to work on a proper archaeological dig.

However, making finds is only the beginning of the archaeologist's job. They spend a great deal of time looking at their finds and trying to extract the most information out of them they can. A couple of small flakes of flint might be the only information on people who lived in West Yorkshire thousands of years ago. It's the only way of finding out about them. We have to make the most of what evidence we have.

Activity One: Sorting the finds

Aim	To promote classification skills To help pupil's recognize different materials
Equipment	Bags of finds. There could be generated via a molehill survey, garden survey or field walking. Our accompanying download - '*Finds Recording Checklist'* Magnifying glasses for examining finds
Duration	30 minutes to 1 hour

Introduction

Archaeologists classify things by material. This can reflect the technological knowledge of people in the past and has given rise to the names which we give to periods in the past: Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age.

Method

- Give each pupil/group of pupils a bag of finds to analyse.
- Ask them to sort the contents into different materials and enter them on the *Finds Recording Checklist* document.

- Discuss with the class the interpretation of their finds. Some questions to consider might be:

    - *Do you have any complete objects*? *Why is everything broken*? Most of the material is likely only to be fragments. In some ways archaeology can be said to be the science of rubbish. Children often expect to find whole objects and need to be reminded that the objects were probably thrown away as they were broken in the first place.

    - *Do any of the pieces fit together*? *Can you tell what they were part of*? Clearly the more pieces of an object we have the easier it is to work out what it was. It is often difficult to decide if you have only one or two small pieces.

- Once the contents of separate bags have been discussed the results can be collated onto a single checklist. This can provide an opportunity for you to employ ICT for data handling. This can be used to consider such questions as:

    - *What was the most common type of find*? The answer to this is likely to be *pottery*. Partly this is because one pot can smash into dozens of pieces. However, there are other factors at work here. Finds recovered through fieldwalking or molehill surveys may have been in the ground for many years. Pottery is a relatively stable material, but organic substances decay and metal corrodes. Pottery is therefore quite likely to be the most common topsoil find.

    - *What percentage of the total number of finds are pottery*?

    - *Does pottery represent a larger percentage of finds in Context A than it does in Context B*?

Questions like these lend themselves to the use of ICT for data handling, and provide practical examples for classroom work. Classroom discussion could focus on the implications of the results.

Activity Two: Finds Catalogue

Aim	To promote classification skills To provide opportunities for observational drawing and descriptive writing
Equipment	Bags of finds. There could be generated via a molehill survey, garden survey or field walking. Magnifying glasses for examining finds
Duration	30 minutes

Introduction

Whenever archaeologists carry out fieldwork, they always write a report to let other people know what they have done. Often this will contain a finds catalogue which shows one of every kind of item the archaeologists have found.

In the classroom, this is most easily achieved by giving each child a blank sheet of paper and asking them to draw an image in the top half of the sheet and writing underneath. The resultant work can then be bound together to form your finds catalogue. Some suggested heading are given below.

Image
How you record your image is up to you. It offers an opportunity to use ICT in the form of digital cameras if you wish. However, archaeological finds catalogues are made up of drawings of objects. This is because it is easier to highlight all the tiny details with a drawing. This fits in well with doing observation drawing at KS2. Added emphasis could be given to the need for clarity and accuracy by stressing the fact that the children are compiling a real finds catalogue and that the children are illustrating and describing something to people who cannot see the object themselves.

Find Number
All finds in the catalogue should be given their own number for ease of reference. In the classroom this can be done by keeping each item in its own bag and writing the find number on the bag.

Where was it found?
This is what archaeologists call the *context*. On a real archaeological site each context would have its own number. For school purposes it should be enough to put *Molehill in school playing field* or *Garden of 23 Waterloo Terrace*. Again it is worth stressing that someone else may look at this in the future and will need to know the location as accurately as possible.

Size
Archaeologists normally draw things to scale. Your pupils' drawings will have been done free hand, so size will need to be indicated.
(Hint: Make sure that the children understand that it is the size of the object which they have to measure. I have seen pupils measuring the size of the drawing!**)**

Material
What is the object made of? Archaeologists tend to group things by material as this makes things of a similar type easier to compare. The use of different materials in the past can also give a clue to the level of technology.

Description
This too needs to be as thorough as possible. Pupils will need to consider such issues as colour, texture, decoration, function and possible date.

DIFFERENTIATION

Younger/ less able pupils might benefit from the use of a template or form rather than free text.

Older/ more able pupils may be able to cope with additional fields to fill in. These could include.

- **Ordnance Survey Grid Reference**. This could be established in several ways depending on the focus of the lesson. For geography map reading might be most appropriate. If an ICT focus is required pupils could use a hand held GPS device during the fieldwork.

- **More detailed measurements**: Length, breadth, width and diameter can all be measured. It is also possible to work out the full diameter of a pot through careful measurement even if you have only part of it. The easiest way is to draw a number of concentric circles on a sheet of paper and then match the curve on the piece of pottery to the curve on one of the circles.

Activity Three: Letting people know about your finds

Introduction

Carrying out an archaeological project can be a whole lot of fun for both teachers and pupils. However, just because you've done your molehill survey, garden survey or fieldwalking, things shouldn't stop there. Archaeology presents a great opportunity to let other people know about all the good work which goes on in your school. Here are some ideas for ways in which you can do this.

Making a museum

The objects you find could form the focus of a display for a classroom museum. You could add photos of your fieldwork, replicas of objects borrowed from the museum's loan service, and information about the finds.

This can be extended into role-play for a parents' after-school session. Children can be coached as guides and show groups of parents around the classroom museum.

Writing a report

For an archaeologist this would be the intended result of his/her fieldwork. It should be yours too. It's all part of teaching children about scientific methods. You've formed a hypothesis (e.g. *Was there a Roman settlement in our area*?). You've found a way to test it through practical means and come to a conclusion (*Our finding suggests that there were/weren't Romans in our area because*…). The results should now be made public so that everyone can share in your discoveries.

For a school project writing a report needn't be that difficult especially if you have already done either of the Finds Recording or Finds Catalogue activities. You have already tabulated and analysed the raw data. All you will need to add is a cover note listing

- Name of place where you did your survey
- O.S. Grid Reference
- Section of map showing location of the area worked on
- Date when work was carried out
- What you did
- What your results were
- Who did the work and the names of the report's authors

Copies of your report could be lodged in the school library or with your other history resources for others to use.

If you do find something you think is of historic interest we would urge you to send a copy to your local Historic Environment Record (HER). A HER is a record of all known find spots, archaeological sites and historic buildings in the region, which can be consulted by members of the public interested in finding out more about their own locality. It is also the source of information which is used by the local authorities when looking at matters relating to development and the historic environment. Putting your results into the HER will ensure that your results will be available to researchers and planners for years to come.