



Archaeology at The Hermitage

Thematic Unit

Introduction

When you think of Archaeology, does your mind drift more to Indiana Jones? What about your own house? You can tell a lot about someone by the objects they own, and that's the basis of Archaeology at The Hermitage. Based on actual archaeological excavations at The Hermitage, students will use deductive reasoning to examine the lives of the people who lived at The Hermitage.

Objectives

- A. Examine the purpose and process of archaeology.
- B. Explore the idea of deductive reasoning in a hands-on environment.
- C. Understand the lives of all nineteenth-century Americans – both white and enslaved.

Background

From Jackson's letters, maps, and other documents Hermitage archaeologists know that there were at least one hundred buildings and structures on the Hermitage property during Jackson's life. While some of these buildings have been found, most have not. Fortunately, archaeological evidence and Jackson's documents provide clues as to where they were. Examples of these buildings include: the overseer's house, barns, stables, carriage houses, the blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, and spinning/weaving shop. Since the first archaeological dig took place at The Hermitage in the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of artifacts have been uncovered and numerous previously unknown or missing buildings have been located.

Vocabulary

Archaeologist
Artifact
Deduction
Excavation
Primary Source
Reasoning
Slave Quarter

Suggested Pre-Program Activities

1. Have students bring three objects from their bedroom to class. Ask students to figure out details of their lives based on what they bring.

Presentation Outline

Note to classroom instructor: this information will be covered within the education program.

1. Begin discussion with an examination of the meaning of an artifact. Ask for examples of artifacts. Does an object have to be thousands of years old to be considered an “artifact?” An artifact is “something created by humans for a practical purpose.” That could be three weeks ago, or three hundred years ago.
2. How can you learn about a person by the objects they own? Introduce concept of deductive reasoning: have three or four objects on hand, and assist students through deductive reasoning process.
3. Begin presentation on archaeology at The Hermitage. Examine sites at The Hermitage – what artifacts might you expect to find at The Triplex, the Cotton Gin, the Smokehouse, the Field Quarter, and the root cellar.
4. What are the tools necessary to uncover artifacts? Emphasize other tools, such as patience, thoroughness, and being careful.
5. How would artifacts found at the Mansion differ from those found in the Slave Quarters?
6. Split students into three groups and assign them to one of three stations. These stations represent three sites on The Hermitage’s property: the root cellar, Triplex, and Field Quarter.
7. Have students catalog the artifacts they find, and answer questions given to them on the worksheet.
8. Go over students’ answers and guide them through their reasoning process.
9. Explain that archaeology is a window to the past, and gives us clues about how those who came before us lived.

Suggested Post-Program Activities

1. Have students draw a picture of what they would expect a Slave Quarter to look like, include artifacts that might be found there.
2. Visit The Hermitage's section on the history of archaeological findings (linked below). Use Google Earth to have students place where they might find these buildings on The Hermitage's property.

Selected Bibliography

Panchyk, Richard. "Archaeology for Kids: Uncovering the Mysteries of Our Past." Chicago Review Press, 2001.

Marrin, Albert. "Old Hickory: Andrew Jackson and the American People." Penguin, 2004.

Remini, Robert. "The Life of Andrew Jackson." Harper Perennial Classics, 2001.

White, John R. "Hands-On Archaeology: Real-Life Activities." Prufrock Press, 2005.

Web Links

Dig! The Archaeology Magazine for Kids
(<http://www.digonsite.com/>)

Archaeology at The Hermitage
(<http://thehermitage.com/archaeology-at-the-hermitage/>)