

## ACTIVITY GUIDE

### Piecing History Together

All Grades



### Overview

Sometimes when excavating a site, archeologists discover broken fragments of artifacts. These sherds can help the scientists understand how the people of that place might have lived and worked. To understand how the artifact might have been used in that culture, it is often reconstructed. In this activity, learners will decorate their own artifact, write its history and purpose, and then break and reconstruct the object to experience an archeological process.

Note: This activity involves breaking clay/ceramics into pieces, so make sure safety procedures are followed. This activity may be done as an individual or group learning experience.

### Objectives

- Determine how an artifact represents a culture
- Practice an archeological process

### Vocabulary

**archeologist** (ahr-key-OHL-oh-jist) noun: a scientist who studies past peoples and cultures by excavating and examining material remains such as bones, plant remains, and certain stone materials

**artifact** (AHR-tih-fakt) noun: an object made or modified by a human culture

**culture** (KUHL-cher) noun: the traditions and beliefs practiced by a group of people

**excavate** (EKS-kuh-vayt) verb: to uncover by digging away earth; the physical process of surveying, exposing (uncovering), processing, and recording physical or cultural remains found under the ground

**reconstruct** (ree-kuhn-STRUKT) verb: to put back together

**sherd** (SHURD) noun: a broken piece of ceramic material, like pottery, usually found at an archeological site. Also *potsherd*.

## Materials

### Part 1

- clay flowerpot(s) or inexpensive ceramic plate(s)
- colored pencils
- markers or acrylic paint and brushes
- Who Made This? activity sheet

### Part 2

- decorated pot(s)/plate(s)
- old pillowcase or cloth bag
- rubber band
- hammer
- craft glue or painter's tape
- safety glasses
- Piecing History Together activity sheet

## Activity

*Part 1: 30-45 minutes; Part 2: unspecified*

### Part 1: Creating an Artifact

In this part of the activity, learners will use paint or markers to decorate a pot(s)/plate(s) that represents a fictional culture. Learners can use the **Who Made This? activity sheet** to help them think through creating the decorations.

- Distribute the pot(s)/plates, markers or paint, and the **Who Made This?** activity sheet.
- Tell learners that they will be decorating an artifact that represents a real or imagined culture. Guide them through the activity sheet to help them think about how artifacts reflect a culture and how they can decorate the pot/plate to reflect that culture.
- Remind them that this artifact will be smashed and reconstructed in the next part of the activity.

## Part 2: Breaking and Reconstructing the Artifact(s)

In this part of the activity, learners will break the artifact(s) into sherds and then piece them back together, a process similar to what archeologists do with real artifacts. **Note:** If this is a multi-person activity, consider combining all the broken artifact pieces and letting learners determine which pieces go together for reconstruction.

- Prepare to break the pot(s)/plates(s) by following the **Piecing History Together activity sheet**.
- Supervise learners in breaking the objects. For safety, consider having younger learners watch rather than participate.
- Follow activity sheet instructions for artifact reconstruction.

## **Additional Resources**

- For more information about what archeologists do, go to this Texas Historical Commission webpage:  
<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/archeology/what-does-archeologist-do>
- For additional archeology-related educational materials, go to the Texas Historical Commission Learning Resources webpage:  
<https://www.thc.texas.gov/education/learning-resources>

# Activity: WHO MADE THIS?



Hundreds of years from now, a team of **archeologists** will find the **artifact** you have in your hands. It might be in pieces, so they'll have to **reconstruct** it. They'll study what it's made of, what the decorations mean, and how this artifact might have been used in its time.

Answer these questions to create an artifact that represents a real or imagined **culture** that made, used, and decorated this object.

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What group of people made this object? When? Where did they live? What skills or talents was this culture known for?

What material is this artifact made from? How did the culture use this item?

Sketch the designs on this object. Write a description of how each design represents the culture.

# Activity: PIECING HISTORY TOGETHER



## Artifact Deconstruction

- Collect the materials for this activity.
- Place the pot(s)/plate(s) in an old pillowcase or cloth bag. Close the top securely with a rubber band so no pieces fly out.
- Put on safety glasses. Lay the case or bag on the ground. Use a hammer to break up the objects into medium-sized pieces.
- Carefully pour out the pieces into a single layer on a tabletop or other flat surface.  
Note: If you're doing this activity inside, consider covering the tabletop with cloth or paper before pouring the pieces out.

## Artifact Reconstruction

- Collect the materials for this activity.
- If you're reconstructing more than one artifact, carefully sort and separate the pieces that go together. Look closely at the designs for clues.
- Once the pieces are sorted, begin putting them back together like a puzzle. Be careful of any sharp edges.
- Once you're sure of where a piece belongs, tape or glue it in place.

## Reflections

You've just done an activity similar to what professional archeologists do in the field. Think about these questions:

- What can archeologists learn by piecing broken artifacts together?
- What did you learn by doing this activity?
- What challenges did you have in completing the activity?
- What other topics related to archeology would you like to investigate now? Why?