

LEARN • PRACTISE
EXCAVATE!

LONDON
GRID FOR LEARNING



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Teacher Guide | Excavate!



The “Excavate” section is where the children can get their hands dirty in actually using what they have learned in the previous sections to carry out a real excavation in their school grounds.

Although more preparation is involved for the teacher, this activity is of great value for the children in providing them with a unique opportunity in actually testing their historical inquiry skills. They find it an immensely enjoyable experience too!

The children will clearly learn how distinct types of evidence can be used to make claims about the past. You will find that they will come up with different hypotheses on what objects were used for or the function of a particular area, which may be revised later. Through weighing evidence against each other, they will develop their critical thinking skills and come to the important realisation that piecing together the past is rarely straightforward!

HOW TO VIEW THE VIDEOS

There are three ways to access the *Excavate!* videos:

1. Visit www.idig.lgfl.org.uk *Excavate!*
2. If you are reading this document on a device or online, click or tap the link to view the video.
3. If you are reading a printed version, you can scan the QR codes with your smartphone or tablet.

Activity | Introduction

Carry out an excavation within your school grounds.

Note: The first part of the Learn, Practice, Excavate resource gives the information necessary for pupils to understand the principles of archaeology and the methods that archaeologists use to learn about the past, such as why we excavate in layers or the importance of context and recording. This part needs to be completed, in particular the activity Mapping your School, in order to carry out part three successfully.



[Introduction to Excavate!](#)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By actively engaging and challenging pupils in a real-life excavation through teamwork, they will gain an understanding of the methods of historical enquiry that is much more likely to be retained. The skills of critical thinking and observation can also be applied to other areas of the curriculum.

Highlights

- The difference between evidence from material remains themselves and making inference
- The importance of context in archaeology and how looting is so destructive
- How our knowledge of the past is not only incomplete, but can also be subjective

This activity is for a generic culture so that the children can just focus on the principles and techniques of archaeology. However, it can be modified to reflect a particular culture in time, according to the teacher's needs, age of the group and time period under study.

them answer the questions you have set.

See the Materials Annex for a full list



[What artefacts can you use in the excavation?](#)



You can use everyday items such as pottery (broken and complete), fabrics with interesting designs on them, beads, seeds, dried fruit, nuts, snail shells etc. If you are covering a particular topic in history, you can use objects that existed during this time period.

Much of these items can be found in your house and extra items can be purchased cheaply from charity shops or local car boot sales.

MATERIALS



[What equipment do you need?](#)



You will need a variety of items that replicate / illustrate the life of an ancient community. You should think about what you want the children to learn so that you can use items that can help

PRELIMINARY WORK



[Measuring the excavation pit](#)





[Checking your excavation pit measurements](#)



The test pits are created by measuring out a 1 x 1 metre square, checking the hypotenuse is 1.41 m. Place a stake at each corner and wind string around each stake so the 1 m you are excavating can be clearly seen. You can also place 2 pegs behind each stake when you are winding the string to keep the string taut. A line level can be used if you want to measure the artefacts found below the surface. It will ensure that the string is level.

Depending on the hardness of the soil and the fitness of the person digging, remove between 20-50 cm of soil using a shovel.

Use an area of the school that is grassed, preferably flat and is not obstructed in any way. The activity can be carried out on a rise, if there is no level ground available, with the understanding that the square itself will be at an angle.

Depending on the quality of soil, it can be reused in the excavation or kept to one side to be used as backfill at the end of the activity. Often the amount of twigs and stones soil can cause confusion for the children though and so it is best to replace the dug soil with potting soil.



[Digging the excavation pits](#)



The test pits then represent the foundations of an ancient house and the children will need to work out what part of the house they are in, such as the kitchen or bedroom.

With this in mind make up each test pit with artefacts – in the video example, one pit is part of a kitchen, another is a midden (rubbish pit) and another contains a burial, that has been looted. Therefore, I will be adding artefacts that reflect this.

You will need a space large enough for your 1 x 1 m squares (test pits), with at least 2 m of space around them. Also check that there are no cables or water mains in the area.

Depending on the available help, 3-4 children can work on one test pit. The maximum of 16 children (4 test pits) should be used for this activity, so it will need to be repeated for the other half of the class.



[How to use the excavation pits](#)



With the exception of the looted test pit, make sure you pack the earth in tightly.

TEST PIT - LOOTED BURIAL



[Interpreting the looted pit](#)



This pit has been looted and so the soil is completely mixed up and so the artefacts are also mixed up within the soil.

- Remains of a textile
- 12 turquoise beads
- 4 gold-painted beads
- 42 purple beads
- 16 glass beads
- Shell
- Small jug

TEST PIT - MIDDEN (RUBBISH PIT)

- Seeds/beans
- Broken ceramics
- Piece of material with strange writing on it
- Beads
- Thread
- Pieces of chert
- 3 small figures
- Wool balls



[Interpreting the midden \(rubbish pit\)](#)



TEST PIT - KITCHEN

- Twigs, charcoal/ash (hearth) and remains of a broken pot, animal bones, seeds/beans
- Chalk powder for the remains of a floor.
- A mortar and pestle with mint inside, one complete bowl, one broken bowl, snail shells and nuts



[Interpreting the kitchen pit](#)



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE ANCIENT CULTURE

It has been recently reported in the local news that workmen clearing an area for housing near to your school have found the remains of an ancient building. Local county records mention

that the **Sdnaldoow** (spell your school name backwards) culture used to live here about 1000 years ago.

Subsequent excavations that were carried out at this construction site found remains of several houses. Pieces of pottery and food were discovered as well as hearths (fire areas used for cooking), suggesting that these areas may have been kitchens. Archaeologists also found middens (rubbish pits) that contained seeds, broken pots and pieces of chert. Finally, a burial of a female, wearing several necklaces of coloured beads, pottery and a type of sea shell that is not local to the area was found. Little of her clothing was left, but she appeared to have been wrapped in brightly coloured textiles.

Archaeologists suspect that there might be further remains in your school and so they spent some time yesterday setting up three test pits for excavation in your school grounds. However, before they could excavate they were asked to help on a rescue excavation up north in Manchester and so decided to complete the work later. However, last night, some scallywags broke into the school grounds and started digging one of the test pits removing the finds. Fortunately, Rufus, the school's guard dog, smelt their shenanigans and chased after the people. Unfortunately, they managed to escape leaving one test pit in complete disarray.

In response, the archaeologists have asked if you could excavate these test pits immediately and salvage what is left. They would be extremely grateful if you could as it many people in the UK want to know about this culture, including the Queen! If you help, you might even get knighted!

Are you ready to accept the challenge?

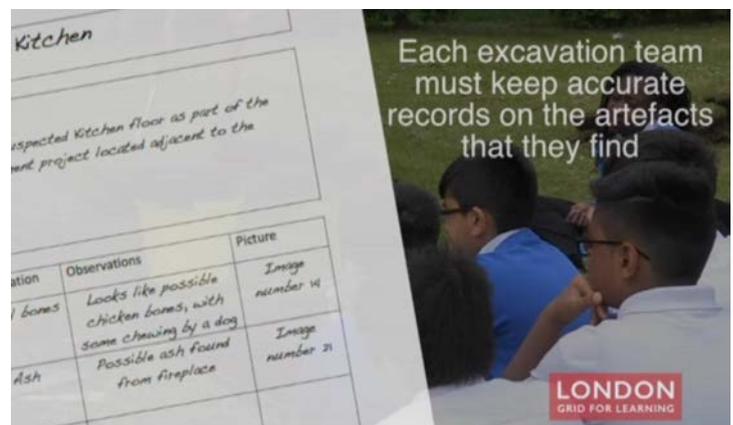
Activity | Part 1 - Excavation



[Introducing the children to the task](#)



The teacher will decide which role each child has in their team - one will be the excavator, one will screen the material and bag the artefacts and one will take pictures and complete the level form. They can be swapped over if needed, so that each child has a turn at each role.



[Allocating tasks within the pit groups](#)



Explain to the children why test pits are used, the principle of stratification and how to dig, screen, bag and complete the level forms.

Ensure sure the children understand that they will be excavating a test pit to not just find things, but to understand the ways of life from the finds.



[Understanding stratification and the importance of context](#)



[An exciting find!](#)



At quiet moments during the activity you can also discuss the issues of preservation and looting.

NOW THE FUN STARTS!



[How to make sense of your excavated finds](#)



Children will start with the looted test pit. Have the children make note of what they see and answer the following questions:

- What part of the house do you think this is?
- What do you think was removed from the test pit, if anything?
- Does what is left tell you anything about the people or their culture?

One child will excavate, while one will fill in the level form and the last will be sieving the soil (using the

screen) and bagging the artefacts.

Digging will be suspended momentarily when artefacts are found. At this point a picture will be taken and the artefact section in the level form will be completed. The artefact will only be removed and bagged after the whole area has been checked first for other items. Whilst digging, the children should be thinking about what room they could be in, using the artefacts as clues to the lives of the ancient people.

When the excavation has been completed, it is time to move indoors to analyse and discuss the finds.

Activity | Part 2 - Analysis & Interpretation



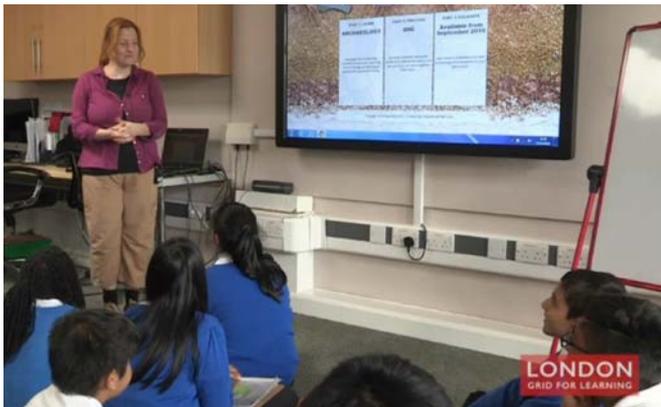
[Exploring the kitchen test pit](#)



child taking an artefact and both measuring and drawing it, noting its characteristics and what they think it might have been used for.

They then should answer some of the following questions:

- What area of the house did you think you were excavating in and give reasons why?
- What do the artefacts tell you about the culture who left them behind? What did they eat? What did they wear? What did they make?
- What further tests could you do to prove your ideas about how they lived?
- Was there anything you were surprised to find?
- Thinking about the problem of preservation, what could have been in the house, but has since disintegrated?
- Why is looting so destructive?



[Follow up in the classroom](#)



Activity | Part 3 - Report of Findings

The pupils write up their conclusions and then present them to each other. They could do this in the form of a news article.



[Making sense of your excavated finds](#)



THINGS TO NOTE

Loose soil is much easier to dig, this is why the squares are dug first before the children work on them. It goes without saying that in a real excavation we start from scratch and we don't have any idea of what could be beneath.

Make sure that the children scrape across the soil with the trowel rather than digging downwards and making holes.

Do cover the test pits if it rains as wet soil is very heavy and difficult to dig.

Make sure the artefacts you choose give answers to your questions and the story behind them, don't just use random items.

Activity | ANNEX 1 - WHAT YOU WILL NEED



[How to successfully excavate the test pits](#)



GENERAL EQUIPMENT

- Potting soil
- Plastic sheet to cover squares in case of rain
- Chalk powder (optional)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EQUIPMENT

- Trowels
- Dustpans
- Measuring tape
- Garden screen
- Stakes (preferably metal, such as tent pegs)
- String
- Line levels
- Buckets
- Small plastic bags
- Pens, waterproof black markers
- Brushes
- Level Forms
- Camera
- Small whiteboard
- Clipboards
- Gloves

EXAMPLES OF ARTEFACTS

- Seeds and nuts
- Charcoal/ash/twigs
- Dried fruit or beans
- Pottery – complete and broken
- Strong smelling herbs/spices
- Beads
- Shell
- Wood or stone objects
- Cooked animal bones
- Ornaments
- Textiles

Activity | ANNEX 2 - LEVEL FORM

Name of School:			
Name of Class / Year:		Description:	
Description:			
Artefact No.	Identification	Observations	Picture

Artefact No.	Identification	Observations	Picture