

WORLD OF THE
PHARAOHS

TREASURES OF EGYPT REVEALED

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ARKANSAS ARTS CENTER



**FROM ARCHEOLOGY
TO MUSEUM:**

**HOW DO OBJECTS GET
TO A MUSEUM?**

Description: This series of activities focuses on the tools used by scientists and scholars, as well as careers that allow us to explore and study ancient cultures. Students will participate in a simulated dig exploring scientific methods used by **archeologists**. They will engage in research and explore skills in art, art history and science to reassemble objects as **conservators** (learning the difference between conservation and restoration). They will engage in **scholarly research** reviewing field notes, utilizing comparative analysis to date, and write about the objects. They will become museum **curators** to display the objects, as well as tackle ethical questions regarding ownership.

Archeology:

An **archeologist** is one who studies the human past. Archeology's initial objective is the construction of cultural chronology. Its intermediate objective is the reconstruction of past lifeways. Its ultimate objective is the discovery of the processes which underlie and condition human behavior. Archaeology (and alternately Archeology) is a science well suited for anyone who enjoys biology, botany, geology, chemistry, history, psychology, art, and solving a great puzzle.

George Reisner became one of the most important Egyptologists of the 20th century due, in part, to the scientific method of documentation that he developed. His methods were detailed and incorporated photography as a way to preserve information discovered during an archeological dig. Archeology is a destructive action which, once an object is removed from its context, much information is lost. By carefully recording each detail, information is retained.

The majority of the objects displayed at the Arkansas Arts Center World of the Pharaohs: *Treasures of Egypt Revealed*, come from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and were found during years of excavation led by George Reisner.

Conservation:

A **conservator** is a professional who works on the conservation of objects. Their work involves determining the structural stability of an object, addressing problems of chemical and physical deterioration, and performing corrective treatment based on an evaluation of the aesthetic, historic, and scientific characteristics of the object. Conservators are usually trained at a conservation graduate training program.

Objects on exhibition were conserved in many ways. Conservation strategies change with the creation of new technologies. Looking at ancient objects closely will give you a better idea of *when* an object was conserved. It is a rare occasion when an object is uncovered in perfect condition.

Scholarship:

A **scholar** is a person who does advanced study in a particular field. Research scholars may concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical

methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and of the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself.

Scholars research and compare to gather insight into the use of an object. Scholarship, like other areas of study, changes with the discovery of new finds and also with the advance of technology.

Museum Curator:

A **curator** is one who manages or oversees, as the administrative director of a museum collection. They may also be an exhibition organizer, somebody who organizes and chooses the items in an exhibition at a museum or gallery intended to showcase items and educate.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Goals:

1. To increase students' knowledge of methods used to learn about ancient history
2. To involve students in an interactive simulation analyzing the study of objects and their role in a "civilization"
3. To engage students in thinking about ethical dilemmas surrounding the field of archeology
4. To expose students to the multitude of careers involved in understanding the ancient world
5. To take an object from a dig site to a museum display and give meaning to those who view it

Objectives:

1. Use scientific steps to unearth objects
2. Use scientific methods to document a dig site
3. To work as a team to interpret a site
4. To conserve objects that are found
5. To preserve objects for the future
6. To discuss ethical challenges in which the field of archeology is confronted
7. To use research methods to discover possible meaning of objects
8. To display objects in a way that is accessible to the non-scholar
9. To create labels with vital and interpretive information

Materials:

Dig Pit:

- Any sized container with dirt fill. Suggested: a Tupperware tub 18" x 24" x 12"; a children's swim pool; or an out of doors constructed dig site that can be sectioned off in regular intervals.

- **Matrix** (sand, or clean fill) this is the material in which the artifacts, or features are encased and which must be removed to reveal the object.
- **Color chart** to record the color of the *matrix* and found materials
- **Artifacts and Features:** A mummy is an artifact, a pyramid is a feature. Your artifacts can come from a variety of creative places representing any ancient, or future, “civilization.”
- **Suggestion:** Social Studies teacher may team with Fine Arts teachers by asking Fine Arts students to research and create Egyptian-style artifacts.

Examples of artifacts:

1. Doll faces covered with aluminum foil, gold foil, or paint
2. Brass or ornate vases
3. Beads (simulating the ancient culture you are studying)
4. Tools
5. Broken pottery (preferably with pieces missing)
6. Replicated objects (sandals, game pieces, glass animals, masks, jewelry)
7. Organic matter (seeds, dried vegetation)
8. Stones that may form a “building foundation”
9. Charcoal within a stone area representing a cook area
10. Forms for documenting dig site (forms should have a grid over a sketch resembling the dig site)

Tools:

- Paint brushes
- Toothbrush
- String
- Thumbtacks
- Note books/sketch pads
- Rulers
- Small trowels

Conservation:

- Brushes
- Elastic bands
- String
- Elmer’s Glue (reversible, water-based glue)
- Clay
- Watercolor
- Watercolor brushes
- Q-Tips
- Sketch pad

Research Scholars:

- Books for research and comparison

- Objects that would “date” earlier or later. (It might be fun to have an object from a “previous find” that can be compared to a newly found object. Make it turn out to be something other than it is labeled based the new find and new context.)
- Color print cards of comparative objects from other times and/or cultures that would help students build context.
- A form that follows the object from dig, to research and conservation. This form should remain with the object documenting every action taken.

Curator: Create a “museum exhibition” and interpret the scholarship for the novice.

- Pedestal
- “Museum” space
- Label material

Museum Label

Example

Title of artifact
Date or period it was made
Materials used in making this object
Artist, if known
50 Words or fewer about the object
Date found
Catalogue number

Scientific Method:

- Ask a Question
- Investigate Background Information
- Construct a Hypothesis
- Test Your Hypothesis through comparative analysis
- Analyze Your Data and Draw a Conclusion
- Communicate Your Results

Procedure:

I. Archaeology:

1. Teacher will bury objects in dig site
2. Divide students into teams

3. Students create an evenly divided grid with string *over the top* of the dig site
4. Students carefully excavate the dig site using brushes, small trowels
5. Students record and sketch found objects in field notes

II. Conservation:

1. Students gently clean objects with water, Q-tip, brushes
2. Piece objects together by laying on a table (rubbing them will further chip or break them)
3. Replace “missing” parts with suitable, but distinguishable material such as clay, paper mache, or any other common material
4. Make sure any “modern” material can be reversed
5. Students sketch their idea of what object originally looked like
6. Students fill a condition report of the final product

III. Scholar

1. Make careful observations of your assigned objects
2. Sketch the object from several views
3. Write a description that would assure the object could always be identified
4. Compare the object to images in books and online resources searching collections in other museums
5. Create meaning and context for the object by writing a paragraph stating your findings and what you interpret the object to be

IV. Curator

1. Review current scholarship and primary source material
2. Develop an ethical argument why the object should be taken to “your” museum and not stay “in situ” or in a museum in the country of origin.
3. Write an interpretive label
4. Display object
5. Prepare a presentation about the object using the information given by the scholars and presented to a non-scholar audience
6. Create a *Museum in a Classroom* and invite other classes to view the objects
7. Lead a classroom discussion about the ethical questions involved in placing objects in museums in countries other than where they were found

Outcome:

- Students have elementary skills in interpreting ancient objects based on their own experiences, observations, and ideas formulated through these activities.
- Students will understand the issues surrounding ownership of objects.
- When students look at original ancient objects in Museums they will have basic understanding of marks, restorations, and label information.
- Students will have a better understanding how the information in their Social Studies books was gathered.
- Students will begin to understand why it is important to collect ancient objects.



- Students will begin to understand why the study of ancient cultures is important to their own lives.