

Create your own mini archaeological dig

*Hi, I'm Jane the archaeologist.
Join me for some dirt-digging,
story-telling, mystery-solving fun!*



Archaeologists dig the ground to find out how ancient people lived, what they looked like, what tools they used, and more. They do this by looking at the objects that people from the past left behind. Over the years, discarded objects, abandoned buildings and even entire towns become covered and buried. Layers of dust and dirt gather on top of objects and places, and, little-by-little, they slowly get covered up. Archaeologists dig under the ground in set ways to find what people of the past have left behind. This is called excavation or a 'dig' for short.

There are various ways to recreate a mini archaeological dig. Why not try using a shoe box, sand tray, or go large and use a plastic paddling pool? Use tools such as trowels and brushes to uncover buried artefacts and carefully record them on a grid to show where each object was found. Use the archaeological dig record sheets and archaeology field diary to record, identify, describe and analyse your finds. Then create a fun display to show off your important finds!

You can become an archaeologist like Jane in this fun activity!

Read on, get digging, and see what you can find!



1 Prepare your dig (30-60 mins)

You will need:

- A small to medium container (e.g. foil-lined shoe box, medium to large plastic storage box, small plastic dustbin or small plastic paddling pool)
- Enough potting or garden soil and sand (optional) to fill the container
- Select some of the artefacts from the lists below to bury. Choose a mix of **organic** (things that once lived) and **inorganic** (things that never lived) objects as it gives more chances to find objects and makes it more realistic:



Inorganic: pottery pieces (e.g. piece of broken cup or plant pots), old coins or keys, stone/flint, beads, pieces of plastic (remember to put any plastic in the top layer of your dig as this is probably the most modern material)

Organic materials: leaves, twigs, acorns, pieces of wood, empty shells, apple core, pieces of fabric or paper

- Ruler
- A suitable outdoor or indoor space (you may want to place a plastic sheet under the container to catch any spillages)
- Artefact Recording Sheets (number of sheets = number of objects you bury)

Bury your artefacts:

- Prepare your dig site at least one day in advance of your dig
- Put about a 10cm layer of soil/sand into the container and bury two or three of the artefacts in this layer (you can do thinner layers if you are using a smaller container like a shoe box, but you will need smaller objects to bury)
- Add another 10cm of soil or sand and bury two or three more of the artefacts
- Continue to do this until you reach almost the top of the container, to bury all your artefacts
- Add a top layer of soil ensuring all your artefacts are fully covered
- Add water to keep the soil moist (but do not waterlog). Leave container overnight or for maximum for up to 8 weeks keeping soil moist (the longer you leave it the more changes you will see in the artefacts when buried)

Jane's TIP: Use different soil types for each layer to make it more realistic, like plain soil, soil with stones in it, mixture of soil and sand, just like a real archaeological excavation.

2 Dig it!

Let the dirt-digging fun begin!



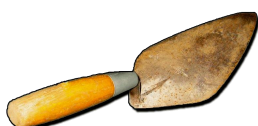
You will need:

- Your prepared excavation pit
- Artefact Recording Sheets, Archaeological Finds Recording Grid, Archaeological Field Journal
- Plastic sheeting or newspapers
- A finds tray – to put excavated artefacts in (a plastic seed box is ideal)
- Container to put the excavated soil in (like a bucket)
- Small trowel or other digging tool (e.g. spoon, small garden hand spade, dustpan-optional)
- 1cm mesh sieve, to sieve the soil for any small objects (optional)
- Old toothbrush and bowl of water to clean artefacts (pastry brush optional)
- Pencil and ruler
- Gloves and apron (optional)

Digging up your artefacts

- Put your prepared pit on to the plastic sheet or newspapers (leave room on plastic sheet for excavated soil).
- Set out your finds tray next to you by the pit
- Excavate your container by removing 5cm deep layers of soil at a time working across the pit with your trowel or other digging tool
- Scoop out excavated soil using your digging tool and spade (or dustpan) and put on to the plastic sheet or into a bucket.
- If you have a sieve, then you can sieve excavated soil to look for smaller artefacts you may have missed
- Before you remove any artefacts you find, carefully clear the soil from around the edges, avoiding damage to the surface of the object and record the location for each one on the Archaeological Dig Recording Grid (e.g. B4)
- Then carefully remove artefacts from the soil and put them in the finds tray
- You can clean stones, shells and pottery more thoroughly using a toothbrush and water, but artefacts of wood, paper, metal and fabric should not be washed or cleaned in water, these can be carefully cleaned with a dry soft brush (a pastry brush is ideal)
- Record your excavated artefacts on the Artefact Recording Sheets
- Keep excavating across the pit in layers, recording artefacts as you find them, until you reach the bottom of your container

JANE'S TIP: 'Excavate in layers rather than dig down into the soil as this is how a real archaeologists work, by carefully removing soil layer by layer'



3 Exhibiting your finds

You will need:

- Your excavated artefacts
- Paper and pens
- Suitable dry and cool display area

Excavation is only one part of my job. Next, we look at what we found and figure out what objects were made by people, and what those objects say about the people that made them!



Displaying your artefacts

You have now excavated your artefacts, examined them and recorded what you have found out about them! Important finds once excavated are then carefully preserved for future study. Some of these objects will often end up being displayed in museums.

You can now create your own display for your excavated artefacts. You can place labels next to each artefact to let people know the most important information about each one (remember you organic remains may continue to decay so they will need to be displayed in a container in order to preserve them).

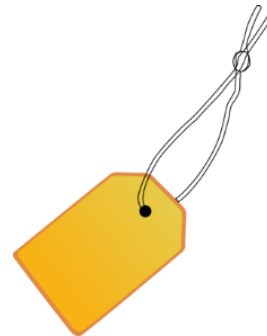
Draw your labels on paper using the headings below and put them next to your artefacts:

Artefact:

Date discovered:

Location of discovery:

Size:



Once you have created your display, why not share photos of your mini museum displays with us on social media?

Archaeological Finds Recording Grid



Dig carefully to find buried artefacts, then record the position of each find on your grid and place each artefact in a plastic bag. Label each bag with the grid reference of where it was found.

	A	B	C	D
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Archaeologist's name: _____

Date of dig: _____

Artefact Recording Sheet

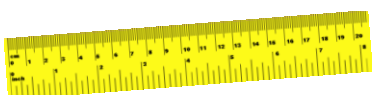


The Artefact:	Grid reference (location of artefact):
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What is the artefact made from?	
What colour is the artefact?	
Are there any patterns on it?	
Is the artefact complete?	
How long is it?	
How wide is it?	
How high is it?	
How does it feel in your hands?	
What do you think it is or was used for?	
Do a sketch of your artefact	

Name of archaeologist _____

Date of excavation _____



Archaeological Field Journal



You can also use this sheet to record your observations and ideas about the artefacts you discover.

Describe your artefact (shape, colour, patterns, texture, size):

How old do you think it is? Why do you think this?

Materials (what is it made from?):

What questions would you ask to find out more about this object?

What do you think it was used for and who do you think made it?

Use this space to draw a picture of your artefact

Look closely using a magnifying glass

