Teaching with Archaeology

Why Archaeology?
Archaeology can be a wonderful tool to add to the teacher’s toolkit. It is a multidisciplinary subject that can allow educators to access many different subjects, and open up new and exciting possibilities. Rather than teaching archaeology on its own, we suggest making it work for your classroom, using it as a way of accessing standard subjects in new ways. We have listed some suggestions below, but the possibilities are endless. Some applications are expected, and some might be surprising, but they will all be engaging! Each suggestion is followed by a few of the Massachusetts State Standards that it covers. For more detailed activity plans, check out our website at www.maeconlearning.org.

Arts: Theatre
Activity: Create a short play based on historical information gathered from an archaeological site. Research the people who used a site and what they left behind. These details can be used to set the scene, create backdrops and props, and inform character decisions. Can focus on a local archaeological site, or a well-known site from around the world.

Standards: 1.3 Pretend to be someone else, creating a character based on stories or through improvisation, using properties (props), costumes, and imagery. 2.4 Create a scene or play with a beginning, middle, and end based on an original idea, a story, or other forms of literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry). 3.7 Select a scene from original or scripted material, conduct research on the historical period, genre, playwright, and other relevant information, determine casting, staging, and technical requirements, and articulate the rationale for all artistic choices. 4.12 Conduct research to inform the design of sets, costumes, sound, and lighting for a dramatic production.

Arts: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts
Activity: Study a small assemblage of artifacts (can use a museum display, replicas, or photos). Think about how these items represent the people who made and used them. Students may need to do some research on the various historical groups in order to fully understand their perspectives.

Standards: 6.3 Interpret the meanings of artistic works by explaining how the subject matter and/or form reflect the events, ideas, religions, and customs of people living at a particular time in history.

English/Language Arts
Activity: Compare fictional accounts, historical accounts, and archaeological records of the same time, place, or event. Think about why authors and historians might have made the changes they did, and what the differences in the account could mean to the reader. If someone read only one of these accounts, what might they miss or not think about? How can these accounts be biased? What can archaeology contribute that is different from written accounts?

Standards: Literature 7.9 Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

Activity: Read, watch, or listen to presentations of pseudoarchaeological theories (such as “Ancient Aliens”). Evaluate the way that these arguments are presented, and compare them to arguments by archaeologists and other scientists. How do pseudoarchaeologists skew the evidence to make their claims seem more believable?

Standards: Informational Text 6.8 (and up) Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not. Informational Text 6.9 (and up) Compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another.

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6.3 (and up) Delineate a speaker’s argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

**Literacy in History/Social Studies 6.8 (and up)** Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

**Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6.8 (and up)** Distinguish among facts, reasoned judgment based on research findings, and speculation in a text.

**Foreign Language**

**Activity:** Choose a historical event or period from one of the countries where the language is spoken. Write letters or emails requesting information about that event from museums or historical organizations in the chosen country. Use the internet and other sources to gather information related to the historical event in the language. Synthesize and write a report or presentation about the historical event.

**Standards:**
- **3.11** Give presentations on planned activities or on cultural topics.
- **3.15** Write letters requesting specific information.
- **4.12** Identify, place in chronological order, and describe the significance of important historical events in the target culture.
- **7.1-4** Obtain information and knowledge related to other disciplines from sources in the target language.

**Math**

**Activity:** Research a particular set of archaeological dates, such as the Native American history of the Boston area. Ask students to lay these events out on a 100-foot timeline, calculating the placement of each event based on its relative distance from the beginning and ending dates. This way, the timeline will be an accurate, proportional representation of the length of time between events, giving the students a sense of the passing of time.

**Standards:**
- **2.MD.6** Represent whole numbers as lengths from 0 on a number line diagram with equally spaced points corresponding to the numbers 0, 1, 2, …, and represent whole-number sums and differences within 100 on a number line diagram.

**Activity:** Investigate how archaeologists configure their excavations. In a sandbox, focus on laying out a grid system from a set point (the concept of “area”), measuring depths as they dig down, and measuring how much soil has been removed from an excavation unit (the concept of “volume”).

**Standards:**
- **2.MD.9** Generate measurement data by measuring lengths of several objects to the nearest whole unit or by making repeated measurements of the same object.
- **4.MD.3** Apply the area and perimeter formulas for rectangles in real-world and mathematical problems.
- **5.MD.5** Relate volume to the operations of multiplication and addition and solve real-world and mathematical problems involving volume.

**Science and Technology**

**Activity:** Use archaeology to learn about natural processes that create, move, and redistribute soils. Think about volcanic eruptions, decomposition, erosion, and others. Have students create their own archaeological sites and then enact “natural processes” on them to demonstrate how these sites can get buried. Notice how different processes create different types of layers. Use this to have a discussion about stratigraphy.

**Standards:**
- **Earth and Space Science 3-5.12** Give examples of how the surface of the earth changes due to slow processes such as erosion and weathering, and rapid processes such as landslides, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes.

**Activity:** Choose an everyday object, such as a pencil, and ask students to analyze what technologies were necessary to create it. For example, to create a pencil, one needs to have mining to get the metal, rubber processing to make the eraser, milling to shape the wood, and so on. Have students research each of these technologies and compare what would have been necessary for an object in the past and a similar one in the present.

**Standards:**
- **Technology/Engineering 6-8.4.4** Explain basic processes in manufacturing systems, e.g., cutting, shaping, assembling, joining, finishing, quality control, and safety.
- **Technology/Engineering PreK-2.1.1** Identify and describe characteristics of natural materials and human-made materials.
- **Technology/Engineering 3-5.1.1** Identify materials used to accomplish a design task based on a specific property, e.g., strength, hardness, and flexibility.