

How can Archaeology help children to learn?

Touching the past is exciting!

When we are motivated it is easier for us to learn. People have always had a fascination for the past and Archaeology allows us to explore the past by actually coming into physical contact with it and using our imaginations.

We can begin to learn about the human needs of past societies and how people went about meeting them. We compare how people lived in the past to our own time, and marvel at the differences and often the similarities, between the two.

National Curriculum History: Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

Archaeology has a crucial role to play in the History curriculum where children examine different types of evidence across the key stages. Archaeological remains are original and therefore give us a primary source of evidence.

Areas of Study: Key Stage 1

Children at KS 1 will be looking at a time beyond living memory, whether that be from the lives of grandparents or much further back. They can be introduced to Archaeology by investigating all kinds of evidence for the past, comparing 'old' with 'new' when looking at things people used, buildings people lived in and so on.

Areas of Study: Key Stage 2

Archaeology makes a major contribution here. In particular it has a vital role to play in learning about the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in Britain. We do have some written records from these periods which have come down to us in the form of copies and translations over the centuries and these are valuable sources of knowledge. But such evidence is very rare. The archaeological perspective may also be integral (or at the least, useful) to a local area study.

Looking at surviving buildings and artefacts from Tudor times will also support the Tudor World teaching programme, while an awareness of the work of archaeologists will underpin both the Ancient Greeks programme and World Study options.

Areas of Study: Key Stage 3

From Year 7 onwards, pupils continue to investigate and increasingly compare sources of evidence. For the Area of study, Britain 1066-1500, the evidence of surviving buildings, archaeological sites and artefacts from the Medieval period should be investigated alongside the historical (ie. written or illustrated) sources for the time. Where appropriate this can include work on the local area. The variety of sources of evidence from Medieval times onward is generally greater. So pupils can

be encouraged even more to assess the benefits and limitations of different types and make judgements about the usefulness of each.

For those of you who are Archaeology addicts, take the Neolithic Revolution option for A European Study before 1914. For prehistoric periods of our past, material evidence is virtually the only source we have for how people lived.

Skills, Knowledge and Understanding across the Key Stages

By introducing young children to a variety of sources and resources, including activities with actual artefacts, reconstruction images, visits to historic sites and so on, you will be helping them to develop all of these areas. There are ideas for practical activities and places to visit in this guide, plus details of other resource providers who can support you.

Making learning enjoyable!

Finally - as teachers you will know that when we are well motivated it is far easier for us to learn. The great thing about Archaeology is that it is about real things - things which have survived over the centuries. The idea of something used by real living, breathing people 100's or 1000's of years ago has an abiding appeal for many people, children and adults alike ... If you can actually see and touch it, even better!

Children with Special Needs

Children with learning difficulties can benefit from the tactile nature of archaeological material. Some may be able to describe their impressions orally or in picture form, without the need to necessarily make a written record. Where possible a visit to an excavation, with someone available to show children what is happening, can make for a stimulating and memorable event.

A Cross-Curricula Approach in the Primary School

Archaeology is a multi-disciplinary subject. While a teacher's main objective may be to incorporate it into a History programme, you can at the same time usefully apply it in other subjects. For example:

Technology

Looking at artefacts*, standing buildings, reconstruction models and drawings based on archaeological evidence. Compare different technologies throughout time. How do they compare with the present? Why do some designs change while others remain the same? Does this relate to function? Compare two very different

cultures (eg. the Romans and Anglo-Saxons). Were the technologies of one necessarily any 'better' than the other, or were they simply fulfilling different needs and desires?

Geography **

Using different sources to discover the development of a local site over a long period of time (eg. maps, archaeological evidence, landscape reconstructions, documents, aerial photographs, place-names). Can any peaks and troughs be identified in the site's development over a period of many centuries? How does the present use of the area compare with its history?

Science **

Looking at types and uses of materials in finds and buildings. What materials were used and why? Consider the survivability of different materials when buried in the ground and in different soil conditions. Conservation methods for artefacts.

Maths **

Recording intact standing buildings and making estimates from ruins and only partial remains. Estimate size and shape of a complete vessel using fragments of pottery from a loan box. Measure and draw finds, introducing scale. Investigate tessellation and create mosaics.

English

Talking and writing about virtually any project experience! Talk or write about a visit to a 'dig' and talking to an archaeologist. Discuss and list the main features of a find (colour, material etc.) and describe how it may have been used. Build a story around the 'life' of a single find (where and how it was used, how it became buried, how it was discovered and what happened to it then.).

* The word 'artefact' is used in this booklet when referring to a man-made object. You will often see the word 'finds'. This is a collective term for both man-made objects and naturally occurring objects (eg. bones, shells).

** Useful publications for a cross-curricula approach are Geography and the Historic Environment, Maths and the Historic Environment and Science and the Historic Environment. All three are produced by English Heritage Education Service (see 'National Contacts').

Fostering a balanced view

In introducing children to the nature of archaeological evidence they can be encouraged to assess both its benefits and its limitations. They can then begin to make judgements about its usefulness when we investigate the past.

Archaeology has great benefits:

- For the prehistoric periods it is the major source of evidence.
- Archaeology deals with tangible evidence. We are able to:
 - Find out about the technologies of the past and therefore people's practical skills and resourcefulness.
 - Learn about land use and organisation by examining the structural remains of different periods (eg. from a Roman town, an Anglo-Saxon settlement) and seeing how an area changes over time.
 - Quantify the evidence helping us to draw conclusions about the rarity or abundance of different types of finds, building materials etc. and therefore about relative value and availability.
- It enables us to learn about the everyday lives of society's ordinary people who may have been overlooked by ancient writers, or about whom written works may simply not have survived over the centuries.

But Archaeology is also subject to limitations:

- Where we dig is often dictated by town planners and developers. Most of the below-ground archaeology carried out in Britain today is of a 'Rescue' nature where excavation takes place prior to re-development. Each dig is like a piece of a jigsaw. The more pieces, the more complete the picture of the area becomes.
- The excavated remains from a site are only a sample of the activity that once took place as much of the original evidence has been lost. For example:
- Throughout perhaps centuries or more of a site's history, repeated day-to-day activities have disturbed or completely destroyed a great deal of original evidence. Digging foundations for buildings, 'robbing' and recycling building materials and making deep rubbish and cess pits (very common in the past) all resulted in severe disturbance of the underlying evidence of former generations. Organic materials buried in soils where warmth, oxygen and moisture are present will be decomposed by destructive bacteria. So objects and structures made of wood, textile, leather etc. buried in these conditions will eventually decay. Where any of these elements is missing there is a much better chance of survival eg. the wooden Bronze Age boat found in waterlogged soils (no air present, therefore no oxygen) at Dover in 1992. Valued materials like metals and glass were melted down and recycled to some extent in the past, so that the original object was destroyed.
- Excavation is labour intensive and therefore expensive. So steps are taken to assess the potential of a site before deciding whether to excavate (eg. researching any previous work and documentary sources, 'trial' trenching). Even when the decision is made to excavate, archaeologists can never be absolutely certain of the extent and quality of the evidence they are about to uncover.
- Digging is a destructive process and you don't get a second 'go' at it. How much we can learn from an excavation is to a degree dependant on the aims

and competence of those digging it! Archaeologists today gather and record evidence from all cultures that they encounter. However, prior to the mid-19th century antiquaries were more selective, largely concentrating on the 'glamorous' Classical periods and discarding the evidence of less attractive cultures. Therefore a good deal has been lost forever.