



ARCHAEOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Can we really know about the past
from things left behind?

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Students will analyze the objects in the *Cyrus Tang Hall of China*, either onsite at The Field Museum or online and think about how history is learned through objects. They will also theorize about what gaps can exist when stories are told through objects.

If you are planning to use this as part of a visit to The Field Museum, see the field trip guide on page 6.



Image: Archaeologists uncovering Late Neolithic Village Diorama,
photograph by Karen Bean for The Field Museum

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The *Cyrus Tang Hall of China* is one of the only exhibits in the United States that explores the anthropological story of China through its objects, instead of focusing on a different field, like art history. Archaeology, a branch of anthropology, explores human civilizations in the near and distant past through their material record—essentially what these societies left behind.

Archaeologists have made incredible discoveries that have changed the way we understand our past. For those studying pre-historic communities, where no written records exist, material remains offer evidence to draw conclusions and paint pictures of our ancestors around the world.

Material evidence is invaluable, but it might not reveal the whole story. Before the 1960s, scholars thought that China's earliest Neolithic societies arose in the Yellow

River Valley between 8000 and 5000 BC. This area was seen as the “cradle” of Chinese civilization, and it was believed that all Neolithic technologies and innovations spread from there. Based on more recent discoveries, however, we know that China's Neolithic traditions were much more diverse. The Field Museum's Chinese Neolithic artifacts, mostly assembled in the first half of the 20th century AD, reflect the scholarship of that time. If someone were to only look at these objects, they might draw the same conclusions—that Chinese civilization started in this one geographic region. However, Field Museum research today considers the expanding view of China's Neolithic, and the exhibit reflects this expanding view in object descriptions.

Keywords: 6-8, 9-12, object-based learning, world history, geography, archaeology, critical history, social empathy, historical empathy
Lens: history, geography, art, and anthropology

COMPELLING QUESTIONS

Can we really know about the past from things left behind?
 Can we describe the past accurately through objects?
 What do we miss when we rely solely on objects?
 What can we do about gaps in archaeological records?

OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze museum collections.
 Students will infer where gaps may exist.
 Students will propose ideas for learning about the past through objects.

STANDARDS

C3 Framework

D2.His.6 Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.

D2.His.7 Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past.

D2.His.8 Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.

D2.His.10 Detect possible limitations in the historical record based on evidence collected from different kinds of historical sources.

Common Core

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CPS Framework Alignment:

Grade 6, Unit 1: Introduction to Geography; Unit 7: Rise of Asia

Grade 9, Unit 1: Introduction to Geography

APPROXIMATE TIME

1-2 class periods

PREPARATION NOTES

Students will be working in groups to explore content.
 You may consider pre-selecting student groups.

GALLERY OF FOCUS

Students will explore the entire exhibition.

OTHER MATERIALS

Access to museum content in exhibit or online:
<http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>
 Graphic organizer
 Clipboards (in exhibit)
 "Evidence In the Un-written" Video:
<https://vimeo.com/188170558/71d99d4cd2>

PROCEDURES

› Engage

Ask students to pretend they are archaeologists five thousand years in the future studying our civilization. What do you think they would find? What materials would be likely to last five thousand years from now?

After brainstorming the initial list, students can work together to form ideas about what future archaeologists might think of our civilization.

Examples:

- If they found jewelry from today, they may think we have a fairly equal society, because most people wear jewelry, across different social groups.
- They may find weapons, and infer that we are a war-like people.

Ask students, “What wouldn’t they find? What parts of our material culture may not survive five thousand years? What wouldn’t they be able to learn about us? What questions do you think they might have about us?”

› Explore (Questions and Inquiry)

Explain that just as archaeologists living five thousand years in the future might have a hard time knowing who we really are, we have challenges getting a full picture of the civilizations that came before us. Archaeologists have discovered a lot over the past century, and we are constantly learning more with new discoveries.

In the *Cyrus Tang Hall of China*, they will find objects that span more than ten thousand years of Chinese history. It will be their job as critical archaeologists to make observations and draw conclusions about what we can learn from objects, and also to ask questions about what they think is missing.

Divide students into five groups. Each group will be responsible for exploring one of the five galleries in the *Hall of China*. While exploring the content of their gallery, they will use the graphic organizer, which asks them to make observations and inferences about what they see and ask questions about the objects they do not see.

Content can be explored in one of two ways:

- Visiting the museum in person
- Using the Online Exhibition: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>

› Explain (Apply Disciplinary Lens)

After exploring the galleries, students will report back to the other students about what they found. Groups can either present to the whole class, or students can break into new groups with one member from each team sharing their findings.

While sharing, have them think about the compelling question—can we describe the past accurately based on what we find? What are the big stories they think are missing across the galleries?

PROCEDURES (CONTINUED)

› Elaborate (Gather and Evaluate Evidence)

Once they have explored and shared about objects in the galleries, have students learn more about how these objects are uncovered.

Share the “Evidence in the Un-written” video <https://vimeo.com/188170558/71d99d4cd2> with students. Have a class discussion based on the following questions:

- Why is archaeology important?
- What is the difference between survey archaeology and excavations?
- What does archaeological evidence tell us that we can't learn from written sources?
- What limits does archaeology have?

Students can conduct their own research on archaeology.

Several rails in the exhibit and online exhibition discuss how specific objects were found, including

- How Archaeologists Unearth the Past: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-1/case-108/g1-8_m1_b4
- Early Scholarship Found Only Part of the Story: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-1/case-103/g1-3_m1_b2
- Discovering How a Village was Organized: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-1/case-108/g1-8_m1_b5
- What Archaeologists Learn from Graves: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-1/case-108/g1-8_m1_b6
- Going Beyond the Artifacts: Field Museum Research in China Today: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-1/case-109/g1-9_m1_b5
- What is Left of Ancient Cities: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-2/case-204/g2-4_m1_b1/what-is-left-of-ancient-cities
- A Curator's Last Trip to China : http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-2/case-204/g2-4_m1_b4/a-curators-last-trip-to-china
- Archaeology of the Silk Road: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-5/case-501/archaeology-of-the-silk-road>
- The Java Sea Shipwreck: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-5/case-503>
- Collected as the Empire Fell: http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/gallery-5/case-506/g5-6_m2_b1/collected-as-the-empire-fell

Students can explore these topics using the online exhibit or in person. They can also do additional research on specific objects and sites that interest them.

› Evaluate (Develop Claims, Communicate and Critique Conclusions)

Direct students to return to the original question – Can we tell the truth about the past based on what we find? Have students construct an argument, citing specific evidence from the exhibit and their research. Have them consider all of the discussion questions explored in the activity:

ENRICHING THE LESSON

Background Knowledge Needed:

Students will benefit from knowing about the field of archaeology, but will learn more over the course of the exhibit. Some background knowledge in Chinese history will help them interpret objects, but they can use the content from the exhibit to build their background knowledge.

Anticipated Misconceptions:

Students may be surprised to discover gaps in archaeological records and their impact on our understanding of the past.

Methods to Build Empathy:

Historical empathy

Students will build understanding of the gaps in our own knowledge about the past, which will encourage them to consider additional perspectives.

Social empathy

Students will be working together in groups and forming consensus. This will require active listening, restating each other's ideas, and engaging in discussion.

Opportunities for Informed Action and Contemporary Connections:

Students can apply this understanding to current events issues by determining where there are gaps in knowledge now and how that impacts what we know and do. They can share their ideas in blog posts or other public forums.

DIFFERENTIATION

For an additional challenge, students can explore other exhibits in the museum, or secondary sources in the classroom, using the same questions.

Students can explore the field of archaeology by researching professionals, and potentially connecting with local field projects.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Want to be an Archaeologist? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao4vVcfvyuE>

LESSON GLOSSARY

These concepts are embedded in the museum content and may be unfamiliar to students.

anthropology – the scientific study of humankind, both biological and cultural.

archaeology – a branch of anthropology that studies people and cultures through artifacts and other material remains

material record – physical (not written) evidence of the past. The artifacts excavated and studied by archaeologists.

NOTES FOR FIELD TRIP PLANNING

Before

The “Engage” section of the activity plan can be used as a pre-visit activity. It might be helpful to share images of the exhibit with students before they visit so they can easily locate the galleries when they arrive, and to preview how to use the Digital Reading Rails (which have similar navigation to the online exhibition:

<http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>.

During

While in the museum, students can conduct the research described in “Explore” using the graphic organizers and clipboards. There are no restrictions on writing materials in the galleries. Groups of students will be assigned to each gallery, but encourage them to take time to see the other galleries, time permitting.

Students can also begin the research described in “Elaborate” in the exhibit. For this they will need to use the Digital Reading Rails.

After

After visiting the exhibit, students can share their findings in the museum and engage in the research, discussion, and writing described in “Elaborate” and “Evaluate.”

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Graphic Organizer

Observations What do you see in the exhibit? Describe the objects.	Inferences What can you learn about the culture from your observations of these objects?	Questions What questions do you have about what is missing?

STUDENT HANDOUT



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Rubric

	4 Exceeds Expectations	3 Meets Expectations	2 Approaches Expectations	1 Does not meet Expectations
Make a clear argument relevant to the content	Argument is clear, and illuminates something new about the content	Argument is clear and connected to the content	Argument is either unclear or not connected directly to the content	Argument is neither clear nor connected to the content.
Use evidence from objects or readings	Student uses 3-4 pieces of evidence from objects or readings, describing them fully	Student uses 1-2 pieces of evidence from objects or readings, describing them fully	Student uses 1-2 pieces of evidence from objects or readings, but does not describe them fully	Student does not mention specific objects or readings, or uses unrelated objects/readings
Explain why the evidence supports their argument	Explanation of connection between evidence and argument offers innovative interpretation and illuminates something new about the content.	Explanation of connection between evidence and arguments is clear and convincing	Explanation of connection between evidence and arguments is unclear or disconnected	No explanation of connection between evidence and argument
Listen to others and restate their ideas	In Speaking			
	Clearly restates the ideas of others and incorporates other's ideas into their own argument, whether agreeing or disagreeing	Clearly restates ideas of others before returning to original argument	Incorrectly restates the ideas of others before returning to original argument	Does not restate the ideas of others before returning to original argument
	In Writing			
	Addresses other perspectives and/or counter arguments and uses them to strengthen their argument	Addresses other perspectives and/or counter arguments and clearly explains reasoning for their original argument	Addresses other perspectives and/or counter arguments but does not connect them to original argument	Does not address other perspectives and/or counter arguments.

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