Anthropology is the study of people and their culture and includes four different branches: archaeological, biological, cultural, and linguistic. **Archaeology** is one of the four branches of anthropology and consists of several subtypes. The word archaeology comes from two Greek words, *archaia*, which means ancient things, and *logos*, which means theory or science, meaning archaeology is the study of all ancient things that were made or changed by humans. Archaeology in Oklahoma is an integral part of its history. There have been eight **artifacts** that are at least one thousand years old found around the state. Archaeology helps to answer some questions about the history of the United States. [It is important to understand that paleontology is the study of prehistoric animal bones and fossils, like mammoths and dinosaurs. This is NOT archaeology.]

Join us to learn more about archaeology in Oklahoma. Look at the “Important Sites” in Oklahoma page to learn more about different influential archaeological **sites** in our state. The activities section has coloring sheets, games, and other activities which can be done as part of a group or on your own. There are video links to watch archaeology in action, as well as a glossary, a bibliography, and a link on each page if you are interested in more information!

**Types of Archaeology**

- maritime archaeology is the study of underwater human artifacts, typically shipwrecks
- landscape archaeology is the study of geographical ordering of sites
- osteology is the study of bones, human and animal
- paleopathology is the study of old diseases in humans and animals found in archaeological sites
- paleoethnobotany is the study of old plants and plant materials found in archaeological sites
Connecting Archaeology and History

How are history and archaeology related?
History and archaeology both study ancient people and things. Specifically, historians study older documents and artifacts and create an interpretation of the past for the public. Archaeologists excavate artifacts that both the archaeologists and historians study. Archaeologists also look at historical documents, but they typically use them for background information on a site. The fields of history and archaeology study very similar things but do so from different viewpoints.

How are history and archaeology different?
History and archaeology are different in that they study the artifacts from different perspectives. Archaeologists are more concerned with the physical evidence (artifacts); historians rely more on documentary evidence to support their work.

Why is this important?
Even though historians and archaeologists study the past differently, they are connected. It is important to remember that when studying early history, the evidence historians use most likely comes from an archaeological site discovered by a professional. When an archaeologist is preparing for a dig, they do background research and use historical archives to help estimate who might have lived there.

Impact on today?
Archaeology sites are found all over the world every day leading to new insights of the past. The artifacts the archaeologists find, after being analyzed, go to museums all over the world to share the past with their visitors. Maybe one day the toy you played with as a child will be found in an archaeological site and be put on display for the world to see and interpret.

How does this connect to museums, and where can you learn about the field of archaeology?
Artifacts are objects made or used by humans. Artifacts are typically found because they were discarded, someone lost them, or they were broken. Once the object has been found, cleaned, and analyzed, it typically goes to a museum for safe-keeping and to show the public what was found. The Oklahoma History Center is a repository for Oklahoma artifacts. They have artifacts from all over Oklahoma, which cover all of the state’s history. Many of these artifacts are archaeological items donated by the Oklahoma Archeological Survey (OAS) in Norman. The mission of the Archeological Survey is to conduct basic research on Oklahoma’s prehistory and early history, to work with the citizens of our state in preserving archaeological sites significant to the state’s cultural heritage, and to disseminate the results of their work through teaching, public lectures, and publishing the results of their findings. Research faculty of the Survey hold advanced degrees in anthropology with a specialization in archaeology. Universities in Oklahoma at which you can obtain these degrees include University of Oklahoma, University of Tulsa, and Oklahoma Baptist University. Oklahoma State University does not have an anthropological degree at this time.
Surveying in Oklahoma

When an archaeologist is looking for a site, they conduct surveys of the area to find out the location and size. A typical survey consists of several people trained to identify sites walking up to five feet apart from each other and walking in a straight line. Once a site or an artifact has been found, the archaeologist will use the Global Positioning System (GPS) to record the location of the site/artifact so that they are able to come back later and excavate it. Archaeologists use special GPS devices that are made for surveying. These devices give the archaeologist the coordinates, (latitude/longitude). They also may excavate a shovel test pit to see how deep the site/artifact goes into the ground. Once they excavate the shovel test pit, they use a screen to sift through the dirt and look for small artifacts. Next, they collect the artifacts and record them along with the GPS coordinates of the hole. Then, an archaeologist will move on to the next area to excavate another shovel test pit until they have found the size of the site. They mark these coordinates out on a map to show where artifacts are located, as well as where the site is located. After they have mapped everything out, they will start to excavate.

(Photograph courtesy of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey.)
Import Sites in Oklahoma

Bryson-Paddock

Bryson-Paddock is an archaeological site associated with the Wichita people, an American Indian tribe. It is located in north-central Oklahoma along the Arkansas River near the Kansas-Oklahoma border. This is an important site because the Wichita were able to use the flint and chert to make tools. The site was also protected by surrounding open prairie. Bryson-Paddock is where the French and Wichita traded goods such as hides and guns. Before the archaeologists excavated the site they surveyed the thirty acres (which is equal to thirty-nine football fields) and looked for evidence of artifacts and features.

After surveying, they excavated the features they found and recorded their context. Some examples of the features are the postholes that the Wichita dug for the fences that held livestock. They also found hearths, which are holes that are dug into the ground for fires. They found several middens and many artifacts. Some of the artifacts in the matrices included bison bones, stone hide scrapers, French gun parts, glass beads, and fabric. After excavation, the archaeologists went back to the lab and placed the artifacts into classifications (groups) typically using seriation (dates) to better understand the evidence that was discovered.
Doaksville

Doaksville is an archaeological site located northwest of the modern town of Fort Towson. Doaksville was abandoned around the same time as Fort Towson and named after the man that owned the first trading post in the town, Josiah S. Doak. This town was a trading post in the 1820s and was the capital of the Choctaw Nation. Doaksville is where the food allotment for the Choctaw Nation was sent and where the tribe conducted their business and tribal courts. Doaksville was also a center of major transportation in the Indian Territory. When Fort Towson was abandoned, the economic markets in Doaksville declined, which led to people leaving the town.

Before archaeologists excavated, they surveyed the one-acre site, which is a little more than one football field, and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. After they surveyed, they excavated the features found and recorded their context. Some of the features they found included foundations, a brick hearth, and a wood cellar. There were over thirty buildings that comprised the town when it was occupied. Some of the artifacts they found in their matrices were burnt ceramic shards, a limestone chimney, and nails. Unfortunately, many of the artifacts and features were changed due to looting and vandalism.

After excavation, the archaeologists went back to the lab and placed the artifacts into classifications (groups), typically using seriation (dates) so they could better understand the evidence. The purpose of excavating this site was to gather information about life in Doaksville.

Ferdinandina

Ferdinandina, or Deer Creek Site, is a thirty-acre archaeological site that is located in north central Oklahoma near the Kansas border. The is the size of thirty-nine football fields. The name Ferdinandina was found on a map published in the 1860s and was proposed to be one of the first white settlements in Indian Territory. Located near the Bryson-Paddock site, the Wichita Indians inhabited both the Ferdinandina and the Bryson-Paddock site in the mid-eighteenth century. Ferdinandina is thought to be where the French traded with the Wichita Indians and the Louisiana Colony received the majority of its meat.
Fort Gibson

Fort Gibson is an archaeological site in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, built in 1824. Fort Gibson was the ending point for many American Indians that suffered the Trail of Tears. Fort Gibson ensured the American Indians lived in the area without fear of attack by resident tribes and non-Natives. The fort was an important stopping point for people during the Mexican-American War and the California gold rush as well. The soldiers at this fort created roads and explored boundaries. Fort Gibson was abandoned in 1857 and then reoccupied during the Civil War.

Before archaeologists excavated, they surveyed the site and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. After they surveyed, they excavated the features they found and recorded context. Some examples of the features found are hospitals, barracks where the soldiers lived, a bakery, and a powder magazine. Some of the artifacts found in their matrices were buttons, muskets flints, a hunting knife, wash basins and pitchers, and champagne and wine bottles. After excavation, the archaeologists went back to the lab and placed the artifacts into classifications (groups) using seriation (dates) so they could better understand the evidence.

Fort Supply

Fort Supply is an archaeological site located in Woodward County, Oklahoma. Fort Supply was originally a camp where soldiers went to fight American Indians in the southern plains. Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer was stationed at this post and destroyed several Cheyenne villages while he was there. Later at the fort, Cheyenne people collected rations from the government. When Indian Territory was opened to non-Indians during the land runs, Fort Supply monitored the situation, helping to build roads and protect travelers as they passed through the country. When the post was no longer needed, it became Oklahoma’s first state-operated mental hospital.

Before archaeologists excavated, they surveyed the site and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. They also made cuts as they excavated so they could examine the stratigraphy. After they surveyed, they excavated the features they found and recorded their context. Some of the features they found include five buildings, barracks, and employee and officer quarters including two rare picket-style log buildings. Some of the artifacts found in the matrices include buttons, shell, shards, bottles, and iron pots.
**Fort Towson**

Fort Towson is an archaeological site in Fort Towson, Oklahoma. It is in the southern part of the state near where the Red River and the Kiamichi River meet. The fort is named after Nathan Towson, a war hero of the War of 1812. It was built in 1824 and used to keep peace with Mexico. Later, after being burned down, Fort Towson was rebuilt to protect the Choctaw Indians. When the Choctaw moved into Indian Territory the fort kept non-Indian settlers out of the area. In addition, it was used to train soldiers to fight in the war with Mexico. During the Civil War, Fort Towson was the headquarters of the Indian Territory Confederate forces.

The state archaeologist and the team that works at Fort Towson surveyed the site so they would know how big it was and then started to excavate and record the context of the features and artifacts. They found many features at this site including barracks (where the soldiers lived), a hospital, a schoolhouse, storerooms, and guardhouses. They also found many artifacts in the matrices at this site, including animal bone fragments, bricks, shards of earthenware, and window glass. After excavation the archaeologists went back to the lab and placed the artifacts into classifications. The excavation served to positively locate buildings from historic maps, allow for reconstruction of buildings to enhance visitor experience, and create exhibits from artifact recovery to interpret the cultural setting.

**Honey Springs Battlefield**

The battle at Honey Springs was the largest Civil War battle in Oklahoma. It is located on the Texas Road and is about three thousand acres, or three thousand football fields. The springs were a stopping point for people traveling through Indian Territory to Texas, as well as a supply depot for the Confederates. At this site, the Union forces stopped the Confederates from intercepting a supply train on its way to Fort Gibson. The battle was one of the first mass Confederate battles against the Union in Indian Territory and enabled the Union to attack other forts. This battle is also one of the first in which African Americans were praised for their contribution.

Archaeologists have not excavated at this site, but they have surveyed the site and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. Limited excavations of the site have occurred to collect and examine artifacts and features located here.
Kenton Caves

Located in Cimarron County, the Kenton Caves were discovered in 1928 by an amateur archaeologist. There are seven different caves or shelter sites within the entire site. Because of the dry climate many artifacts from thousands of years ago survived and were collected and studied. Some of those artifacts include bone and wooden beads, hide and yucca-fiber sandals, shells, squash rinds, beans, baskets, stone arrowpoints and spearpoints, and a wooden atlatl (spear throwing tool).

Before archaeologists excavated, they surveyed the site and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. They also made cuts as they excavated so they could examine the stratigraphy. After they surveyed, they excavated the features they found and recorded their context.

Learn more about the Kenton Cave Sites here

Prairie-dog skin bag stuffed with seed corn (image courtesy of the Oklahoma Archeological Survey).

Spiro

The Spiro Mounds are located on a 150-acre prehistoric American Indian archaeological site located near the town of Spiro, Oklahoma. The site is the size of one hundred and ninety-five football fields. There are eight mounds located at the site. The mounds are a part of the Mississippian culture. They were made by the ancestors of Caddoan-speaking peoples. The mounds are burial sites that include many artifacts and human remains. The Spiro Mounds are a part of a time period in archaeology known as the Mississippian. The Spiro Mounds are important because they are located along the Arkansas River and the people of Spiro influenced many of the people with which they traded. The people of Spiro sent representatives as far away as present-day Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, and the west coast.

The Spiro Mounds are notable because before archaeologists could excavate, looters destroyed several of the mounds looking for interesting and profitable artifacts. Once a law passed making it illegal to loot the Spiro Mounds, the state hired archaeologists to do cultural resource management work to preserve the site. The archaeologists surveyed the site and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. After the survey, they excavated the features and recorded their context. Some of the features they found were the eight mounds and the remains of the surrounding village. Some of the artifacts in the matrices were shells, sherds, whole pots, copper artifacts, and masks. Today, archeologists still work to identify features from the Spiro Mounds. They have also used ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to locate housing areas.

Visit the Spiro Mounds Archaeology Center
Steamboat *Heroine*

The steamboat *Heroine* is an archaeological site near the Red River on the Oklahoma southern border. The *Heroine* traveled from Cincinnati, Ohio, to the Kiamichi River to deliver supplies in 1838. It contained a large amount of cargo that was going to the soldiers at Fort Towson. The steamboat was one of the first five boats to go up river after the Red River had been cleared of the “great raft” by Henry Miller Shreve. The steamboat was stranded many times along the way by low water and had to sit and wait for rainstorms to raise the water level. When it was twenty minutes away from landing at Fort Towson, the *Heroine* struck a submerged snag in the river and sank. All of the people on board survived, but the ship sank into the sands of the Red River. This is an important site because there is little underwater archaeology done in Oklahoma, and it is the only shipwreck in the state, found in the late 1990s.

Before archaeologists excavated, they surveyed the underwater site and looked for evidence of artifacts and features. After surveying, they excavated the site and found several artifacts. Some of the artifacts found in their matrices were barrels of salted pork, soap, empty wooden barrels, ceramic saucers, and clothing. Unlike other sites, there were no features because they were able to remove all of the artifacts they found. More examples of the artifacts found include a hand truck, a block for leading the tiller rope, hasp from the companion hatch at the stern, mechanical pieces related to the engine, and items from the stern compartment.
NAGPRA and Laws about Collecting

What is NAGPRA?
The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a federal law passed by Congress in 1990. When you hear someone say NAGPRA, they are actually talking about two subjects. The first is the protection of American Indian graves by the United States government. The second is the identification and return of human remains, artifacts related to burials, and artifacts of religious or cultural significance.

Who must obey this law?
All parts of the government of the United States must obey this law. Also, any public or private institution that receives funding from the US must also obey this law. However, the Smithsonian Institution is not subject to NAGPRA. The return of Smithsonian NAGPRA-related artifacts falls under the National Museum of the American Indian Act, which was passed in 1989. The National Museum of the American Indian Act does the same thing as NAGPRA but is specifically for Smithsonian museums.

Why is this a law?
NAGPRA became law for several reasons. First, most state laws regarding graves only protected those that were marked. Often, American Indian graves were not marked. This left them unprotected by most state laws. Second, when graves of non-Indians were disturbed by construction or landscaping, they were often reburied quickly out of respect. The same was not done for Indian burials. Often the individuals within these graves were taken for study and not reburied. Third, NAGPRA is related to the First Amendment, guaranteeing the right to religious freedoms. American Indian graves, like any other, are part of a culture’s religious beliefs and customs. When American Indian graves are disturbed, it is a violation of those First Amendment rights. Finally, NAGPRA also strengthens tribal sovereignty by reinforcing the tribe’s right to manage their ancestors’ remains. NAGPRA is an attempt to correct past mistakes made regarding American Indian graves.

What else does NAGPRA include?
Another aspect of NAGPRA is the return of objects having cultural or religious importance to tribes. Throughout the history of the United States museums and similar institutions collected artifacts that were important to tribes as a whole. The entire tribe rather than an individual owned these objects and no one person should have sold or given away these objects to another person outside of that tribe. NAGPRA sets in motion the return of artifacts that fall into this category.

Items, nationwide, returned to tribes as of 2010:

- Human remains: 38,671 individuals
- Associated funerary objects: 998,731 (includes many small items, such as beads)
- Unassociated funerary objects: 144,163 (includes many small items, such as beads)
- Sacred objects: 4,303

Glossary

analyze: To look at carefully and in detail to identify causes, key factors, and possible results.

archaeology: The scientific study of historic peoples and their cultures by analysis of their artifacts, inscriptions, monuments, and other remains, especially those that have been excavated.

artifact: Objects made or used by humans, typically found because they were discarded, someone lost them, or they were broken.

classification: Placing similar artifacts in groups so they can be compared, recorded, and closely examined.

context: The recording of the site location and where artifacts were found within the site. Once archaeologists return to their labs, they can use the information to relate the objects to each other. Context is the most important piece of information for an archaeologist to record when an artifact is found.

Cultural Resource Management (CRM): Work conducted within the environmental industry, outside of academic or museum institutions. When the federal government plans to expand a building, widen a highway, or build something new, they are required to hire archaeologists to survey if there are any archaeological sites that could be destroyed in the course of the project.

cuts: Digs made into the ground by an archaeologist so they can see the feature that is hidden and see stratigraphy.

excavate: Digging. Once an archaeologist finds a site, they divide the site off into smaller parts so they are able to work very carefully. They then begin to excavate the site, recording the context for each artifact they find.

feature: An artifact that cannot be moved. An example includes pithouses, which are houses that are dug into the ground, or midden.

ground-penetrating radar (GPR): A geophysical method that uses radar pulses to image the subsurface. It can be used to detect and map artifacts and features underground.

Global Positioning System (GPS): A global system of US navigational satellites developed to provide precise positional and velocity data and global time synchronization for air, sea, and land travel.

insight: An instance of apprehending the true nature of a thing, especially through intuitive understanding.

interpret: To give or provide the meaning of; explain.

looting: Going to an archaeological site and excavating without a permit. This includes picking up or collecting artifacts with the intent of selling them. Looting is wrong because the context of artifacts and any information they could share is forever lost.

matrix: Materials such as soil or rock around an artifact when it is found. It contributes to the context of the artifact, which is the purpose of excavating.

midden: A trash pit and a feature at a site, such as an outhouse pit.

prehistoric: Of or relating to the time or a period prior to recorded history.

repository: A receptacle or place where things are deposited, stored, or offered for sale.

seriation: A relative dating method archaeologists use to place artifacts in order from oldest to newest, or newest to oldest.

sherd: a piece of pottery found at an archaeological site.
**site:** Places with evidence of past human activities investigated by archaeologists.

**stratigraphy:** The study of the different layers or sections of earth. The different layers are typically different colors.

**survey:** To find sites, an archaeologist performs surveys of the land. This is done in a methodical way with several people and a GPS walking over an area of land and marking sites they find on a map, using the coordinates from the GPS.
Activities

Artifact Activity
Archaeologists study artifacts and objects made or used by people. Artifacts are all around you. They are objects that are used in everyday life. For example, the toothbrush that you used this morning is an artifact. The trash that you throw away is also an artifact. The school that you are in right now is also an artifact, called a feature. The trees outside are not considered artifacts unless you changed them in some way, like made a canoe for example. Have the students participate in the following exercise and share with the class. If there is time, have the students trade pictures and comment about what is in their partner’s picture.

Exercise

• Draw a picture of objects you may have on your bedside table, dresser, or your desk.

• Look at the picture and write down the artifacts that you see.

Writing Extension Activity
Using five to ten complete sentences, what would an archaeologist learn five hundred years from now about you by studying these artifacts?
Plate Sherd Activity
Provide each student with a paper plate or a piece of paper. Have them color or decorate it any way they please. Once they are finished, they will cut the plate/paper into several sections. Have the student try and put the plate back together. This is what an archaeologist does after they find pot sherds. Now, have the students give their plate to the person beside them and remove two pieces of the plate. Have the student try and put their new plate together.

Answer these questions:
How was it putting your own plate back together?
What happens when you get someone else’s plate?
How did you feel when pieces were removed?
How does this relate to what archaeologists do in the field?

Writing Extension Activity:
In three to five complete sentences, write what you think an archaeologist would say in one hundred years about your plate. How it is important in your culture today?

Researching Influential Oklahoma Sites Activity
There are several important sites in Oklahoma which have influenced the history of the state. Pick one of the important sites here or another site in Oklahoma which made an impact on history. Break the class up into groups of two or three and have them choose a site to research. Be sure to share with the class your group’s findings. This is a helpful website: http://www.ou.edu/cas/archsur/counties/counties.htm

Be sure to include the following information in complete sentences: (Teachers, feel free to modify the assignment and add to the information gathered if you wish!)
What site is it?
Where is the site?
What is the site known for?
An interesting fact.
Why you chose that site.
Stratigraphy Activity and Worksheet

Stratigraphy Activity

Use this worksheet to learn more about stratigraphy.

1. Look at the work sheet attached and share some of your observations. What do you see?

2. Which artifacts are oldest? Youngest? Why?

3. Based on this worksheet, place the following in chronological order, numbering from oldest - 1 and the second oldest – 2, and so on.
   a. Deposit A
   b. Deposit B
   c. Deposit C
   d. Deposit D
   e. Deposit E
   f. Deposit F
   g. Deposit G
   h. Deposit H

4. Explain your answers above.

5. On a separate sheet of paper create a timeline using the worksheet, with the oldest time period and artifacts on top, followed by the second oldest, and so on. Name each of the periods and create a story that goes with each, using what you know about stratigraphy and the artifacts that you see. (It is understood there is not much information but be creative)

6. Describe the artifacts that are in each level on the work sheet. Why are they there?
7. Use seriation to group the artifacts from newest to oldest. Then group them from oldest to newest.
8. Between Deposit F and G, there is an artifact. Does this artifact belong in Deposit F or Deposit G? Why?
9. Further research: Research possible ways to date the artifacts that are found on the worksheet.

Adapted with permission from Dr. Patricia Gilman’s Classification Work Sheet
Spiro Mound and the Mississippian Culture

ARKANSAS RIVER
BIRDMAN
BROWN MOUND
CADDIANS
CHUNKY
CONCH SHELL
CRAIG MOUND
CULTURE

EFFIGY PIPE
GREAT MORTUARY
GREAT SERPENT
MOUNDS
NATIVE AMERICAN
OKLAHOMA
RITUAL
SPIRO
Bibliography

Books


Online Sources


Helpful Videos and Clips
PBS SciGirls: Digging Archaeology
http://pbskids.org/video/?pid=t3Pgif5auAyv9bJJ71U0aN__KqHDeBPy

Ocmulgee: Mysteries of the Mounds

What is Archaeology?

WPA Archaeology: Legacy of an Era

Centennial Stories: Red River Wreck (OETA)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M47nylhI6P0

Archaeologist Dr. Richard Drass speaks at NWOSU about the Bryson-Paddock site
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlHTevnFJfw