



Build Your Own Archaeological Site #ArchaeologistAtHome Family Activity

Have you ever wondered what happens on an archaeological dig? This is your chance to practice being an archaeologist and build your very own archaeological site.

An archaeologist is a scientist who uses layers of artifacts to tell a story about the past. They go on digs to find new information and artifacts to bring back to a lab to study. In the field, archaeologists carefully excavate sites in small layers and take detailed notes on everything they see to learn more about what happened in history. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office takes care of many artifacts from across Idaho as well as information about all of Idaho's known archaeological sites and historic buildings to tell the story of Idaho and the past of our state.

Become an #ArchaeologistAtHome by creating your own archaeological site and writing about it. Archaeological sites have many different layers called strata. These sometimes look like layers on a cake. Each of the strata are important because they are all from different times. By looking at the order of the strata, archaeologists can tell what came first, second, third, etc. After you build your site, you will use the strata within it to understand what happened when.

Take a photo of your site strata and tag @idahoshpo so that we can see what you made!

What you will need

Cake pieces or cookies (different types, if possible)
Frosting
Candy pieces (can use one type or multiple)
Plate
Blank paper
Pencils, crayons, or markers

Instructions

1. Work with an adult gather up all the materials you will need to build your site.
2. Start to build your site by putting some frosting on your plate as a base.
3. Build the first strata of cookies or cake.

4. Place frosting over your first strata. Place some of your candy pieces in the frosting across your first strata. These are some of the artifacts from your site.
5. Repeat Steps 3 and 4 a few times. You can make your strata cover the entire site, or you can make thin strata that only cover part of it.
6. When you are done building your site, it's time to start excavating! Have an adult help you cut your site into two pieces. You should now be able to see that strata that you created!
7. Using your pencils, crayons, and markers, draw the strata and artifacts that you can see. This is called a profile map. Archaeologists make profile maps every time they excavate so that they can remember exactly how the strata looked.
8. Label the strata. Which are older and which are newer? Archaeologists use the "law of superpositioning" to understand the order strata were created through time. If you see any of the artifacts in your profile map label them too. These show that people once lived at your site!
9. Write a story about what happened at your site. This can be as short or long as you would like but should include something about each strata. (For example, the oldest strata was made by people who moved into the area thousands of years ago. They were still living in the site when a volcano erupted to make the next layer. The candy pieces in this layer are their toys that they had to leave behind and got stuck in the lava.)
10. Share your profile map and story with your family. You are now an archaeologist!

Activity Vocabulary

Archaeological Site: A place where people lived and left objects behind. This can be a place from a long time ago, or from more recently. Some places that our grandparents lived as kids could be archaeological sites now!

Archaeologist: A scientist who studies the past through material evidence and artifacts.

Archaeology: The scientific study of past human cultures through artifacts and sites.

Artifact: An object made, modified, or used by humans. Lots of things can be artifacts, from gold coins to rocks used only a few times to hammer tent stakes into the ground.

Context: The relationship artifacts have to each other as well as the place they were found and the time they were left there.

Law of Superposition: The principle that within a site, the lowest layer is the oldest and the uppermost is the youngest.

Strata: Layers of earth, rocks, and artifacts.

Stratigraphy: The layering of deposits in archaeological sites.