

WHY TEACH WITH ARCHAEOLOGY?

by George Brauer

How can archaeology enhance the quality of Social Studies K-12 curriculum, especially in today's educational climate with its demands to achieve national and local content standards? For the past 20 years of my 40-year career as an educator for the Baltimore County Public Schools, I have actively explored this question as the creator of Baltimore County's nationally recognized Center for Archaeology (<http://www.p-j.net/pjeppson/or/index.html>)

The educational programs at the Center for Archaeology are designed to promote student appreciation for the value and complexity of historical and archaeological research. Through these programs, students develop mechanisms for critical analysis, raise their historical consciousness, and increase awareness of their responsibility for the stewardship of the world's non-renewable cultural resources.

Archaeology, with its wealth of content, theories, and methodologies, can be taught holistically or as part of an interdisciplinary curriculum, offering tremendous instructional potential and flexibility when planning class activities. Incorporating archaeology into the curriculum is conducive to individual or cooperative learning strategies, is culturally sensitive, and can serve as a means for understanding the consequences of human decision making.

Students who have gone through our archaeology program became active receptors of knowledge and have many opportunities to exercise their imagination, creativity, and logical thinking. For elementary students, the Center for Archaeology offers a summer course in which students follow the path of an artifact from an actual excavation through analysis, to museum curation, and eventually to museum display. The sense of mystery and excitement that archaeology inspires has stimulated student interest and active engagement in the learning process.

For secondary students, the Center created an archaeology simulation in which students debate an ethical issue. Students role-play a variety of stake holders, including archaeologists, politicians, historical preservationists, community activists, and ordinary, tax-paying citizens. After researching their positions, the students come together to debate and attempt to reach a consensus to solve a dispute concerning the development of a hypothetical archaeologically sensitive tract of land.

In another activity, students conduct an actual on-site survey of a potential archaeological site. In the process, students replicate all of the procedures used by professional archaeologists to evaluate the site for excavation. Teaching with archaeology introduces, reinforces, and extends a variety of education skills in critical thinking, problem solving, organizing data, computation, and hypothesis formation.

If you are looking to energize a curriculum, incorporate archaeology to motivate and actively engage your students, and, thereby improve student achievement. I encourage all teachers to look for opportunities in their curriculum framework to use archaeology to enhance the quality of the learning process for all students.



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