

# WHY IS THE PAST IMPORTANT?

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<b>SUBJECTS:</b>	Science, social studies
<b>SKILLS:</b>	Knowledge, evaluation
<b>STRATEGIES:</b>	Brainstorming, discussion, application
<b>DURATION:</b>	15 to 30 minutes
<b>CLASS SIZE:</b>	Any; groups of 3 to 4

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## Objectives:

As an introduction to the study of our archaeological heritage, students will use a personally owned object to:

1. Share the importance of their past.
2. Connect this importance with reasons why the human past is important.

## Materials:

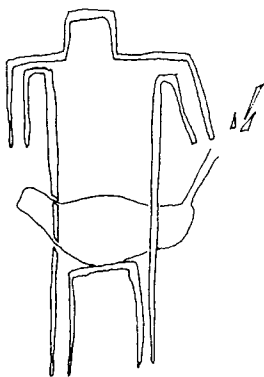
Students bring to class an object, photograph, or drawing of an object that represents their past.

## Vocabulary:

**archaeological site:** a place where human activity occurred and material remains were left.

**archaeology:** a method for studying past human cultures and analyzing material evidence (artifacts and sites).

**artifact:** any object made or used by humans.



## Background:

Sites and artifacts can be messengers from the past. If we know how to read their messages, material remains can tell us about the people who made and used them and then left them behind. Although the owners of the artifacts and the inhabitants of the sites may have lived hundreds or even thousands of years ago, they undoubtedly had many of the same needs and concerns, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows that we have today.

The messengers from the past belong to everyone. Everyone has a right to know how the world came to be and to know his or her place in the world. Material remains and their context play a universal role "... in providing cultural continuity and perspective, and hence in linking past, present and future within the experience of any given human generation" (Lipe, 1984, p. 2).

The link to the past is provided through scientific analysis as well as through traditional values placed on archaeological sites and artifacts. For example, Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia provides a tangible link to the colonial history of America and it is valued for that reason. By examining its historic buildings and objects, Colonial Williamsburg might also provide scientific information about the lives of the historic inhabitants. Similarly, some prehistoric sites throughout the United States may represent the heritage of American Indians and are valued accordingly. These sites are also capable of providing scientific information about the prehistory of the region.



## Setting the Stage:

This lesson sets the stage for Section One. It will help students to begin to discover *why* we study the past. The remainder of Section One explores *how* we study the past.

Assign the students to bring an object (artifact) or photograph from home that tells about their own or their family's past. If the object cannot be brought to class, a drawing or description will suffice.

## Procedure:

1. Share background information and vocabulary.
2. Working in groups of 3 to 4, students tell each other what the object conveys about their past.
3. In a class discussion, ask the following questions:
  - a. Is it important for you to know about your past? Why or why not?
  - b. Is it important to know about the human past? Why or why not?
  - c. Humans have lived in North America for at least 12,000 years. Is it important to know about their lives? Why or why not?
4. What can we learn from the past? The students brainstorm ideas. Some examples: how humans lived in the past and how and why human cultures changed over time.

## Closure:

If your past is important to you, what statement can you make about the importance of the past in general?

## Extension:

Repeat this lesson again at the close of your study of archaeology to demonstrate that students have broadened their understanding of archaeology and the past.

## Reference:

Lipe, William D., 1984, "Value and Meaning in Cultural Resources." In *Approaches to the Archaeological Heritage: A Comparative Study of World Cultural Resource Management Systems*, edited by Henry Cleere. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K.

