

Site Excavation

By Matt Daniel from Pitt County Schools
for the 2021-2022 World View Global Fellows Program

Overview of Lesson: Through the [Excavating Occaneechi Town](#) online module on the [Ancient North Carolinians website](#), students will learn the five-step procedure archaeologists follow during site excavation. Students will then conduct their own excavation process of a fictional site, plotting artifacts on a grid, and drawing conclusions about the lifeways of the people that lived there.

About the Project: American Indians lived in the area we now call North Carolina for at least 15,000 years. Archaeologists study the remnants of their communities to learn who these people were and how they lived and prospered for thousands of years. The lesson presented below was developed as part of the 2021-2022 UNC World View Fellows Program, [Exploring Indigenous Cultures: Ancient North Carolinians, Past and Present](#). It is one in a series of lessons that the Fellows created for K-12 schools and community colleges to help students learn about the ancient peoples that lived here and those who represent today's vibrant American Indian populations. Lessons connect past to present day by exploring multiple resources within the [Ancient North Carolinians: A Virtual Museum of North Carolina Archaeology website](#) to examine how communities changed over time and what influenced these changes. Understanding past Indigenous lifeways—their complexity, resiliency, and vitality—allows for a greater appreciation of the contributions American Indians made to the past and continue to make to the present and future of North Carolina.

Suggested Grade levels: 5th grade and higher

Subjects: Social Studies, Math, and English/Language Arts

Corresponding National and State of North Carolina Standards:

5.H.1 - Understand the role of various people, events, and ideas in shaping the United States.

5.H.1.1 - Explain how the experiences and achievements of women, minorities, Indigenous groups, and marginalized people have contributed to change and innovation in the United States.

5.G.1 - Understand how to plot x and y-coordinates on a coordinate plane.

RI.5.1 - Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RI.5.7 - Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question or to solve a problem efficiently.

W.5.2 - Students complete explanatory/informational writing to communicate information.

Essential Questions:

- What five steps do archaeologists take to excavate archaeological sites?
- How does the methodical collection of artifacts from a site help inform archaeologists about the people that once lived there?

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe the five-step process archaeologists take to excavate historical sites.
- Students will be able to conduct a model excavation, record their findings, and make predictions about the lifeways of the people that lived there.

Background information for the educator: Teachers and students should navigate the [*Excavating Occaneechi Town*](#) online module (specifically, the [*Archaeology Primer slideshow*](#)) for this particular lesson--reading the text, viewing the photos, and watching the videos in order to better understand the steps archaeologists take during excavation. After learning about the steps of excavation, students will excavate a fictional site, writing the exact location of various artifacts, and then making predictions about what life was like for the people who lived there.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important that archaeologists carefully excavate historical sites?
- Why might archaeologists plot the exact location of artifacts they uncover before removing them from the ground?
- What story do the artifacts tell about the people who once occupied a particular place?

Student Activities:

Step 1: Teacher leads students through discussion questions. Students can share answers to discussion questions out loud, share their answers with a partner, or both.

Step 2: Teacher and students explore [*Excavating Occaneechi Town*](#) website together in order to read about and view photos and videos of the excavation process.

Step 3: As teacher and students are viewing the steps of the excavation process, students will record the procedure through the [*Excavation Process Graphic Organizer*](#). (For reference, the five steps of excavation are: establish a grid, remove and screen plowed soil, photograph and map soil stains, excavate features/recover artifacts, and then backfill the excavated areas with soil. A teacher copy of this graphic organizer is [linked here](#).)

Step 4: Students will conduct an excavation of a fictional site, plotting artifacts on a coordinate grid, and then answering questions regarding their findings. The student copy of this [*Sample Excavation Site and Post-Excavation Questionnaire*](#) is linked [here](#). The teacher copy is linked [here](#).

Step 5: After recording their findings, students should add predictions of the lifeways of those that once lived there. (For example, “Fish bones were discovered at point x,y which likely means fish was a part of their diet” or “Many projectile points were discovered throughout the site which likely means the people that lived here engaged in the hunting of various-sized game.”)

Literacy/Text Connections:

- Close-reading of the [Excavation Process slideshow](#) through [Excavating Occaneechi Town](#) website allows students to pull information from the text.
- Completion of [Excavation Process Graphic Organizer](#) allows students to record information from the slideshow into an easy-to-read graphic organizer. (Can even make a connection to a Sequence/Chronological Nonfiction Text Structure)
- Completion of [Sample Excavation Site and Post-Excavation Questionnaire](#) allows students to make logical inferences using background knowledge as well as knowledge from class content.

Learning Extensions:

- Students can complete the [Electronic Dig activity](#) at the conclusion of the slideshow. The Electronic Dig activity includes more realistic conditions, such as a budget, specific plotting method, and more.

Explore Further:

- Students can complete a site excavation in which they create gridlines and data points. (rather than already being created for them)
- Students can plot different artifacts on a blank template and generate questions for others to answer.
- Students can craft a one-page document or a slideshow presentation on the lifeways of people who once occupied this fictional site (used in the activity) based on the artifacts and information found.
- Students can learn about other American Indian archaeological sites in the region where they live through this [page](#) on the Ancient North Carolinians website.
- Students can learn about contemporary American Indian tribes in North Carolina through links on this [page](#) on the Ancient North Carolinians website.
- Students can explore other publicly-accessible archaeological sites in North Carolina through this [page](#) on the Ancient North Carolinians website.

Materials:

- Excavating Occaneechi Town [online module](#)
- [Excavation Process Graphic Organizer - Student Copy](#)
- [Excavation Process Graphic Organizer - Teacher Copy](#)
- [Sample Excavation Site and Post-Excavation Questionnaire - Student Copy](#)
- [Sample Excavation Site and Post-Excavation Questionnaire - Teacher Copy](#)

Bibliography:

R. P. Stephen Davis Jr., Patrick C. Livingood, H. Trawick Ward, and Vincas P. Steponaitis, eds. *Excavating Occaneechi Town: Archaeology of an Eighteenth-Century Indian Village in North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, second web edition, last updated March 2021. DOI 10.5149/9781469666310_Davis. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from <https://eonline.org/html/index.html>.

This lesson plan was created by Matt Daniel of Pitt County Schools as part of the 2021-2022 UNC World View Global Fellows Program. For more information about the program, please visit <http://worldview.unc.edu/>.