

TEACHER GUIDE

Archaeology of the Near East

Grade 6 School Tour



A Program of the Education Department
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Skirball 
Cultural Center

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Skirball Cultural Center! We are thrilled that you and your class will participate in the Archaeology of the Near East school tour. In an immersive archaeological dig site modeled after ancient cities discovered in the Near East, students will use archaeological tools to excavate, collect, and analyze data. They will look closely and think critically about the way people lived and communicated three thousand years ago and how what they find relates to their lives today.

The following activities will make your visit to the Skirball a more rewarding and enriching experience. We encourage you to adapt the activities to the specific needs of your class.

ABOUT THE SKIRBALL

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

PRE-VISIT CHECKLIST

Before you arrive at the Skirball, please make sure you prepare the following:

- Print a complete list of student names in case of an emergency.
- Create a readable nametag for each student.
- If your group is larger than thirty students, divide them into two even groups, then further divide each half into five smaller groups.
- Be sure that you have one adult (teacher or chaperone) for every fifteen students. The maximum number of adults admitted is ten (teachers and chaperones combined).
- Get ready to join the fun! Teachers and chaperones, tuck phones away, unplug, and be active participants with your students. If you need to make a call or check messages during the program, feel free to briefly step away. Otherwise, please always remain with your group in case of an emergency.
- Inform students that they will be outdoors for at least an hour (weather permitting). Advise them to wear comfortable, closed-toed shoes and layers and to apply sunblock.
- Visit this [FAQ webpage](#) for more information. The Skirball welcomes students of all learning abilities with an ever-expanding list of amenities and services, such as sensory bags and noise-dampening headphones. Please email education@skirball.org to request any accommodations.

TOUR GOALS

Students will gain a deeper appreciation for learning from the past and preserving memory; a greater sense of personal connectedness to history; and an understanding that people from all different eras have many things in common.

Students will understand archaeology as a scientific process and a field that reconstructs and answers vital questions about ancient life.

Students will work together to identify, classify, and interpret ancient artifacts using archaeological techniques and terminology.

Students will see themselves as stewards of the past and collective caretakers of what will be the artifacts of the future.

TOUR VOCABULARY

ARCHAEOLOGY

The study of how people lived in the past through analysis of material remains uncovered by scientific excavations or digs; the process of discovery, observation, and preservation that uses the scientific method to draw conclusions about ancient civilizations

ARCHAEOLOGIST

Someone who uses scientific methods to study the material remains of past human life and activities

ARTIFACT

Anything made and/or used by humans, including tools, containers, and food remains; generally applied to portable objects

CULTURE

The behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that categorize a group of people. Aspects of culture include art, music, literature, food, religion, politics, etc.

DIG/DIG SITE

The location where archaeologists excavate artifacts

EXCAVATION

The process of digging up and removing artifacts and features from an archaeological site in order to analyze and predict past human behavior

INORGANIC MATERIAL

Materials that have never been alive; their chemical structure does not contain carbon

MATERIAL CULTURE

Objects or artifacts created by people and used in the past

ORGANIC MATERIAL

Materials that are or were once alive; their chemical structure contains carbon

SHERDS

A British English term for the individual pieces of broken pottery vessels

STRATA

The layers of sediment or rock revealed after excavation or through natural weathering

STRATIGRAPHY

The study of different layers of occupation and time that accumulate in the earth; used as a relative dating technique to assess the sequence of artifact position

TEL/TELL

A type of archaeological site created by many generations of people living and rebuilding on the same spot. Over time, the ground level rises, forming a mound. Tel is the Hebrew word for "hill."

ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW

PRE-VISIT Activities

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

LESSON PLAN: INTRODUCTION TO ARCHAEOLOGY



Introduce students to the field of archaeology.

LESSON PLAN: ARTIFACT INTERPRETATION



Become better critical thinkers by looking at an everyday object and determining what it may tell us about a society.

POST-VISIT Activities

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

LESSON PLAN: ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT



Students summarize the results of the archaeological excavation.

TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY

TIME TRAVELING PEN PALS



Students write a creative letter based on the themes of the field trip.



LESSON PLAN:

INTRODUCTION TO ARCHAEOLOGY

Duration: 20–40 minutes

SUPPLIES

- Whiteboard
- Dry erase markers

TOUR CONNECTIONS

During the tour, students will learn about the study of archaeology and how archaeologists make connections between the past and present.

OBJECTIVE

Students will be introduced to the field of archaeology and some of its terminology. They will learn how to define **archaeology**, **archaeologist**, **artifact**, and **material culture**, as well as discuss the roles of climate, geography, and the passage of time on artifacts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Use prompts and information below to facilitate a classroom discussion. Write relevant vocabulary words on the board.

- What is **archaeology**?

The word “archaeology” comes from the Greek roots *archae-*, meaning “ancient, old, from the beginning,” and *-ology*, meaning “study of.”

Archaeology helps us learn about our common human history, but also it shows us that we are no smarter than our ancestors. We have benefitted from their discoveries and are constantly building upon their knowledge. People have always required food, clothing, shelter, and communication, and this field is still relevant in that it helps us make discoveries about who we are and where we come from.

- What do **archaeologists** do?

Archaeologists are scientists: they are trained to look for clues about who lived in the place they are excavating. They identify, interpret, and classify **artifacts**—material remains—left behind by ancient humans. Although archaeologists are scientists and use very precise methods to answer questions, they are also like detectives, solving mysteries of the past and using culture, politics, geology, and geography to help them.

Archaeologists find **inorganic materials**—artifacts that do not decay due to decomposition, such as metal, plastic, glass, and pottery. **Organic materials** such as paper, wood, vegetation, and flesh disintegrate. Weather also affects how artifacts are preserved. Natural disasters, climate, and the passage of time have an influence on the condition of artifacts.

- How do archaeologists know where to dig?

They dig where they know people have lived for long periods of time: near sites of famous ancient buildings, such as the pyramids in Egypt or the Parthenon in Greece; in old burial grounds; or around places where they know certain events occurred, such as around where Mount Vesuvius erupted in Pompeii, Italy. Sometimes written sources are helpful too. But oftentimes civilizations were built on top of each other, creating a man-made mountain called a **tel** (sometimes spelled “tell”). A tel is a mound or hill that consists of many layers of the remains of human habitation from different time periods.

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The oldest layers would be at the bottom of a tel and the newer eras would be on top—like a layer cake! Each layer is called a **stratum** (the plural form of the word “stratum” is “strata”). You will be learning about tels and other archaeological sites when we visit the Skirball Museum. We will be thinking about how they are similar to and different from each other.

INSTRUCTIONS

For this activity, students will work individually or in pairs. Explain that an archaeologist could likely determine their interests by examining their stuff—their **material culture**. Ask each student to imagine that an archaeologist discovers their backpack in a thousand years. What would they find? What wouldn't they find? Why?

- Direct each student to make a list of five to ten objects found in their backpacks and then compare their findings with a partner. Ask a few students to share examples.
- Ask students to consider what a future archaeologist would learn about them and their school culture based on the objects in their backpacks. Ask students to discuss the answer with their partner before sharing as a group.

SUMMARY

An archaeologist looks for artifacts and uses them as clues to understand the culture or society which made and used them. In this way, an archaeologist is like a detective and can help us learn about people who came before us. Now we will look at *how* archaeologists go about their work





LESSON PLAN:
ARTIFACT INTERPRETATION

Duration: 30–45 minutes

SUPPLIES

- One or two pennies per group
- Paper
- Pencils/pens

TOUR CONNECTIONS

During the tour, students will utilize visual-thinking strategies to look closely at one Iron Age artifact in order to brainstorm and create educated guesses about the characteristics of an Iron Age city.

OBJECTIVE

Students will build their teamwork and critical thinking skills by looking closely at an everyday object in order to interpret a large amount of information about a specific group of people and culture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Among the many artifacts an archaeologist finds at a dig site, one single object sometimes contains a great amount of detail about a society that made and used it. A coin is a great example because it has the potential to reveal information about leaders, values, technological accomplishments, political structure, economy, and language. Studying a United States penny, students can infer, for example, the following attributes of American society:

1. Americans have access to minerals, presumably through mining or trade.
2. Men have worn facial hair.
3. Americans believe in a deity.
4. They construct open-air and monumental architecture.
5. They have knowledge of a written language.
6. They have a numerical system.
7. They are organized into a system of affiliated states.

The temptation may exist for students to make inferences based on actual or modern knowledge—for example, that Americans know how to mine or that they construct buildings from stone. Both facts are indeed true, but the information on a penny does not necessarily prove them.

Archaeologists are often faced with similar dilemmas, when a recovered object suggests that something may have occurred or existed, but further evidence is needed. Based on these needs, they might implement new hypotheses and questions to help them along in their research. While they hope new proof will emerge, sometimes conclusions must be framed vaguely, using descriptions like “may have” or “probably” occurred.

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INSTRUCTIONS

Divide students into three or four small groups. Distribute one or two pennies per group, and tell the groups to select one member of the group to be responsible for recording the findings on paper.

Ask students to imagine that they are going to be examining a single artifact from an unknown society. Their task is to determine as much about the lives of the people who made the object without making any unfounded assumptions.

When the time has elapsed, ask each group to present their conclusions and describe how they reached them.

For a more difficult activity, you can use old or foreign coins!

Questions for discussion:

- What do we know about the people that made this coin?
- Were any of your conclusions based on information that you know about our lives now rather than what was on the coin?
- What is challenging about thinking like an archaeologist?
- How could you apply this same kind of archaeological thinking if you found a piece of pottery? A weapon? A grave marker?

Lesson adapted from the Society of American Archaeology (saa.org).





LESSON PLAN:
ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

Duration: 35–45 minutes

SUPPLIES

- Worksheet
- Pencils/pens

TOUR CONNECTIONS

During the tour, students will act as archaeologists, and document one section of the Skirball’s archaeological site of Kiryat Ha Malachim. Together, they will create a cohesive record of all five areas of the archaeological site.

OBJECTIVE

Students will reference past archaeological documents (e.g., primary resources from their classroom instruction, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, and their Skirball fieldwork record sheet) to create a record about the daily life of Kiryat Ha Malachim residents. Students will use critical thinking and teamwork.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Setup:

Divide students into the five small groups they worked in at the Skirball’s Archaeology Dig. Distribute one report worksheet to each group.

2. Group work:

Ask students to work together to create a summarized report about their excavation site, including results. Students should write three to five sentences in each section of the report.

3. Group presentation:

Ask each group to present their takeaways regarding the similarities and differences between ancient life and our lives today.

KIRYAT HA MALACHIM ARCHAEOLOGIST REPORT

Literature Review: Use outside resources like your textbook, the internet, and the Skirball tour to describe what life was like in the Levant during the Iron Age (1200–550 BCE).

Dig Area: Describe your dig site and the boundaries of your dig area—include a description of the area’s physical environment, for example what architectural feature did you excavate, what areas were located next to yours in the city of Kiryat Ha Malachim.

Analyze the Artifacts: Share details about the different types of artifacts you uncovered. Did you find a plate, a juglet, oil lamp, or other artifacts? Did you find one type of artifact more than others (for example, more plates than oil lamps)? Why do you think that is? How do you think these items were made and utilized? Are these objects still used today? If no, why not. If yes, can you point to differences or similarities between today’s objects and the ancient items?

Discuss the Results: Reflecting on your findings and research, what are some of the similarities between ancient life and our lives today? What are some differences? Consider the items we use in our daily life or the structures in which we live.



TIME TRAVELING PEN PALS

Duration: 30–40 minutes

SUPPLIES

- Sheets of lined paper
- Envelopes
- Pencils/pens

TOUR CONNECTIONS

During the tour, students will analyze the Gezer Calendar and its Phoenician text to learn why written records are important in connecting the past to the present.

OBJECTIVE

Students will use critical and creative thinking to write their own letters to a twelve-year-old living 3,000 years ago (Iron Age 1200–550 BCE) inspired by information gained during the tour at the Skirball.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Think about the Gezer Calendar you explored during your field trip to the Skirball. This artifact highlights peoples' daily lives and that they assigned certain jobs to specific seasons of the year. Reflect on the long process behind leaving a written record and why people might choose to write down specific messages.
2. Write a letter to an "ancient" pen pal that includes a greeting, some basic facts about yourself (for example, your favorite subject or what you like to do outside of school), and some questions you may have about their everyday life (for example, their favorite food, their pets, etc.).
3. We want to hear from you! Please share your letters with us!

EMAIL TO:

education@skirball.org

OR

MAIL TO:

Skirball Cultural Center
Education Department
2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90049

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

These resources can be used to connect your visit to the Skirball with your classroom curriculum:

American Journal of Archaeology

Browse archaeological projects, databases, and images.
ajaonline.org/learning

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Check out archaeology classroom resources ranging in focus from Ancient Egyptian to Native American.
penn.museum/sites/k12/teacher-resources/resources-by-culture/

Collection of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Browse and search the University of Pennsylvania's collection of artifact images.
penn.museum/collections/

National Park Service

Explore national archaeological resources.
nps.gov/archeology/public/teach.htm

UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology

Learn about new archaeological and conservation endeavors.
ioa.ucla.edu/

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

CA COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

SL.6.1—Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.6.1.B—Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

SL.6.1.C—Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

SL.6.1.D—Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

SL.6.4—Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

RH.6-8.1—Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2—Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

RST.6-8.4—Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 6–8 texts and topics.