

## *Digging for Evidence* Teacher Resource Packet

Thank you for registering for a Historic Newton youth program! In this packet you will find information about your visit, pre- and post-visit activities, and additional resources to support your teaching. Please reach out to [education@historicnewton.org](mailto:education@historicnewton.org) with any questions.

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## Program Overview

**Location:** The Jackson Homestead & Museum, 527 Washington Street, Newton, MA 02458

**Audience:** Grades 3-8

**Duration:** 1 ½ hours

**Essential Question:** What can we learn about people who lived in the past from the objects they left behind?

**Overview:** In *Digging for Evidence*, students practice directed observation and critical thinking skills to discover what we can learn about people from the past from the artifacts they left behind. This program specifically focuses on Indigenous Peoples in Massachusetts. Students will share what they know about Indigenous Peoples in our area, then participate in a mock archaeological dig to uncover and interpret artifacts. After the dig, students will replicate one of the artifacts by making and decorating a clay pot to take home.

## About Your Visit

*Digging for Evidence* is held at the Jackson Homestead and Museum. In order to preserve the artifacts and documents on display, flash photography is not allowed in the museum.

This program will mainly take place in the museum's backyard, in and around a mock archaeological dig site. Please have students dress appropriately for the conditions and weather; they may get dirty.

Parking is available on Washington Street and Jackson Road. Groups arriving on buses may be dropped off at the museum's driveway, but please do not park there. Parking is not permitted within five feet of the driveway.

We ask for at least 1 chaperone for every 6 students. Chaperones are expected to:

- Remain with the group at all times and model appropriate museum behavior.
- Assist the museum educator as needed, such as reading aloud to students, dividing students into groups, escorting students to the bathroom, or other classroom management tasks.
- Keep cellphones and other electronic devices silent.

Please have your students divided into 4-5 groups prior to arrival; this will facilitate the hands-on part of the program. It will also be helpful if each group has a chaperone.

If you wish to conclude your program with a snack, please notify the staff in advance and plan for an additional 15 minutes. You must bring all snack supplies. There are no water fountains on site, but students can fill their water bottles from the kitchen tap.

## Suggested Vocabulary

Below are some terms that you might incorporate in your teaching about archaeology and Indigenous Peoples. Once you define the word with students, reinforce their understanding by using the term in context and supporting them in using their own words to describe what it means.

**Archaeologist:** A person who studies the ancient and recent human past through material remains.

**Artifact:** Anything made or used by humans.

**Brush:** A tool used to gently clean off artifacts in an excavation.

**Excavate:** To remove earth carefully and systematically from an area in order to find buried remains.

**Pottery Sherd:** Commonly a fragment of pottery, although the term is occasionally used to refer to fragments of stone and glass vessels as well.

**Primary Sources:** Primary sources include letters, maps, drawings, photographs, and diaries created by the actual people who witnessed or participated in an event in the past. These documents provide much needed information, in the words of historical people, but also raise questions that we may or may not be able to answer. We are given only the information the author or the creator chose to include; we must interpret unclear information and we must infer information about primary sources that did not survive as complete documents to be studied.

**Projectile Point:** Any stone, bone, or wooden tip attached to a weapon such as an arrow, lance, or spear.



*Projectile Points*

**Secondary Sources:** Secondary sources are created by researchers based on primary sources. But because people interpret information differently and can make mistakes, these sources must be used carefully.

**Sifter:** A tool with a screen used to see smaller artifacts or artifact fragments. Soil or sand is poured into the screen from a bucket or shovel, then the sifter is shaken back and forth to allow the lighter soil to fall through the screen mesh, while heavier or larger artifacts will stay inside the screen box.



*Sifter*

**Trowel:** A tool used to move soil or sand in a shorter time from the excavation. Soil is shoveled into buckets and then carried to the sifter.

Please note, it may also be helpful for students to be familiar with the names of Indigenous groups in our area: Massachusetts, Wampanoak, Massachuseuk, Natick, Narragansett, Nipmuc, Pequot, Mohegan, Mahican, Ponkapoag.

## Suggested Activities to Supplement Your Visit

Below are some short activities you can incorporate into your classroom practice before and after students participate in the *Digging for Evidence* program. Please note you may need to scale up or down the activities based on the needs and abilities of your students.

### Pre-Visit Activities

**Identify Basic Needs.** Have students keep a journal of everything they do for one day. This can include what they wore, how they got around, the activities they did, what they ate, where they slept, etc. In class, use the journal as a springboard for a discussion about basic needs by finding the commonalities among students' entries. For example, all of us wear clothes, sleep in a shelter, eat food, and drink water. Indigenous People thousands of years ago also had the same needs! How might they have met their basic needs without grocery stores, cars, malls, or suburbs? Brainstorm, research, read, and explore to get to know basics of the daily life of Indigenous Peoples in this area.

**Practice Close Looking.** Get an ordinary object, such as a soda can, penny, cheese grater, etc. In small groups or as a whole class, make a detailed list of everything you observe about the object. This could include its shape, size, color, weight, materials, unique features, what it sounds like, etc. Based on what you can observe, make guesses about what the object is and what it is used for. For an added challenge, choose an object that most students won't immediately recognize, such as a garlic press, floppy disc, boot scraper, etc. Thrift stores and flea markets are good places to find "mystery" objects.

**Practice Archaeological Dig.** When doing this activity, consider safety: ensure there are no hazardous materials and that students wear gloves, or even also aprons and face masks, during the activity. Gather a few days' worth of trash and/or recycling in a bag. For the activity, dump out the bag on a tarp or tablecloth and have students sort through the contents. They should record what they find and sort the artifacts into categories they determine. Students make interpretations about what they've found, such as what you can tell about the class from the trash and what you can claim based on what isn't included. For example, a lot of paper scraps could mean the class recently did an art project. Lack of food waste means the class doesn't eat in the classroom. For an added challenge, partner with a teacher to trade trash bags.

### Post-Visit Activities

**Artifact Analysis Summary.** With their team from the *Digging for Evidence* program, students summarize and document the artifact images and the hypotheses they developed in the previous activity more thoroughly. Give students the following prompts:

- Using your artifact analysis worksheet from your museum visit, write a summary of your findings and describe how you think they relate to the Indigenous people who used the artifacts you excavated and examined.
- Using the evidence you gathered from examining the artifacts, write a description of what you think a day in the life of the Indigenous people who used them would be like.
- Draw a picture of each of the artifacts and label them with a name your group decides on. Hint: many archeologists use simple, descriptive words when naming an object whose exact

purpose they are unsure of (for example “animal scapula,” rather than “hoe blade”). Write a short label describing the object’s use and provenance, then have a mini exhibition in your classroom to share your artifacts.

**Site Mapping.** To get a deeper understanding of how a site has changed over time, conduct a sound and sight mapping exercise. Choose an outdoor area, such as your school’s lawn or a nearby park, and have students spread out, each with a clipboard, sheet of paper, and pencil. Have them draw a dot in the center of the paper to represent where they are standing. To create a sound map, they stand in place, close their eyes, and just listen to the sounds around them for a full minute. When they open their eyes, they should draw the sounds they heard and continue to hear in the location where they heard them, making sure to represent the volume of these sounds in some way. To create a sight map, they stay in the same spot and draw everything they see around them. Students should turn in a circle while standing in their spot to complete the map. When everyone is finished, bring the group back together to share, then lead a discussion around the similarities and differences between the maps they created and what a person hundreds of years ago would have heard and seen in this location.

**Artifact Comparison.** Just like the things we use today, the artifacts students uncovered may advance or change over time and can look different depending on who made them. Visit the National Museum of the American Indian’s [digital collection](#) (click [here](#) for a link to the collection with a filter for Massachusetts). Select 3-4 examples of each artifact they found in the program, such as projectile points and sherds/fragments). Show students the images and information and ask them to make comparisons between the variations of each item. How is each example of the same object similar or different (look, materials, texture, etc.). What can we interpret from the available information (year made, where found)?

**Historical and Modern Comparisons.** Ask students to look back at their dig recording sheets and artifact analysis sheets from the *Digging for Evidence* program. Ask students to think about modern objects that might be the equivalent to the objects they found. They should consider the structure, function, and purpose of the tool when making the comparison. They should be able to explain why they think the modern object is a good match for the historic object and why it might have evolved over time.

## Background Information for Educators

### Indigenous Peoples in Newton

The present-day Newton area was home to many Indigenous American populations for thousands of years, including the Massachusett, Pequot, Mohegan, Narraganset, and Wampanoag, all of whom spoke variations of the Algonquian language family. It is estimated that Indigenous groups occupied this area at least intermittently over the past 13,000 years. Many populations lived semi-nomadic lifestyles, with tribes moving their villages or living sites from one location to another as the agricultural seasons changed, or the natural resources of a particular area began to dwindle. Their diets consisted of gathered resources such as roots, nuts, and berries, hunted game, fish and shellfish, as well as planted crops such as squash, corn, and beans.



*Seal of the City of Newton*

By the mid-1600's, Indigenous American populations in the Greater Boston and Newton areas had been decimated by European diseases and the overall effects of colonization. In an effort to further control what indigenous populations remained, the European colonists established what came to be known as "Praying Towns" or "Villages," where colonizing ministers attempted to convert groups of Indigenous Americans to Christianity, primarily through a coerced adoption by the Indigenous Americans of the English language. John Eliot, a minister notable for preaching to Indigenous peoples in their Algonquian language, conducted his first successful sermons in what is now present-day Newton. Using the Algonquian language as a base for cross-cultural communication, Eliot went on to establish a Praying Town in Natick, and eventually translated, transcribed, and printed biblical scripture in Algonquian.

Indigenous America culture and life persisted despite these physical and cultural attacks. Today, Indigenous Americans continue to practice and share their traditions while living modern lives. At least five tribes, bands, and communities still exist in Massachusetts today, including the Wampanoag, a federally recognized tribe.

### Archaeology

Archaeology is the careful study of people who lived in the past through the examination of the things they left behind. By closely examining and gathering information from the artifacts and materials that were made and used by people in the past, archaeologists and anthropologists can piece together a clearer picture of who those people were and how they lived. Archaeology is especially important for learning about past cultures that left little or no written record, such as many Indigenous American cultures.

Archaeological excavations have multiple components, and each provides critical pieces of information about the materials being excavated. Considerations such as where in a site an artifact was found, how deeply it was buried, and what other artifacts it was buried near must all be carefully documented during the excavation process and requires the collaboration of an entire excavation team in order to do so. Once the artifacts have been uncovered, the real detective work begins. The visual examination of excavated artifacts reveals information about what they might have been, how

they might have been used, and who might have used them. Gathering visual and scientific evidence from an artifact can aid archaeologists and anthropologists in making a hypothesis about the culture that would have used it and opens up communication with people from the past.

### About the Jackson Homestead and Museum

The Jackson Homestead and Museum features exhibits and programs on Newton, one of the country's earliest railroad suburbs, and on the 1809 Homestead itself, a stop on the Underground Railroad and home to the family of William Jackson throughout the nineteenth century. The Museum offers education programs for all ages on the following subject areas: Family Life in the 1800s, the Underground Railroad, Native American History and Culture, Archaeology, and Local History. The programs engage students in active learning through observing, discussing, and participating in hands-on activities.

## Related Standards from the MA History & Social Science Framework

### Grade 3

Topic 2. The geography and Native Peoples of Massachusetts [3.T2].

- Explain the diversity of Native Peoples, present and past, in Massachusetts and the New England Region.

Grade 3 Speaking and Listening Standards [SL]

- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.

### Grade 4

Topic 2. Ancient civilizations of North America [4.T2].

- Using maps of historic Native Peoples' culture regions of North America and photographs, identify archaeological evidence of some of the characteristics of major civilizations of this period (e.g., stone tools, ceramics, mound-building, cliff dwellings).
- Explain how archaeologists conduct research (e.g., by participating in excavations, studying artifacts and organic remains, climate and astronomical data, and collaborating with other scholars) to develop theories about migration, settlement patterns, and cultures in prehistoric periods.

Grade 4 Speaking and Listening Standards [SL]

- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

### Grade 6

Topic 1. Studying complex societies, past and present [6.T1].

- Explain how different academic fields in the social sciences concentrate on different means of studying societies in the past and present.
- Give examples of ways in which a current historical interpretation might build on, extend, or reject an interpretation of the past.
- Give examples of how archaeologists, historians, geographers, economists, and political scientists work as teams to analyze evidence, develop hypotheses, and construct interpretations of ancient and classical civilizations.



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