

Courtesy of George Brauer, Director
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Interpreting an Archaeological Site

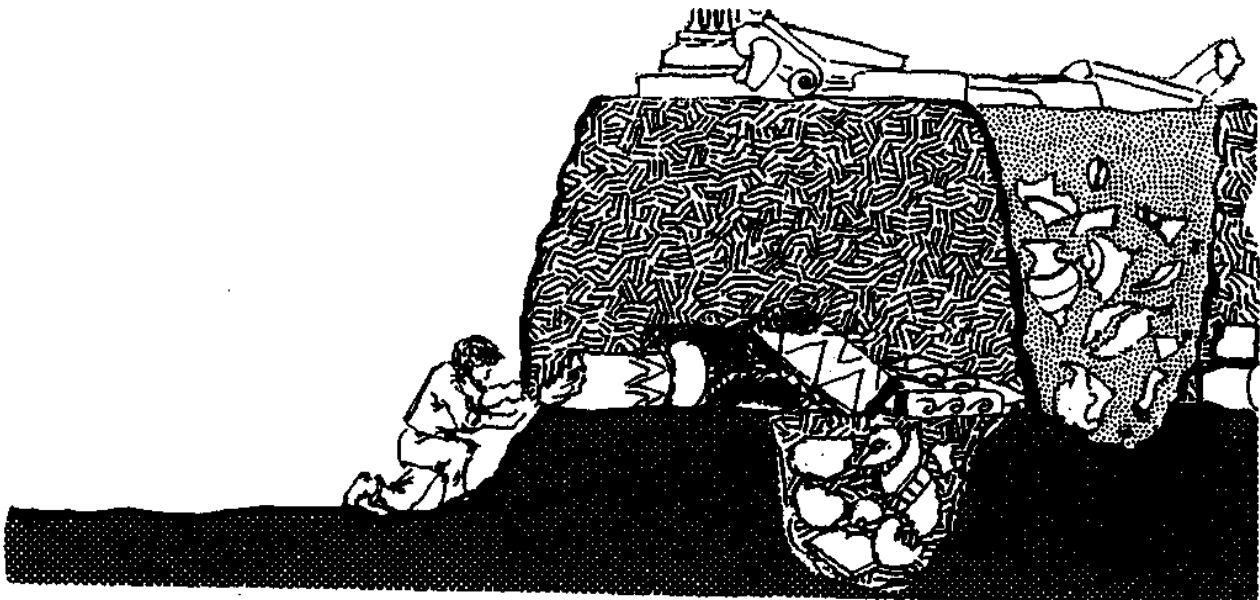
Activity Directions:

1. Review the definitions of the following terms prior to completing this activity.
 - Site
 - Stratigraphy
 - Artifact
 - Feature
 - Soil profile
 - Research question
 - Interpretation
 - Natural forces
2. One of the most important objectives of archaeology is accurate site interpretation. Based on the information recovered from a site, the archaeologist may be able to reconstruct a number of events that took place on a site. In planning the excavation of a site, archaeologists generally develop a series of research questions to be answered during and after the excavation.

Student Task:

- Scan carefully the simulated soil profile below and respond to the research questions in the space provided.

Soil Profile



Interpreting An Archaeological Site

Research Questions:

- 1. How would we know that this illustration represents an archaeological site?**
- 2. How many soil levels can you identify in the stratigraphy?**
- 3. How many archaeological features are present' in the stratigraphy?**
- 4. What seems to be the function of the two features located on the site?**
- 5. In what soil level would you find the most recent artifact material?**
- 6. In which soil level would you find the oldest artifact material?**
- 7. How many living surfaces can be identified in the stratigraphy?**
- 8. Were the layers in the site formed by human activities or natural forces?**
- 9. What types of objects are located in the two features?**
- 10. If pottery fragments were recovered from the trash pits, how would they help the archaeologist to interpret the site?**

- 11. How can archaeologists learn more about the lifestyle and beliefs of people from their pottery?**
- 12. Where would you begin to excavate this site? Why?**
- 13. How could you identify a soil feature during excavation?**
- 14. What would happen if the archaeologist failed to identify soil features during excavation?**
- 15. What inferences can you make about the history of this site based on the archaeological remains?**
- 16. What additional evidence would be helpful in interpreting the human activities on this site?**

Interpreting an Archaeological Site

Teacher Answer Sheet:

- 1. How would we know that this illustration represents an archaeological site?**
(Artifacts and Features are present in the soil levels)
- 2. How many soil levels can you identify in the stratigraphy? (3)**
- 3. How many archaeological features are present' in the stratigraphy? (2)**
- 4. What seems to be the function of the two features located on the site?**
(Trash pits)
- 5. In what soil level would you find the most recent artifact material?**
(Top level)
- 6. In which soil level would you find the oldest artifact material?**
(Bottom level)
- 7. How many living surfaces can be identified in the stratigraphy? (2)**
- 8. Were the layers in the site formed by human activities or natural forces?**
(Erosion, a volcanic eruption, flood)
- 9. What types of objects are located in the two features?**
(Pottery and animal bone)
- 10. If pottery fragments were recovered from the trash pits, how would they help the archaeologist to interpret the site?** (Pottery can be used to date soil layers helping to establish a chronology for a site.)
- 11. How can archaeologists learn more about the lifestyle and beliefs of people from their pottery?** (Pottery designs, shapes, and manufacture may reflect cultural beliefs and behaviors)
- 12. Where would you begin to excavate this site? Why?**
(At the top layer keeping the individual soil layers and features distinct.)
- 13. How could you identify a soil feature during excavation?**
(By a change in the texture, color, or composition of the soil)
- 14. What would happen if the archaeologist failed to identify soil features during excavation?** (Artifacts from different time periods and activities would become mixed.)
- 15. What inferences can you make about the history of this site based on the archaeological remains?** (large buildings were constructed during the most recent period of occupation, there is evidence of destruction activities perhaps relating to war or other social upheaval, re-use of the site at different times suggests that its location was somehow favorable)
- 16. What additional evidence would be helpful in interpreting the human activities on this site?** (More artifact material, documentary evidence, oral history)