



French Legation Museum

802 San Marcos Street Austin, Texas 78702
(512) 472-8180 www.frenchlegationmuseum.org

Hands on the Past



Archaeology for Middle School Students

Definitions

1. **Archaeology** – the scientific study of material remains (as fossil relics, artifacts, and monuments) of past human life and activities.
2. **Ceramic** – of or relating to the manufacture of any product such as earthenware, porcelain, or brick made essentially from a nonmetallic mineral such as clay by firing at a high temperature
3. **Earthenware** – ceramic ware made of slightly porous opaque clay fired at low heat
4. **Flint** – hard quartz stone that chips when it is dropped or hit with another stone. It produces sparks when struck by steel.
5. **Material Culture** – those items of tradition which one can actually put one's hands on, to give a rough definition
6. **Porcelain** – a hard, fine-grained, sonorous, nonporous, and usually translucent and white ceramic ware that consists essentially of kaolin, quartz, and feldspar and is fired at high temperatures
7. **Shard** – fragment of pottery vessels found on sites and in refuse deposits where pottery-making peoples have lived
8. **Stoneware** – a strong opaque ceramic ware that is high-fired, well vitrified, and nonporous

Dig in a Box

Today, you and your classmates will conduct a test archaeology dig for the French Legation Museum. Each box has a different set of artifacts buried in it, with newer items on the top and older items on the bottom. Most of the artifacts were found here at the French Legation. They represent different activities on the site over time.

Archaeology works on a system, and it takes time. You have to make sure that you find everything and identify it before you move on. Once you begin to dig and disturb the items below the surface, you may never find out what they mean to the past.

Follow these steps for a successful dig

1. Decide who will do the following jobs:
 - Digger** – digs into box, one shovel at a time; puts dirt on screen; stops digging when he or she hits something big.
 - Brusher** – brushes dirt to help it pass through screen; brushes dirt away from big objects in the box. Gently lifts out big objects, with digger, after they are completely uncovered. Places object on tray.
 - Runner** – carries buckets of sand or top soil to assigned dumping spots. Holds screen down when needed.
 - Recorder** – checks off items on the list when found; writes down names of items not on the list. Reports to group number three.
 - Everyone** – *decide what each object is.*
2. **Digger** begins by shoveling the first scoop of dirt. Follow jobs listed in number one above.
3. When all of the objects are out of the box and identified, decide what makes your box a domestic, privy/junk, industrial, or Native American site. The **Recorder** will report this to the class.
4. Group reports to class.

Who lived here?

Take a scoop of dirt and dump it on the screen. Shake the screen and the dirt fall through into a bucket. Your clues will be left on the screen. Identify and list the different kinds of things you see on the screen at the site, and then guess who lived on the French Legation grounds.



List the things that you find at the site

Guess who has lived on the French Legation grounds in the past:
