

Archaeology Field Journal

(Adapted from the American Museum of Natural History Ology website)

Being an archaeologist is a lot like being a detective: we decipher clues to learn about people of the past and the way they lived. Think of all the things archaeologists have discovered about ancient cultures. For example, today we know a lot about the Aztec religion because archaeologists uncovered their most important temple under modern Mexico City.

But how do archaeologists find out things about people and cultures that disappeared hundreds or even thousands of years ago? We examine the objects they left behind. Every object, or artifact, provides important clues about the people who used it long ago. We closely observe every discovery, record important information, and think about what each artifact tell us about the people who used it.

How to Start Your Field Journal

- Choose an object that represents your interests or personality. For example, you might select a ball, a book, a piece of jewelry, or a school t-shirt.
- Have a friend choose an object too.
- Switch objects with your friend.
- Use the field journal template provided here.
- Look at how a real archaeologist would describe an object that is being studied in the sample provided.
- Closely observe your friend's artifact and record your "Artifact Observations" in the field journal.
- Next, use your observations to complete the "Artifact Analysis."

Keep Filling Up Your Field Journal

Explore lots of other artifacts and keep adding new pages to your journal. Create a cover for your field journal that reflects the place or themes behind your artifacts. For example, you might draw a map marking the city where your artifacts were found. Be sure to include your name and the date of your discoveries. Here are some ideas to help fill your journal:

- Find other artifacts that reflect different parts of your life. For example, find an artifact that represents your school, your community, or sports team. Instead of trading with a friend, examine each object yourself.
- What other kinds of artifacts was it used with?
- Look for an object that comes from a different place, such as a souvenir from a trip. (If you don't have the object in front of you, print a picture from a book or Web site to help you describe it.)
- Describe an artifact from another time, such as an old-fashion phone, an arrowhead you found at the park, or a piece of clothing from your parent's childhood.

Take a Closer Look

Chances are, the objects you choose are ones you've seen many times. But take a closer look and you might see new details you've never noticed before. Use a magnifying glass if you have one. Is the object worn in certain places? Does it have any small words or inscriptions? As you describe your object, be very specific and include these little details. Imagine describing the object to someone who doesn't know what it is or can't see it.

YOUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD JOURNAL

Archaeologist's Name: _____

Artifact Observation

Closely examine the artifact and record your observations in the spaces below.

Observations

Date artifact was found: _____

Place artifact was found: _____

Description of artifact (shape, color, other characteristics): _____

Materials (what it's made of): _____

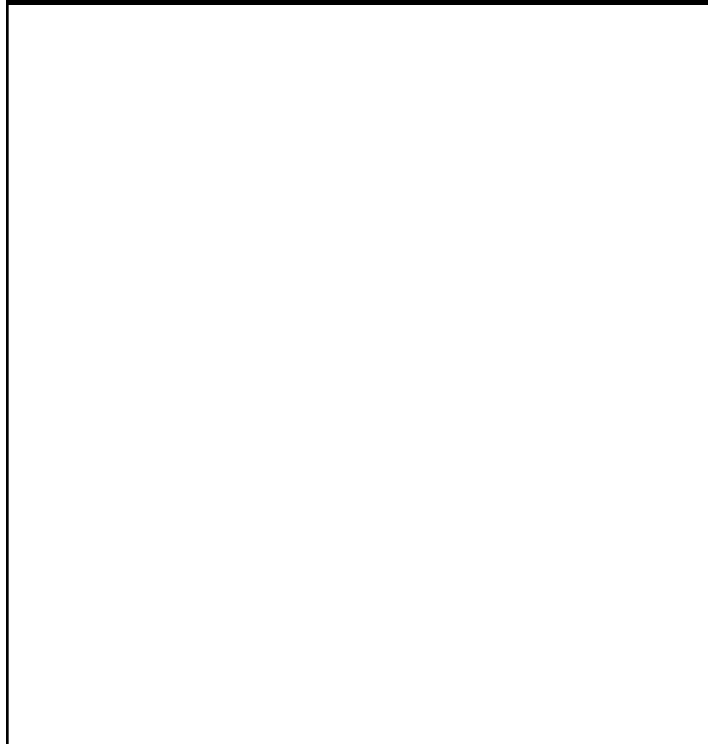
Measurements

Height: _____ Width: _____

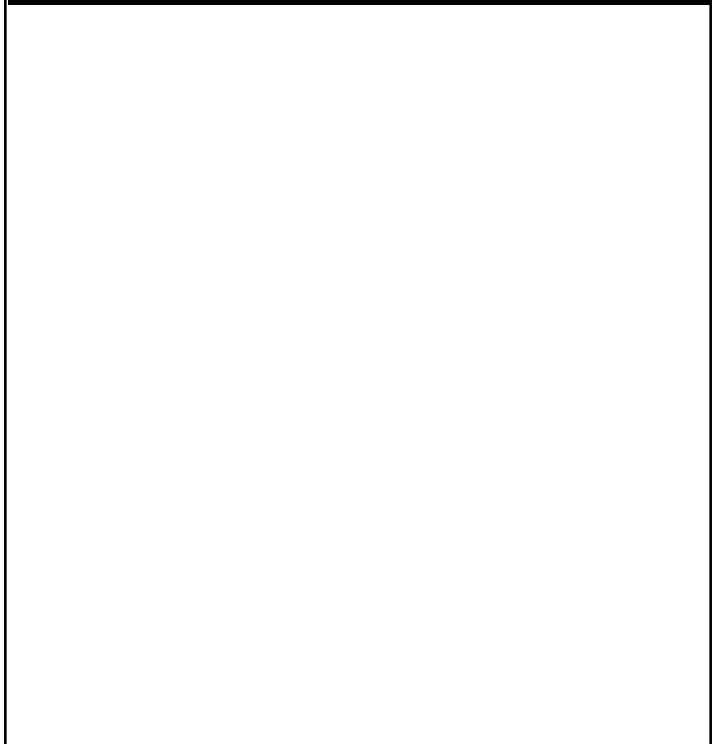
Drawing

Use the space below to draw your artifact:

Front View



Back View



Artifact Analysis

Consider your observations and think about what they tell you about the artifact.

Who do you think made the artifact?

Is there anything distinguishing about the artifact that might give you clues about the culture it came from?

About how old do you think the artifact is?

What does the place where you found the artifact tell you about the people who used it?

What do you think was the purpose of this artifact?

What other objects might be found with or near this artifact? What other objects might be used with it?

If you could find out anything about this artifact, what would you want to know? How would you try to find out?

YOUR ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD JOURNAL

Archaeologist's Name: Christina Elson

Artifact Observation

Closely examine the artifact and record your observations in the spaces below.

Observations

Date artifact was found: 1904

Place artifact was found: Oaxaca, Mexico

Description of artifact (shape, color, other characteristics): urn was made of light brown clay that feels rough, shaped like a standing jaguar with large ears, mouth of the jaguar is wide open, and it is wearing a necklace with a rectangular charm on it

Materials (what it's made of): baked clay

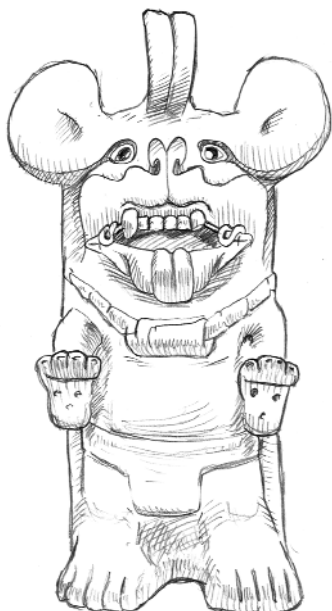
Measurements

Height: about 1 foot tall (32cm) Width: 5 inches (13cm)

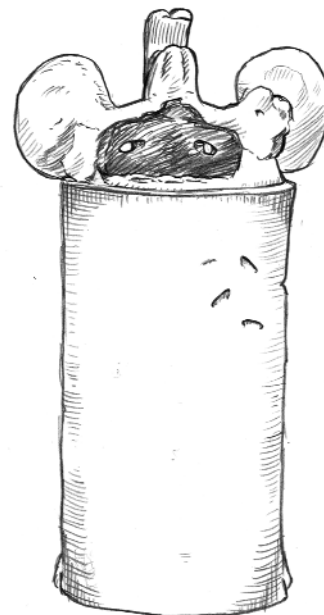
Drawing

Use the space below to draw your artifact:

Front View



Back View



Artifact Analysis

Consider your observations and think about what they tell you about the artifact.

Who do you think made the artifact?

The urn was made by a Zapotec person because it has Zapotec designs and was found at a Zapotec site.

Is there anything distinguishing about the artifact that might give you clues about the culture it came from?

Jaguars are associated with military, government, and power in Zapotec society. People with high status in Zapotec society were often buried with urns in the shape of jaguars because it was thought to be pleasing to the Gods.

About how old do you think the artifact is?

it could be 1,000-1,800 years old

What does the place where you found the artifact tell you about the people who used it?

The urn tells us that the person in the tomb was a noble. Many people that had important roles in the government or were very wealthy were often buried with elaborate urns in their tombs.

What do you think was the purpose of this artifact?

Urn like this one were commonly placed in tombs because it was thought that people would need when they died.

What other objects might be found with or near this artifact? What other objects might be used with it?

There may be other vases in the tomb and possibly human skeletons.

If you could find out anything about this artifact, what would you want to know? How would you try to find out?

I would like to know if other urns were found in the tomb and what they look like. I'd like to know if the other urns are also sculpted in the shape of a jaguar or if they have pictures of people or Gods on them. I would also like to look at photos or drawings of the excavation and see what else was found. This may give me more clues about the culture and what the urn was used for.