



The big dig!

Do you like to dig in the dirt? Find things that have been lost? Put puzzle pieces together? Figure out stories from clues? Learn about the past? These are all things archeologists do!

Archaeologists learn about different cultures from the past by digging up and studying artifacts – the remains of things people have left behind or thrown away. In *Archaeologists Dig for Clues*, the author Kate Duke shows how archaeologists set up a dig site, what tools they use, and how they record their findings.

Little Dig

With this simple “one-layer” dig, your child will love uncovering these homemade “rocks” – each containing a surprise “artifact.”

What you’ll need:

- A cardboard or plastic box
- Sand, potting soil or backyard dirt, or cat litter
- Artifacts: beads, buttons, coins, marbles, pretend “gems” and jewels, bottle caps, small plastic dinosaurs or other animals, plastic doll dinnerware, etc.
- Small broad paint brush and spoon for uncovering the rocks
- Rock dough (recipe below)

Rock dough

- 2 cups sand
- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup coffee grounds (leftover from brewing coffee in a coffee maker)
- 3/4 to 1 cup of water

Parent prep

1. Combine the sand, flour, coffee grounds and 3/4 cup water in a large bowl. Knead, like bread dough, until the mixture comes together. Add the remaining 1/4 cup water, a little at a time, if needed.
2. Take a small amount of dough (depending on the size of the artifact), flatten it, put the artifact on top, and then fold the dough to completely cover the object. Each artifact will be a different size and shape.
3. Bake at 250 degrees for about 30 minutes, turning over after 10 minutes.

Fill the cardboard or plastic box with about 6 inches of sand (or whatever digging material you use). Hide the rocks at different levels; some can be poking through the dirt a bit.

Time to dig!

Remember that archaeologists dig very slowly and carefully, using a brush around fragile objects. Have your child break open the rocks and talk about the objects she’s found. ([See Big Dig on next page](#))



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Big Dig

The earth around us is made up of horizontal layers. Over time, layers of dirt, plants, and manmade objects build on top of each other, one layer at a time. This is called “stratigraphy.” The oldest layers are at the bottom and the youngest are at the top. Archaeologists dig one layer at a time so that they can try to date the time period of an object. Archaeologists also keep detailed records of everything they find – and where they found it. With this “two-layer” dig, you can try this, too!

What you’ll need:

- A rectangular plastic storage box
- Sand, potting soil (or backyard dirt), and birdseed
- Artifacts: beads, buttons, coins, marbles, pretend “gems” and jewels, bottle caps, sugar cubes, small plastic dinosaurs or other animals, plastic doll dinnerware, etc.
- Small paint brush and spoon for excavating
- Ziploc bags and a black marker for collecting and labeling the artifacts
- Paper, pencil, and ruler

Parent prep

Create a bottom layer of sand and arrange artifacts in the sand (Layer B). Press firmly. These are your “oldest” artifacts. Then add a layer of potting soil mixed with birdseed and arrange more artifacts (Layer A). Press firmly. These are your “youngest” artifacts. Add a bit more potting soil and birdseed to cover the artifacts.

Getting ready to dig

Using paper, pencil, and a ruler, have your child create a “top plan” grid that represents the rectangular “dig site” or use the grid we provide on the next page.

Talk with your child about what the two different layers mean and how archaeologists dig horizontally – one layer at a time. Have your child start digging in the top layer. Each time she finds an artifact (*Eureka!*) pop it into a Ziploc bag and mark it:

- Layer A or B
- Section of grid (see example shown on sample grid)

Keep digging until all of the artifacts have been found and labeled. If your child is interested, you can keep a log (record) of all of the artifacts. Ask your child to imagine what each artifact might say about the people who left it there many years ago.

A

1

B

C

D

E

F

2

3

4

5

6

This artifact was
found in section 4D





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More learning online

Try these fun online "digging" activities:

- Dirt Detective (Colonial Williamsburg)
<http://www.history.org/kids/games/dirtDetective.cfm>
- Dig It Up: The Romans (BBC)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/romans/>
- Mystery Message Excavation (Boston Museum of Science)
<http://legacy.mos.org/quest/message.php>

Find lots of great information and hands-on activities from the National Park Service

- Archaeology for Kids: <http://www.nps.gov/archeology/public/kids/kidsTwo.htm#>

Discover archaeological digs and exhibits near you

- State-by-State Guide to Digs: <http://digonsite.com/guide/index.html>

More to think about

What kinds of artifacts might your family leave behind for future generations to discover? Take a peek inside your own trash can: what items would survive years in the dirt and what might those items say about your family life? For example, a used pencil means that you could write. A tin can and a plastic fork says that you ate a certain kind of food. Old toys reveal what games you played.