

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Archeology

History is the story of humans in the past. It tells what they did and what happened to them. Historians are people who study and write about the human past. Historians say that history really began about 5,500 years ago when humans first began to write. However, many argue that the history of humans began long before the invention of writing in a time period called prehistory. Prehistory is known as the time before humans developed writing.

What we know about the earliest people comes from the things they left behind. Many historians and scientists have worked to uncover clues about early human life. One type of scientist that does this job is an archeologist. Archeologists hunt for evidence buried in the ground where settlements might once have existed. Once a site is chosen by an archeologist, they then use special techniques and tools when carrying out a dig.

Archeologists use these techniques and tools to dig up and study artifacts. Artifacts are things that were once made by humans such as tools, weapons, pottery, clothing and many other items. They may also look for fossils when conducting an archeological dig. Fossils are traces of something that was once living such as plants, animals, or organisms that have been preserved in rock. Fossils can vary in size and can be microscopic to as large as a dinosaur or tree, weighing many tons. They can also include marking left behind by something living, such as animal tracks. These types of fossils are called trace fossils.

Sometimes items found in an archeological dig are broken in many pieces because they are very old and have been in the ground for thousands of years. One special tool that an archeologist uses to collect these small particles of artifacts or fossils is a mesh screen. When an archeologist finds an artifact or fossil it is immediately photographed or sketched. The location of the artifact or fossil is also mapped or recorded for further use. Once this is done the archeologist will try to put the artifact or fossil back together if possible for further study.

Finally, when artifacts and fossils are sent to a museum, they are often studied by anthropologists. Anthropologists study the physical evidence found in a dig to figure out how humans used items during their lifetime. They also study early human society and how humans developed over time and how they related to one another. All of these things give us a clearer picture of how humans lived in the past.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Why might some historians believe that history does not really begin until the invention of writing?
2. Why might other historians believe that human history begins during the time of “prehistory?”
3. How do you think archeologists might choose the sites where they dig?
4. What other types of artifacts might be found in an archeological dig?
5. What might a fossil tell us about an early human civilization?
6. Why might it be helpful for an archeologist to put pieces of an artifact or fossil back together?
7. Why would an archeologist want to record exactly where artifacts were found?