

# Living in the Past, Present & Future

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*Social studies, language arts, science*

SKILLS.....Knowledge, comprehension, analysis, evaluation  
STRATEGIES.....Brainstorm, categorize, compare and contrast, discuss, draw,  
research skills  
DURATION.....2 class periods and field trip to Aztec Ruins  
CLASS SIZE.....Any

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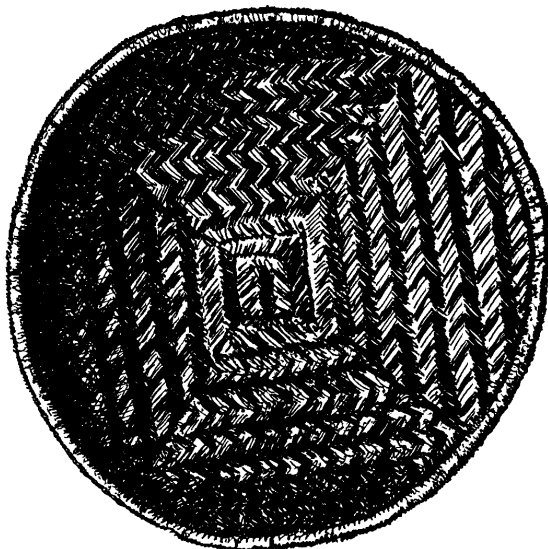
## OBJECTIVES

In their study of culture and Aztec Ruins, students will:

1. List and compare different ways that past, present, and future people meet basic human needs.
2. Identify evidence indicating how the Aztec Ruins inhabitants met their basic needs.
3. Assess how incomplete information about a culture impacts the interpretations of archeologists.

## MATERIALS

- "Meeting Basic Needs" HANDOUT for each student.



## VOCABULARY

**archeological site:** a place where human activity occurred and material remains were left.

**archeology:** a method for studying past human cultures and analyzing material evidence (artifacts and sites).

**artifact:** any object made or used by humans.

**culture:** the set of learned beliefs, values, behaviors, and tools shared by members of a society.

**inference:** a conclusion derived from observations.

**observation:** recognizing or noting a fact or occurrence.

**time capsule:** a collection of artifacts specifically placed in a container to be opened in the future.

## BACKGROUND

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All people past and present have basic needs that must be met. Some of them include:

- The need for food and water.
- The need for protection from the elements (clothing and housing).
- The need for continuation of the culture (marriage, kinship, education).
- The need for explanation (religion, philosophy, science).

Archeologists learn how people met these basic needs by making observations about artifacts and archeological sites. Usually the artifacts they find today are just a fraction of the number of things the people originally made. From these few clues, archeologists can then make *inferences*, or conclusions based on the observations. Because they do not have complete information, their inferences about how past people met their basic needs may be inaccurate or incomplete.

At Aztec Ruins, archeologists have observed artifacts and examined the remains of structures that the Ancestral Pueblo people used. These things provide evidence – but not the full story – regarding ways in which they met their basic needs. Discarded animal bones of deer, mountain sheep, coyote, water fowl, beavers, and turkeys, and plant remains – dried squash stems, corn cobs, and beans – hint at their diet. Projectile points, arrow shafts, and digging sticks indicate methods for procuring or raising their food.

Multi-room buildings, such as the West Ruin and smaller structures nearby, give us clues about how the Ancestral Pueblo people protected themselves from the elements. Fragments of yucca sandals, woven cotton garments, and turkey feather and rabbit skin blankets suggest their attire. Evidence indicating how they perpetuated their culture is more elusive because material artifacts may not explain how they dealt with kinship, marriage, and education. Structures such as the kiva and treatment of the dead help us understand how they met their need for explanations of the world. Artifacts that are unusual, difficult to obtain, or indicate that a great investment of energy was required to make them may also relate to their religion or philosophy of the world. These include macaw feathers (obtained by trade from Meso-America), unusually shaped and carefully painted pottery items, highly polished stone blades called *tcamahias*, pipes, and crystals.

In a sense, archeological sites, with their associated artifacts, are like time capsules. Although the Ancestral Pueblo people did not intend their "site" to be excavated and studied in the future, they nonetheless left archeologists a record of themselves at a given time through the buildings and artifacts that have survived the centuries.

## SETTING THE STAGE

1. Brainstorm what human beings need in order to live.
2. Distribute the "Meeting Basic Needs" WORKSHEET. Help students categorize the needs and write them in the left vertical column of the worksheet. Examples: food, water, shelter, clothing, transportation, religion.

## PROCEDURE

1. Working in groups of three or four, students fill in the "Present" column of the WORKSHEET, giving examples of how people today fulfill the basic needs listed in the left column.
2. Share the background information about how archeologists make inferences about people of the past based on surviving clues from artifacts and sites.
3. Take the field trip to Aztec Ruins and complete the following assignments:
  - Students will complete the "Past" column on their WORKSHEET by researching the evidence present at Aztec Ruins. Students explore the site and museum, searching for artifacts, structures, and information that will help them answer how the inhabitants provided themselves with shelter, clothing, food, water, religion, and the other "needs" they have identified on their worksheets. They may want to draw pictures of the artifacts or buildings that they observe.

4. While at Aztec Ruins, discuss with students evidence that is missing that would help them better understand how the inhabitants met their needs (examples: lack of information regarding religion and education; lack of examples of clothing and food). Relate this lack of evidence to the challenges that archeologists face in making inferences about people of the past through the few clues that survive.
5. If time permits, the class can compare and contrast the answers to the "Past" and "Present" columns of the WORKSHEET while at Aztec Ruins.
6. After the field trip, brainstorm how people will meet their basic needs in the next 800 to 1,000 years. Students complete the "Future" column.

## CLOSURE

Discuss the idea that archeologists in the future will make inferences about us in the same way that present archeologists make inferences about the people who lived at Aztec Ruins. Would they have a complete picture? What might be "missing" from the record? What will they think of us?

## EVALUATION

Evaluate completed activity sheets and student participation in discussions.

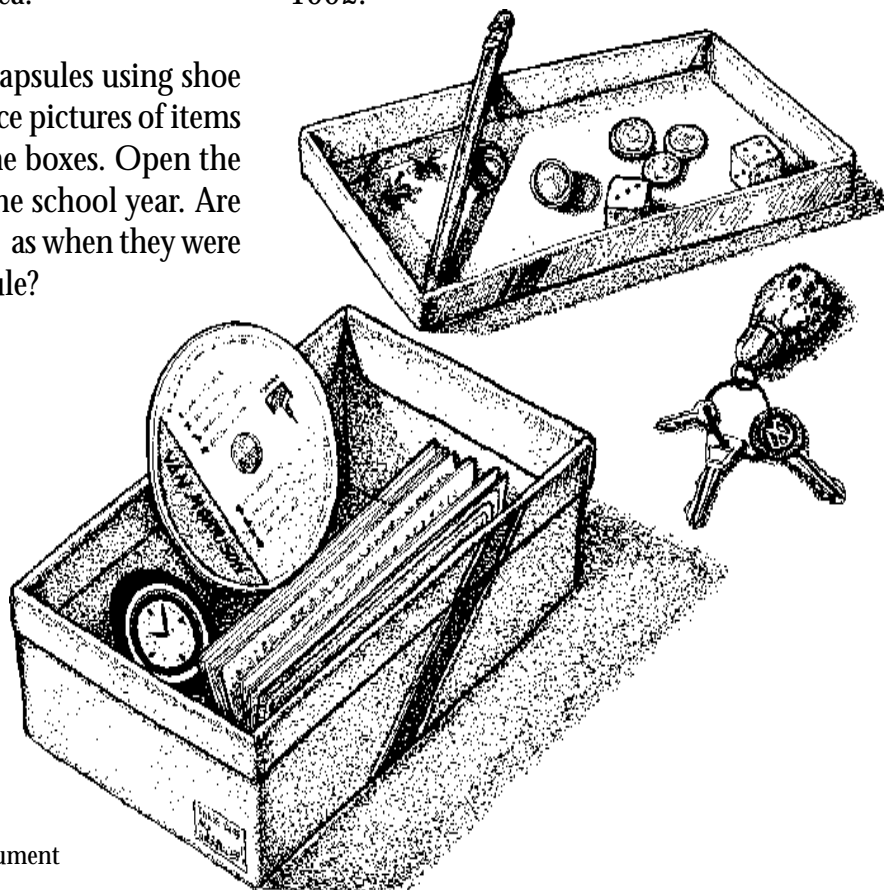
## EXTENSIONS

1. Imagine that your class is to place a time capsule containing five items in the foundation of a new school that is under construction. What items would you place in the time capsule, and why? Each student draws pictures of the five items they would place in the time capsule. Students exchange their pictures with a partner, who develops three inferences about the "culture" that placed these items in the time capsule. In a class discussion, compare the contents of and inferences made from each student's time capsule. What might future archeologists infer about our culture from these items? What might they infer about their context? Will they learn something positive about our culture? Is there a way to send a message to the future? What should we say?
2. Make a time capsule as a class project. Get permission to place it in a building under construction in your area.
3. Make individual time capsules using shoe boxes. Decorate and place pictures of items or the actual items in the boxes. Open the capsules at the end of the school year. Are these items as important as when they were first placed in the capsule?
4. Mix pictures drawn of the artifacts from Aztec Ruins and items in the students' time capsule together. What might archeologists infer from such a mixture? How are the items out of context? Relate this to the damage that people who disturb archeological sites cause. Discuss federal laws protecting archeological resources.
5. Students write a story about being an archeologist of the future. What would life be like in the future? When you find a time capsule in the ruins of a 20th-century school, what might you learn about the students who placed it there?

## REFERENCES

*A Trailguide to Aztec Ruins*, Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, Tucson, 1994.

*Aztec Ruins National Monument*, Southwest Parks and Monuments Association, Tucson, 1992.



# MEETING BASIC NEEDS

BASIC NEEDS	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE

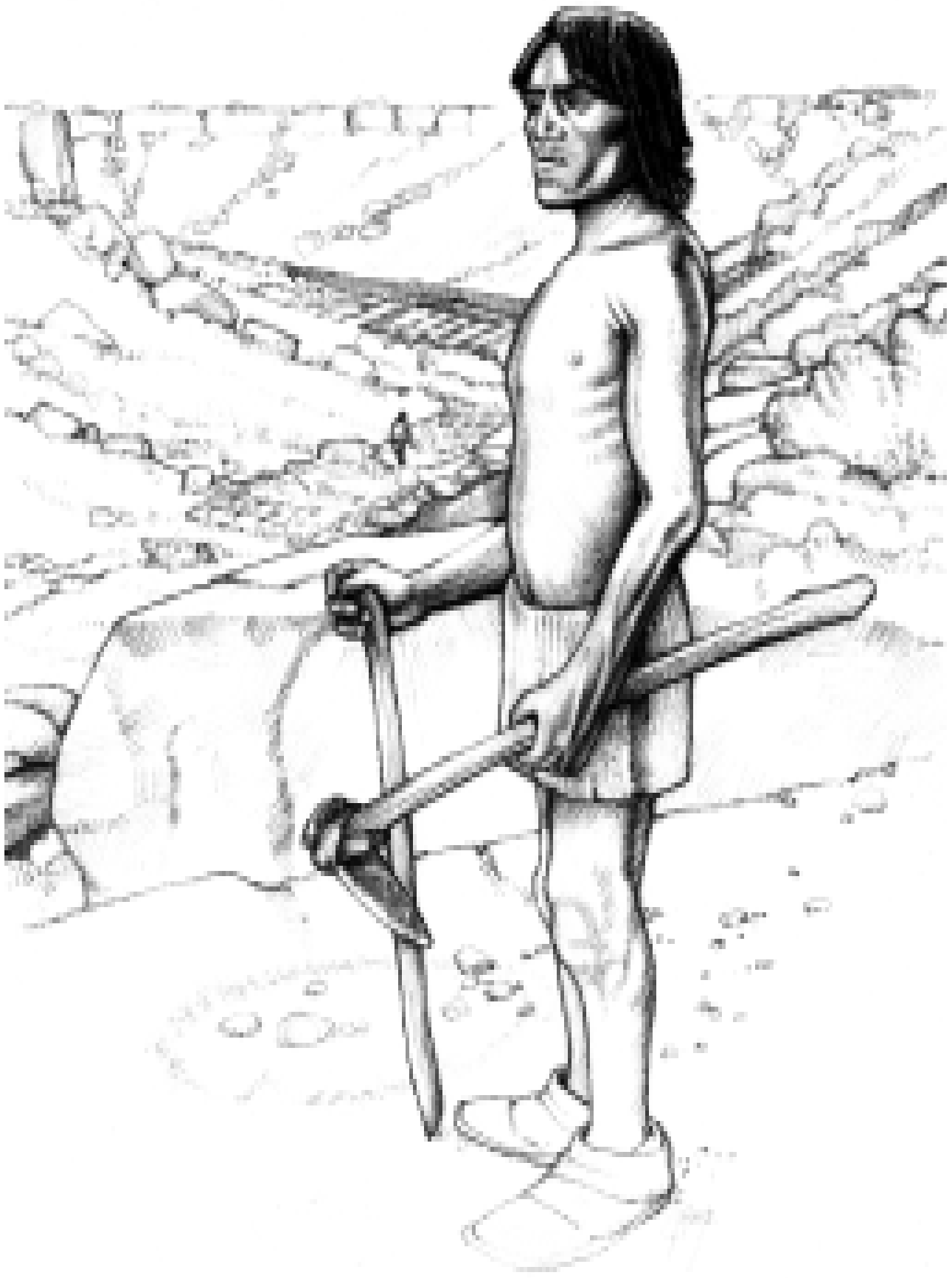


Figure from Vroman photo, circa 1900