



Peanut Butter and Jelly Archaeology

Grade Levels: Elementary to Middle School

Summary: Students will learn the basics of archaeology by building an edible archaeological site.

You will need:

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| ✓ 3 slices of bread | ✓ Sprinkles |
| ✓ Jam or jelly | ✓ Candies (M&Ms work well) |
| ✓ Nut butter | ✓ Knife |
| ✓ Raisins | ✓ Napkins |

* Ingredients can be substituted, use your imagination to think of alternatives!

Archaeology is the study of people that lived in the past by looking at what they left behind. A lot of times, what people leave behind ends up buried underground. An **archaeologist** carefully digs, or **excavates**, the soil to learn about people that lived in the past.

In this activity, you will learn about how objects from the past end up underground and how archaeologists excavate them.

- Begin by placing one piece of bread down on your work surface. This piece of bread represents a piece of land in Virginia before any humans lived on it.

Next, a flood comes through and leaves a layer of mud on top of this soil.

- Spread a layer of nut butter on top of the bread to represent this mud.

The first people arrived in Virginia about 13,000 years ago. For thousands of years, Native Americans lived in Virginia. Just like we do today, they built houses and villages, they made friends and had families, but they also left some things behind that show that they were pretty different from us too. The objects that people from the past left behind are called **artifacts**. Archaeologists find sharp stone tools and arrowheads that Native Americans used to hunt for their food. They also find burnt rocks and wood from the fires that kept the people warm and cooked their dinners.

- To represent the fire circle, make a small circle of raisins and fill in the middle with sprinkles.

Over time, another layer of dirt forms over the last layer and the Native American fire circle.

- Put down another piece of bread.



Let's fast forward to the year 1861, which was only 159 years ago! Considering humans have been in Virginia for 13,000 years, 159 isn't a long time. 1861 is the year that the American Civil War began. The first major land battle of the war was fought at Manassas. It is marked today by the presence of Manassas National Battlefield Park. A battle leaves a lot of artifacts behind. When people are fighting, they probably aren't rushing to pick up the thing that they drop on the ground. One of the most common artifacts that archaeologists find from the battles that were fought here in Manassas is the bullets that the soldiers had fired at each other.

- Use some candies to represent the bullets of the two battles.

After the war, people in Manassas tried to go back to normal. In this part of Virginia, that means farming! The farmers came back to plow the fields and plant their crops.

- Spread a layer of jelly on top of the bread and candies to show what happens when farmers plow the field. Some candies will probably move around, just like artifacts would be disturbed by plowing.

In the years since the battles, another layer of dirt has formed

- Place the final piece of bread on top to complete your archaeology PB&J.

You've now created a tasty model of thousands of years of history. The final piece of bread is like the ground we walk on today. Now, you get to be the archaeologist and excavate this piece of land!

- Take your knife and carefully cut a small circle out of your sandwich.

This is what archaeologists call a test pit. A test pit is a hole dug straight into the ground where artifacts might be.

- Take the circle out of your bread and look through the layers. Did you find any artifacts? Are they Native American or from the Civil War?

When an archaeologist finds something in a test pit, they might choose to look at a bigger piece of the picture by excavating a larger chunk of the land.

- Take your knife and cut a whole corner out of your sandwich. Look at the side of this piece. Can you see the layers?
- Which layer is the oldest? In other words, which layer was placed down first? Which artifacts are older? The Native Americans' or those left from the Civil War?

Archaeologists use the layers in the soil to tell how old artifacts are. They know that artifacts found in a deeper layer are older than artifacts found closer to the surface. Archaeology can tell us a lot about what people were like and what they did in the past. A lot of what we know about history is because of archaeologists.



If you took your sandwich and put it in a blender, would you be able to tell what layers the artifacts were in? No! This is what happens when sites are bulldozed or when people take artifacts for themselves. If the site is disturbed like that, then archaeologists are going to have a hard time figuring out what happened. It's like doing a puzzle without all the pieces.

So, if you are ever at Manassas National Battlefield Park or somewhere else where there might be important artifacts, remember never to take anything that you find. Instead find an adult or someone who works there and tell them what you found and where it is! You might even help archaeologists make an important discovery!